

. . . you do not know America. There is a "puritainism"- of which you hear, of course, but you have never felt it stinking all about you - that has survived from the past. It is an atrocious thing, a kind of mermaid with a corpse for tail. Or it remains, a bad breath in the room. This THING, strange, inhuman, powerful, is like a relic of some died out tribe whose practices were revolting.--"

William Carlos Williams, *In the American Grain*

Chapter 1

BERKELEY, 1956

The taut, eager silence of anticipation. A silence which hung massy and glittering, like the enormous cathedral chandeliers, rotating very slightly on their axes, receiving and returning, from thousands of shimmering facets, the softly tintured morning sunbeams, breaking them abruptly into a shattered spectrum of colors which skittered pell-mell across surfaces of stone and wood and metal; some rushing suddenly from behind the curving surfaces of columns, hesitating for an instant on the nearest arc, then racing out of sight along the opposite curve; others broken into yet more intricate colors and configurations by swirling complexities of bronze and silver; still others captured and confounded by the soft absorbing patina of ancient carved walnut, which sucked the light inexorably into the dust-choked recesses of its geometricity.

Then, like a gentle giant clearing his throat, a single⁴-prolonged⁴, guttural utterance from the diapason, rumbling up from deep inside the cathedral's larynx⁴, which hung suspended between choir and nave, *vox dei et vox humana*,⁴ muttering its prefatory admonition. And finally, from a hundred eager throats, the transcendent ecstasy of praise and thanksgiving:

O be joyful in the Lord, all ye lands: serve the Lord with gladness, and come before his presence with a song.

The sound went up in a mighty rush to the apices of the ascending arches, where the very keystones shook with the sudden impact. Pressing back with all their might against the onslaught they held their ground and the defeated army of decibels fell back in disarray, rushing in disordered fury from aisle to aisle and finally spending themselves in futile single combat against the oblivious company of saints and sacristans.

As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be: world without end. Amen.

And before the final phalanx of echoes had thrown itself against the unyielding stone, a single voice sang out its ancient prodamation:

I believe in one God . . .

And the hundred surpliced choristers wheeled towards the altar with a rustle of silk and took up the Merbecke melody, supplely ascending and descending, pausing in midflight, wheeling, gliding, soaring, sweeping on triumphantly in perfect unison of voice and vocation, at one with the glorious company of the apostles, the noble army of martyrs, the holy church throughout all the world, in echoing affirmation.

Even Phoebus Apollo, chastened and sanctified by the New Dispensation, smiled in upon the high altar through the translucent robes of the ascending Christ, whose earthly cycle was being brought to its pre-ordained fruition:

. . . And was made man, And was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried . . .

Suddenly and without warning, the darkness and the soundlessness of the grave: the cycle arrested at its crucial moment, the point at which, if unfulfilled, the ritual sacrifice became an unspeakable miscarriage of divine justice. The sun extinguished, the voices silenced in mid-utterance, the stones of centuries swept away in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye . . . at the Last Judgement?

Paul listened anxiously for the first whisper of the distant trumpet. He blinked rapidly several times, but the darkness remained, the tomb still unsundered. Then slowly, as from far off, the gathering thunder of tramping feet. Suddenly the sound was all about him, filling the lugubrious closeness with a mighty roar from which isolated voices arose in raucous antiphony: "Hey, turn on the lights!" "Where's the projectionist?" "Out to coffee -- where d'you think?" "When are they going to start running this flea-pit like a theatre?"

And then the light was everywhere about him; not the radiant luminosity of an unseasonal English sun, but a clinical incandescent glare. Indifferently it examined the bare black walls and ceiling, punctuated with random chips and scratches left by jostling crowds of the cognoscenti, like the inscrutable graffiti of an ancient civilization; it rebounded with blinding intensity from the empty screen, which had reflected the seven wonders of the world and retained no shadow; it itemized the bearded and still beardless countenances of the congregation, faces which, like the screen in front of them, bore no traces of their nightly rendezvous with Aeschylus and Dante and John Stuart Mill.

And then the merciful darkness swallowed them up and Paul was once more surrounded with Gothic grandeur. But this time the ponderous fabric danced and capered in daemonic frenzy and shameless voices rose in a gargled Gregorian travesty. The projector malfunctioned, the spell was broken, and before the angels of the Lord were once again confounded by the powers of darkness, Paul slipped out of his seat and left his fellow acolytes to their impending damnation.

OUTSIDE IN THE DRIZZLING RAIN a soggy queue of the faithful waited under the eaves for the next showing. Paul almost relented and went back for the last few minutes of *Sermons in Stone: a Tour of English Cathedrals*. He rather enjoyed these prim little effusions from the British Travel Association with their plummy-voiced Virgils, guiding the ignorant through

an English Paradise. He much preferred them to the current feature, one of those German expressionist efforts of the mid-twenties which seemed to bring the Berkeley enthusiasts out in droves. The rain at any rate would get them into the right mood for the modernistic but crumbling tenements with their shabby inhabitants who goggled ominously at each other and threw their arms about like purgatorial traffic wardens.

Paul turned right outside the Cinema Guild and headed automatically towards Robbie's, then stopped and reconsidered. The reek of stale bodies and stale beer was not what he needed at the moment. There was a hint of spring in the air and a rain-cleared freshness which made him remember the cathedral solitude of the eucalyptus groves rising aloof and superior behind the campus. He turned and walked back along Telegraph Avenue towards the University.

It was only nine o'clock and roving bands of aborigines in football sweaters or ragged field jackets passed him unseeing and unseen. His stroll led him oblivious past the rows of shops which survived somehow on the dwindling cash and dubious credit of the academic transients: book stores, clothing stores, soda fountains, modest travel agencies, all regarded with condescension by their affluent cousins down on Shattuck Avenue. Only a few more generous establishments which drew their trade from the fraternities and sororities up on the hill looked down in easy opulence upon their poor relations.

The grey eminence of Sather Gate loomed ahead of him in the rain, a chastely decorated bronze arch spanning two granite pillars. Paul smiled as he remembered the campus tradition that the pillars had once been faced with prancing bronze satyrs, their members proudly aloft, and the whole subscribed with the provocative legend, "Erected by Jane Sather".

Once through the gate, Paul stopped to look around him. It was a comfortable place to be: solid undistinguished architecture, buildings which, during the three years he had worked here, had lost their aesthetic identity and become mere symbols of their functions. To his left, Dwinelle Hall squatted like an efficient, not unfriendly cell block of offices and classrooms, honeycombed with a confusing network of passages and stairways, the ideal headquarters for an army of academic ants. Sometimes one of the older professors, still unaccustomed to its inner complexities, wandered helplessly along the miles of identical corridors looking for his office; he would stop and ask his way of a more adaptable colleague, who would point him amiably in the right direction.

A perfectly humane and progressive prison, but what did it reflect of cultural or intellectual tradition? Its form was determined, not by an evolution of aesthetic concepts, but by the most efficient utilization of steel and concrete. On the other hand, had its immediate predecessors solved the problem any better? Towering above him was the monumentally Italianate facade of Wheeler Hall, concealing behind its

pediments and porticoes a gridwork of grim linoleumed passageways opening onto classrooms like sterile storerooms; and high up under the roof was a rabbit warren of academic servants' quarters, where the domestics retired after their daily attendance at the feast of knowledge.

Alas, the Venetian campanile, miraculously whisked away from the Piazza di San Marco and set down in mid-campus by a quixotic sorcerer, looked out in confusion on an alien landscape. On Charter Day the academic procession might stir some dim memory of ecclesiastical pomp and ceremony, but the daily throng of scholars scurried beneath its shadow on mysterious and incomprehensible errands.

Paul shivered at a sudden gust of damp wind and quickened his pace up the hill past Faculty Glade. Where was the focus of this burgeoning academic metropolis? Was there a point in space at which the campus coalesced, a unifying symbol of its multifold activities? On Homecoming Weekend one might be tempted to point to the football stadium, but that would be an over-simplification. This was too large an industry to be dominated by a few thousand Male Animals, boisterous relics of the roaring twenties. The Greeks had retreated to their three-letter villas and four-letter vocabularies and left the university to get about its business.

The ancient Greeks as well. Ahead of him now lay the concrete classicism of the Greek Theatre, a deferential monument to the Best Which Has Been Thought and Said. In the heyday of Samuel Hume, the lofty sentiments of Aeschylus and Sophocles had echoed round the amphitheater like a summons to reason and to rectitude; but the echoes had faded and in their place one heard the cries of the New Greeks as they gathered around the ritual bonfire, working themselves up for the impending slaughter of some neighboring tribe. And old Sam Hume, his gray beard bristling with indignation, had shut himself up in his Rhenish castle on Nut Hill with the eternal verities.

Paul crossed University Drive and continued up the hill towards the eucalyptus trees, leaving the campus below him. The Department of Grounds and Buildings with its magnolias and forsythias had not penetrated into this no man's land and the dry grass and scrub oak were gratefully absorbing the season's first steady rain. There were no sidewalks, only steep gullies along both sides of the narrowing road where the water was beginning to trickle down over fresh-soaked soil.

The road turned abruptly on itself and climbed the outer edge of the hill. Feeling the wind and rain against his face, Paul lowered his head and kept his eyes on the edge of the road. It was dark here without street lights but not too dark to see where he was going. It was good to be alone, in the dark and climbing, a luxury which graduate work and teaching didn't often afford. When was the last time he had been alone in the hills? Was it last semester when he had been thinking about chucking his Ph.D. and

going abroad? What an endless wearisome task it all was. Though not without its compensations.

For straight is the gate and narrow is the way that leadeth unto . . .
In the dark Paul almost stumbled into the barrier. He must have taken the wrong turning. Looming above him in the drizzling dark was the ponderous circular expanse of the Radiation Lab. A low hum stirred the ground beneath his feet like the ominous murmur of a subterranean choir; light came from a scattering of windows behind which a few nocturnal celebrants still muttered their formulae. Here, towering above the tenebrous jumble of halls and libraries and herbaceous borders, invulnerable within its magic pentagram of barbed wire, was the eye that never closed, the brain that never slept. Here was the object of his search, the Pantheon of mind and matter and money, of religion and relativity, of Aristotle and Armageddon: the Church of the Holy Cyclotron from whose spinning sanctuary were flung the secrets that would erect and flatten a thousand New Jerusalems.

Si monumentum requeris, circumspice. There was no need to look further. Behind him the eucalyptus trees were still waiting, but they had lost their magic. They seemed irrelevant. Paul turned and walked back down the hill.