

Robert Anderson

SCHISM

In 1378, the Cardinal College, comprised of a majority of Frenchmen, declared the papacy of Urban VI, an Italian, void and named Robert of Geneva as their new pope. He would take the name Clement VII and reside in Avignon. Urban VI remained in office in Rome and both contestants to the holiest of offices excommunicated the other and their followers. Catherine of Siena was visiting Rome at the time. When she heard the news she retired to her lodgings, lay back on her wooden pallet and called for her scribe. She ordered that the letter she was going to dictate be delivered to both Popes, numerous members of the higher clergy and Christian heads of state, as well as to the Grand Turk, whom she dropped a line to now and again in hopes of redeeming his immortal soul. Although he was her hated enemy, she would not dream of issuing a major proclamation behind his heathen back. Catherine said that though she reserved for herself the title of Messenger of God, the holder of the papacy represented no less than the Almighty's shadow upon the earth. The fact that there were now two shadows alighting on separate and warring countries was too much for her to bear; her body was vivisected, her heart was carved in twain, and she proposed to die at her earliest convenience.

The letters were dispatched and no one believed her. Since girlhood she survived solely on the communion tablet and a few spoonfuls of vegetable broth a day, she weathered a certain variety of pox that perished strapping young men effortlessly in their sleep, and, in times of plague, she mothered the infected unto the hour of their deaths. Urban VI, whom she nominally supported in her letter and who had been trying to get her to return to Siena and leave him in the comparative tranquillity of a mere papal schism and untold assassins vying for the honor of doing him in at every turn, offered to have her transported, via map sheath, to the top of the Alps so that she could roll over into the arms of God at her pleasure. The Grand Turk—prey to the fiction of Catherine's beauty—replied that she should come and die in his gold-spun hammock. Clement VII had been acquainted with her in Italy years before and he'd never gotten over the tunic of goat's hair she received her

visitors in. He inquired if any part of her wardrobe might be made available following her demise.

Catherine lay on the pallet for just under two years, taking neither food nor water, sucking her finger, tweaking her ear, and praying to die. Her scribe brought a truncheon into the room one day and she told him to hold his horses, whereupon he tied a rope around the nearest tree and hung himself. An anonymous priest—so many of them came to gawk that Catherine stopped bothering to ask their names and affiliations—took it upon himself to come and shrive her and she humored him by saying that she vaguely envied the Virgin her immaculacy, possibly meaning that she could have done without those darned menstrual cycles. She couldn't think of anything else. Brother Marcantonio of Spoleto, a convivial Franciscan very loosely attached to the monastery of Saint Ambrose and known to us only because he wrote a self-serving memoir, came with victuals, just in case, and would sometimes read to her from his *Book of Odes*. She politely asked that he postpone the recitations until after her funeral. Guglielmo of Rovigo, an expelled Carthusian, arrived with the flush of the dawn for six straight weeks in March and April of 1379 and flagellated himself just outside her doors, deaf to her entreaties for him to go away. He severely injured his spinal column in the course of the beatings and was later able to pass himself off as a victim of lightning; he found employment with a traveling carnival, posing as various members of the alphabet. He is pictured in a famous series of woodcuts by Zuccinno, contorting his person into the constituent letters of Italian word 'pazzo.'

The withholding of death, despite her efforts, was the last, desperate ploy of Satan and Catherine told herself that she must be patient and tranquil. She mused on the five wounds of the Crucifixion, emptying her mind of all other thoughts. Her surroundings and even her own person began to recede into an ashen impasto while the florid wounds bloomed in the air, a quincuncial optical stigmata. The remaining visitors arrived to find her pallet empty and the cloistered air of the room pungent with blood. They pestered Urban with news of a forced assumption. God, they surmised, was the one who abducted her and, in the end, He was forced to kill her to get her to go with Him. Urban was busy purging his new Cardinal College, only a few months old, and buying up the services of mercenaries with indulgences that all but guaranteed heaven and would make life hell for the rest of Rome for years to come. He proposed that perhaps Catherine went to the market to get something for dinner and he asked not to be troubled with the matter again unless

she turned up alive, and was willing to take up arms in defense of the Papal States—every hand was needed. In her limbo between the worlds, Catherine gave up on prayer and wrote one unending mental letter to herself, and the crowds—gathered outside her lodgings in hopes of a visitation or at least a glimpse of a honey-colored ray of light—heard a softly whispered patter, as though a single mouse was scurrying across the shelf of their collective mind.

The dying Catherine pitied the one who had lived her illiteracy. She'd heard the Word of course; she was sermonized from the hour of her birth. She breathed in the Gehenna of the Dominicans, Franciscans, Benedictines, Waldenses, and heretics under no particular banner save that of lunacy, but Urban's predecessor Gregory XI made a point of showing her his Papal Library, or, as he called it, his "nursery of the mind." The ordered scrolls and folios, with their colored ribbons and leaden seals, indeed held all the grandiosity and all the mystery of flowers. Gregory allowed her to open a few of the illuminated parchments and she found rows and rows of charmed candle flames; the calligraphy as mellifluous to her eye as the sound of this same Latin—a separate enigma to her—was to her ear. Ever after, she scrutinized her own dictated letters for evidence of her own personality. She was reassured by the visual harmony of the alphabet, but she ached to connect sight with sound as she yearned for some sensory perception of her God, yes, other than His wounds, which seemed too human to be trusted. Couldn't she just once hear His voice? No? Well, perhaps He would see fit to write her a letter? What colors would He write in?

Wait. Hold on a minute. Words gave solid form to . . . Oh, yes, in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, unspoken, unwritten, even unknowable outside of the Void that was with God and the Void that was God. Why did the living Catherine never see the danger—the looming threat of iconolatry that these pretty painted Words brought? Could she have been that ignorant? Of course, she was ignorant. Wasn't ignorance a part of faith, a willful denial not unlike the denials of the flesh that emaciated her body and sustained her soul? Ignorance gave solid form to the soul, a voice in pitch silence, an entity in the Void, something in the dark. Knowledge was something separate from intelligence. The intelligent were forced to ask questions; the ignorant only knew. But given all that, wasn't the Word still the Word if it was seen instead of heard? Wait, whose Words were they, anyway? Which hand guided the scribe's hand? In the scriptoriums of the Turk, they wrote with liquid gold upon marbleized paper.

No? And if this corporeal body of the Word was to be trusted, why was it that it had to be taught? You were taught to read and to write, but you heard and you spoke . . . on faith?

“You told me what to say in those letters,” Catherine said, trying to rise from her pallet and proving conclusively to herself that she no longer possessed a body. “I confess I threw in a phrase of my own here and there to make them seem . . . well, lifelike, I guess. Do You think You can speak like me? What do You know about me anyway?”

She forced herself to recall the sensation of rising after a long sleep, the waterfall of the bodily fluids, the creamy foam lathering in her head. A wind stirred in the room. The five wounds of Christ Crucified began to bleed.

“Don’t. Don’t try that now. If You can cry, You can speak. Stands to reason, even for a mystery, right? No, You can’t speak, can You? If You could, You’d command me to be silent? Cat got Your . . .? Oh, You poor jaded fool. You envied me my voice. Isn’t that it? Well, take it, I curse it. Just leave me scales to sing in my own head. You know, scales? Ascending scales? Imagine if You hadn’t thought of words. G major, the entirety of the Book of Matthew, G minor, The Gospel According to Saint Mark. So forth. After all, it’s how You think isn’t it? In song? They always said that it was. So, think about it. Oh, this is useless. What do You have to do with music. I wouldn’t put it past You to think in graphs and clocks. You know time, sure; eternity, I mean. That’s the one gift You kept for yourself and so we invented music with a beginning, a middle, and an open end. If we were undying like You, there would be no music, would there? Do You know something, Sire? I’m blind to the mystery of eternity, I may not have known how to live, and it’s obvious that I don’t know how to die, but You, Sire, are miserably tone deaf.”

If she had eyes, she would have closed them. Instead, she willed herself to go blind. She died then and there of unhappiness. On the pretext of showering her bed with rose petals, which was a vanity she never would have abided, Brother Marcantonio of Spoleto entered the room early in the morning, only to see her temporal remains restored on the pallet. The odor of sanctity was present, but it turned out not to be the aroma of wood-cut violets that everyone expected. According to Marcantonio, it was something entirely more forthright, a bit like the boot-blackening smell of the shoemaker’s stalls or the unique fragrance of a rubricator’s dipping well. Cardinal Uzzo solicited for the return of her body to Siena and Urban offered to provide the wheelbar-

row, but the Collegium begged to take charge of the affair. There had been martyrs among the new College, but no new saints, which is what Rome desperately needed now. Siena was told that the absence of putrefaction had to be established if the process of sainthood was to go forward and Catherine was taken to the Chiesadi Santa Maria Sopra Minerva, and remained on indefinite loan there. In the meantime, Siena appropriated the house she had grown up in on Via di Sant' Antonio, converted some of the rooms into chapels, commissioned frescos by Sodoma and others, and called it the Santuario Cateriniano. When Rome finally saw fit to make them a present of her head in the fifteenth century, Siena housed it in the tabernacle of the church of Santo Domenico. They dressed the head, the story goes, in a length of material from the Sabbath dress of the adolescent Madonna.

In 1974, Father Bernardo Rizzolo, PhD, was appointed prefect of Santo Domenico. He wanted nothing to do with the actual pastorate; daily mass was a 6 A.M. formality allotted to the ancient Father Burgio who, as late as 1980, continued to single out Rossellini for vituperation and to offer up the odd prayer for the continued good health of the Duce. Rizzolo's tasks were to write press releases—sections of which were plagiarized time and again by the harried editors of the international guidebooks—see to the conservation of the artwork done by the studios of the fortunate Renaissance dabblers endowed with enough money to bribe the archdiocese, and to diplomatically reject the petitions of scholars, scientists, and even paleoanthropologists (As if she were an ape!) who wanted to see Catherine's head. Strangely, or perhaps not so strangely, these suits were all brought by foreigners. Rizzolo gave it little thought; after all, in Italy everyone feared the *occhio maligno*. He was fearful himself and he had one quarter of a mind to curse his fate and the ever-nearing hour when he would hold that head between his two hands and look into those floating Caravaggioesque eyes. Oh, the peril of those answered prayers.

Rizzolo took holy orders at seventeen. Almost a decade earlier he had given himself in betrothal to one of Sodoma's reflections of her in the Santuario Cateriniano. He told the news to his father, an engineer who had grown up under the nerve-strain of Catherine's omnipresence and even sometimes joked of constructing an incorporeal bomb powerful enough to rid Siena of her for good. The son was told to go to the dictionary and look up the word 'necromancer.' Undoubtedly, the father meant to use the word 'necrophile' and,

who knows, that definition might have dissuaded the boy. The entry for ‘necromancer’ spoke of a ‘sorcerer’ who communicated with the dead and divined the future. Like a priest? In his doctoral dissertation written at the seminary in Rome when he was all of twenty-one, he sought out not the actual saint, but the Catherine of pseudo-history, lore, and literary wish-fulfillment through the ages. This was she who plucked up a severed eye after some fictitious battle with invaders on the Piazza de Campo and held it trembling in her hand until it stilled and pointed north. She walked all the way to Bologna, where she found a vanquished and one-eyed foreign mercenary begging alms, with a fake accent, at the city’s gates. This was the Catherine who, in a pinch, would scrawl a message onto the belly of a pigeon and shoo the bird off to find His Holiness or The Holy Roman Emperor. The bird would return only to roost in her palm and unfurl its plumes so that she could read the reply. This was the Saint Catherine of the people. Rizzolo made much of the fact that some holy vessels—George, Philomena, Christopher—progressed from fiction to sainthood, but was it not true that Catherine of Siena made the opposite journey? And was this not an inspired form of ubiquity?

On the first evening of his curatorship, Rizzolo groomed his hair with brilliantine and wore a paisley neckerchief over his collar. He brought pillows to the chapel, bolted the door, and made a divan of the front pew. There were all sorts of possible opening ploys. For instance, he could bring a stereo system in and play period music softly. He could write a haiku of love upon the emerald leather of a dried ivy leaf, sign it with a Latinization of his name, and slip it through the vent of the tabernacle. He gloried in these ideas, but knew in his heart that they were out of the question. Even in her letters to the Pope, Catherine pretended to speak as an ordinary woman and this forced upon Rizzolo the conceit of his lifetime, the role of the ordinary man. Suppose they met in a stunted elevator or in the turret of the hastily locked belfry in some ancient church. Embarrassed by fate, their conversation would be at first tentative, deferential and solicitous and, little by little, they would thaw the distances by mentioning common acquaintances and drawing out common interests.

After introducing himself as “Prefect Dr. Bernardus Rizzolo,” and touching upon his dissertation, which was on the shelf of every ecumenical library of standing in Christendom, he looked off, faked a yawn, fluttering his hand

at his mouth like a trumpeter with a mute, and said "You know I have a good friend in Florence who owns a reputable osteria. His name is Paulo Gianono. Did you know the Bishop Pierantonio Gianono? You know, the fellow who refused a red hat from Urban for piety's sake? He woke up the next morning and his courtyard was full of conical yellow hats. Did you know that he's my friend Paulo's uncle, if you discount the fourteen or fifteen generations between them? What's time, anyway? It's dull and self-serving to think of time as loss and decay, don't you think? On the other hand, when people try to put time in a positive light, they speak of progress and evolution. That's really all so abstract and peripheral. Day to day, year to year, what is time? It's an Easter hunt for the bright egg of identity and the hunt is always in unfamiliar fields, if you will. If you'll forgive me, I had a dream once that truly defined the concept for me. I was on a surgeon's table and it was some strange, high-pressure situation where you had to tell the doctor exactly what you wanted taken out. There was a long line of gurneys behind and invalids jabbering for me to make up my mind. The surgeon, fish blade in hand, asked his question and I said, 'Take out my inner child.' Not because I wanted him eradicated, but because I wanted to have a conversation with him. Face to face."

He listened for a possible wind through the rafters.

"I suppose people would think this is ludicrous, you and I talking like this. Some sort of delayed funeral rite, I guess they'd think. I really couldn't feel less like that. I'm inclined to see this as more of a baptism. I can't help but feel that I'm bringing a fragile, squirming soul back into the light of the world. Oh, not that you've ever really been away, but the ecstasy of belief is a thing for the moment. Our entire faith is contingent upon reaffirmation after reaffirmation, isn't it? Rebirth after rebirth, even."

Still no rustling above.

"I think I'll let you sleep now, Signora. I call you Signora because I consider you wed to our Savior Jesus Christ. I promise I will extend the very same courtesy and devotion to you that I would to my dear friend's wife."

He got up and lit every tallow in the prayer well. He pressed ten thousand lire into the poor box and returned to the pew. He closed his eyes and pretended to go to sleep.

Over time he sneaked in an entire hi-fi, hiding it in an anteroom, wiring and unwiring it at the waxing and waning of the night watch. He played Mozart's

Requiem Mass in D for her while conducting an invisible choir, spasmodically shaping the notes in the air amid the haze of burning sandalwood.

“A Freemason, of all things, Signora,” he said in an aside and then stretched the arc of the soprano’s lingering B-flat in the air as though showing a length of yarn to a spacecraft. “An evil man repenting with the last breaths of his mortal body. They’re always the best instruments, aren’t they?”

He brought in a period chess set, removed the bracket of candles from the prayer stand, and set the board and table up on the steps of the sacristy. He taught her the fundamentals painstakingly—she’d had no time to learn the game in life. He anticipated her aptitude for it, it was a contest based upon rhetoric, argument and will, after all, and he saw fit to allow her a sly forbearance in the early stages of the matches and a gentle and firm blitzkrieg later on; his pawns were untouched, his knights were beguiled into surrender, his bishops were overrode, his queen circumvented, and his king possessed. Time and again, he was left to contemplate the checkered emptiness of his side of the game board.

It was All Souls Eve and a lunar eclipse was scheduled for the early morning hours. Such heavenly ordained irony was not to be ignored, not to be wasted. Rizzolo apologized for leaving the chess set at home and he begged to be allowed to speak freely. It was time for a heart-to-heart, never mind the obvious about hers residing, technically, in Rome. There was one or two things the signora did not know about him. For instance, entering the priesthood hadn’t been his idea any more than this evening’s disruption of the heavens was the product of any earthly referendum. He, like the earth, was a victim of gravitational slavery and, worse, there’d always been a confounding obstruction between him and the exalted face of our Lord.

“This obstruction I speak of . . . Forgive me, I really must rephrase that. To be precise, it is not an obstruction. It’s a self-ordained stigmata of the eye, an hysterical blindness of my soul. Signora, I look to find the Lord, but I see only your face and all the rest is darkness and darkness’ aurora. At the northernmost part of our night tonight, the earth will go blind. Signora, I would touch you and look at you. I know you will object, but did you never lay on hands? Did you never embrace the condemned, lie with the dying, carry the crippled? Did you not? I remind you, Signora. August, Thirteen Seventy-Nine. Alfonso Il Magnamino, the warrior of Padua, writes to you about the danger of dying of the sin of pride. ‘Sister, I implore you. I have looked into the face of death

and have never found God.' You reply from your deathbed, 'Sovereign, come and look at me.' Signora, upon my honor, I look into the eyes of undeath only to find the face of my maker."

Near midnight the light through the apse turned to an unsettling shade of blue vapor. He was still smelling smoke, though he had extinguished the prayer candles hours ago. He undid the simple iron latch on the tabernacle. The door fell open of its own accord and he cupped his hands to catch her head, but it did not drop out. He put his hands inside.

"Come," he said.

Then the moon turned its face from the earth and all was darkness, the darkness he'd wished for, disdaining prayer. The silk of the veil was so sheer as to be spectral, though he felt, to his astonishment, a succession of stitched rubrics sewn into the cloth, as of the coverings of the Turk's harem girls in their purdah. This was a sin of mere ignorance, he told her, lifting her out with one hand cupped under her chin and the other supporting her skull. He would do something about it in the morning. Wasn't it time she had a new bedspread, anyway? He brought her to the center of the sacristy and raised her toward the apse. The tail of her veil breezed against his forehead and he thought to bring her down and kiss the crown of her head as well, and he would have had he known when the climax was coming. At the resumption of moonlight, he would jettison her cloak with a swinging motion of his arms and look her full in the face, the tenderness of his almond eyes meeting the bottomless pity of hers, whatever shade they might be ordained to be, and the scars of his rampant adolescent acne coupling with her pockmarks like either end of a severed poem. He waited and waited and the darkness did not lift. He held his breath, daring God, but did not ultimately want to meet the signora in the next world, red-faced and with bulging eyes. When he let out his breath, he heard a sleeper's expiatory moan of horror and he was entirely certain that it was not he who had made the sound. The dew rose on both his palms and warm, salty raindrops slashed down his cheeks.

"Devil!" he cried in the throes of a horror he did not know his system was capable of and swung the skull in the air, warding off her ghost with the cudgel of her own head. He darted back toward the tabernacle, but misjudged and went wide to the right. The ghost's opalescent visage reared out of the darkness, looked with great concern into his eyes, and then butted him with the shell of the stone wig that she wore perhaps, he thought in a flash, as a hedge against a crash-landing. He staggered blindly, rammed the altar and

felt for the tabernacle. He located it and deposited the head. He threw the latch and ran for the exit. The moonlight came up upon a tongue of faded green silk, caught in the crack beneath the tabernacle door, and on the marble Madonna to the right of the sacristy, rocking gently back and forth on her heels.

Bernstein kicked up out of the tone poem, a viola on his heels, whole notes dripping from his hair and eyelashes, and caught sight of himself in the Magnavox console at the foot of the bed. 'Thank God,' he thought because his reflection proved that he was no longer the young man he had just been in the dream. Gone were the pretty boy gangster looks and safe and sound above his neck was the sedimentary face of the Shanghaied Swami of Moghar of the Buck Rogers serial—probably only extant now in the minds of fond middle-aged men like Lenny—who replied "Ugh" whenever anyone asked him the meaning of life. In the dream, he was in a roomful of people, a New York rent social or an interior fishing expedition on behalf of Tanglewood perhaps, and they were all either turning away when he spoke or regarding him with the eyes of a sturgeon looking up from the supper china. He made jokes at his own expense, gossiped about his more famous friends, played Fats Waller on the baby grand, and the only thing that warmed to him the entire night was the sandpaper of his starched shirt. Was he the main course for the upcoming dinner and was the cold front meant to slowly cook him inside his suit? Envy, anti-Semitism, the stilted demeanors of the knowingly inferior; he never got any of that anymore. Arriving at the Kunstlerhaus three evenings ago, all he had to do was to give the bronze Beethoven in the lobby a whack on the behind and the assembled patricians and the monkey-suited bellhops beamed back their love. And another thing, why always Sibelius at the tail end of dreams?

His secretary Miss Helen Coats hadn't forgotten to pack the crossword sections of five separate international papers (English, German, French, Spanish and Italian), nor the L&Ms, nor the pertinent and the odd among the correspondences he'd received this week. She also included a dribble from the Sunday Times—he read it on the plane—concerning the fictitious rift between him and Berlin Philharmonic conductor Herbert von Karajan, likening them to two warring popes in an era of history almost entirely lost on Lenny since it predated the development of symphonic music. Humbug, thought Bernstein. Karajan was across town at the Bristol (The man was an Edwardian

with a Prussian accent) right now and if the hour wasn't so severe, he'd ring him up for a dinner date. There wouldn't be time anyway and their secretaries would cross wires with conflicting excuses for the cancellation. The dinner date would evaporate like a breath mint, leaving the air between the two men artificially sweet. Like a hundred times before.

Earlier in the evening, he pretty much completed the crosswords, cheating with the paper accordion of his Berlitz Multi-lingual. He red-penciled his way, once again, through the *Linz* and the *Prague* symphonies as well as the *Violin Sonata in B-flat K.454*; Issac Stern was in the air over the Atlantic and Mozart was turning two hundred and eighteen in his early grave. He went to the console and switched on the radio. Mozart, what else? The *Serenata Notturna*, what else? Listening to it, he was reminded of how Felicia had decorated the west room of their new home at the Dakota in New York with seashells; shells on mantles in a glass case tinted a tranquil blue almost as though they were floating in a joint nebula of moon and sea and clawed and pink-hearted shells along the walls, rimming the entire room. He'd gone in one evening with a cluttered mind while working on *Dybbuk*, his new ballet. He returned to the music room and completed an unconnected five-minute prelude in five minutes, an ocean in miniature.

This week's selected correspondence was bound with a note from Miss Coats. She reminded him of what was contained in which bag, noting with the care the location of his inhaler—in with the toiletries—and of how much of which prescription to take, and what not to take with alcohol if he did not wish to return to New York packed in luggage himself. The envelope and the stationary of the first letter on the stack were of a coarse, lusterless provincial paper and he had to put on his half-moon glasses (Woe to him who snapped his picture with these granny-annie eyes on) to read the handwriting. The letter was from one Caterina di Siena. There were salutations and congratulations, and then she took grave issue with the Papal Concert he conducted in Rome a few months ago. First of all, why the Requiem Mass in D? Who was it that had died? And couldn't he have chosen a Catholic mass, or at least the work of a 'devout Lutheran' such as J.S. Bach? In addition, there was the more serious issue of his hand signals.

Pardon me, Maestro, for noticing, but during the violin part in the Dies irae, you issued the number three with your left hand. At the succeeding violin break in the Rex tremendae, you gave evidence of the number five with a rather placating wave at the

fiddle section. Again, with the trombone solo in the Tuba Mirum, you did extend four fingers from your left hand while pronging your baton between the two forefingers of your right hand, thus giving evidence of the number seven. Given your background and your legendary love of both musical and social subversion, I can only conclude that you were speaking in a sort of Cabalistic sign language, each number corresponding to the Sefirot, the ten supposed emanations of God the Father. Sir, you had the Pope present, did you also wish to provoke the presence of the Almighty? Or perhaps the Other whose name is an affliction upon the tongue? Mozart, gracious Maestro, trifled with Zoroastrian riddles, but he was in blessed ignorance of the stratagems of the Sephardic Black Book. Did you really think a Papal Concert was the time and the place?

I await your reply and explanation.

Yours in God,

Caterina di Siena

She supplied three different return addresses, the house in Siena where she grew up, the church in the same city where her head resided, and the one in Rome where her body lay.

What time was it in America and whom could he call about this? This was priceless. Why hadn't Miss Coats said anything? He had the phone in his hand before he knew what he was going to do with it. Its purring was as noxious a warning as the discord of the alarm clock, but he simply had to tell someone. Obviously, the smartest little girl or boy in some middle-American school-room vacationed in Rome last summer and witnessed his Papal concert. She/he fell desperately in love with Lenny and this was, of course, nothing new. Oh, the adulation he received care of CBS by virtue of the 'Young People's Concerts' program; impacted flowers, rhyming verse, pressed cotton underwear, the whole bit, the letters always straightforward, shameless and always begging an answer and an eight-by-ten glossy. But just look at the way this little boy/girl employed psychology, musicology, history, and Cabalism—a little Mozart was in love and desperate to make contact with him. Just check this out, Herbert.

Herbert? The phone grew hot in his hand and he snapped it back in its cradle. But Karajan was the one who would understand, no doubt. Hadn't they both suffered from the same distortion of sycophancy, the same worship-

ful hall of mirrors? How refreshing it was to at last find combative love in this context. Like when he first met Felicia.

Surely, there would be some buffer between his phone line and Karajan's, some aide in an anteroom or, for all he knew (he discounted rumor) a valet sleeping on the phone-friendly side of the bed; Karajan would have a gentleman's choice whether or not to accept his call. He dialed the operator.

"Operator, lieblich, put me through to the Bristol."

She said, "Yes, sir," and he heard the call go through.

"Bristol."

"Yes, please, get me Maestro Karajan's suite. This is Leonard Bernstein calling."

"It is four in the morning."

"You're a switchboard operator, not a clock. Get me von Karajan."

The line rang and it was picked up immediately. The Bristol switchboard person said, "Herr Karajan, please. It's a Mister Leonard Bernstein calling."

The aide or valet on the other end began to breathe hard and Bernstein was going to say, "Get me your master," in a sweet, vacant tone like an alien's "Take me to your leader," but he hadn't time for self-deception now. The rattled breath on the line was that of a thirty-year three pack a day man, just like Lenny. When did aides or valets to great men have time to burn sixty cigarettes per day? Across the city, the world's two greatest conductors were orbiting in the same dense silence, each of them controlling it, four masterful hands at the helm.

"Maestro," Bernstein said, "I got a letter from Saint Catherine of Siena."

Karajan said "Ugh" in the exact cadence of the Shangaied Swami of Moghar—Buck Rogers in Weimar, Germany, that explains the V-2 Rocket System, by God!—and he hung up the phone.

Lenny lay on the bed, regarding the eggshell tempura pattern of the ceiling, smoking, desperate to get back to the dream—to salvage something from these hours of insomniac limbo. He was going to give the room of surly partygoers the great what for. Mozart, on the radio, helped ease the transition and, before he knew it, he was back at the gathering. Hadn't he noticed a buffet of fruit last time? Yes, there in the corner, ripe and lonely as a bunch of harlots at a cotillion. The partygoers welcomed his return with squinty eyes and signals for more cordials. He pigged his eyes back at them; bright, black-haired Lenny, Koussevitzky's elbow-rest and heir, scion of the tattle columns,

and the man who would perennially play the young Tchaikovsky in an upcoming Paramount production. His social life was but an extension of his covenant with God and who could deny the miracle? He was hobnobbing here in the big town while his Russian cousins wire-walked one infraction away from the Soviet camps and millions of his co-religionists were still legible in the hazy script over the Vistula River. He crossed to the buffet table, picked up a halved Neapolitan orange, and stared into its bloody viscera. "Alas, poor Yorick," he said and squeezed the fruit's red guts out onto the floor. The room took a breath and exhaled in laughter. Karajan never got a laugh like that in his life.

The rabble queued at the chapel gates in the early morning dark and, arriving to say mass, Father Burgio could only conclude that the Black Plague and its attendant fear of God had returned to Siena after an absence of five-hundred years. No one came in for the service, but for the Vacco sisters who made up his core morning congregation, and the Father grew suspicious, and went out to the steps during the Kyrie Eleison.

"Well, what do you all want?" he asked them.

"The job," they said as one and Burgio remembered the 'night watchman needed' blurb Father Rizzolo inserted into last week's newsletter. Burgio hadn't minded being upstaged by sleep and complacency, but playing second banana to menial employment was intolerable. He turned back to the Vacco sisters who were warbling through the Kyrie in faltering harmony and said, "Church dismissed!"

Father Rizzolo interviewed them one after the other. They were mostly youths tangibly older than he because their childhoods had been their primes. They were still living in the vacuums of their father's houses and contemplating the move to Milan or Rome or the transmigration to America—an improbability ingrained in their bloodstreams now. They saw lofty grandeur in soft employment and working in the chapel was at least something their mothers could brag about over coffee. There was one job for the three hundred of them and Rizzolo wondered why they didn't work harder to make an impression. He wasn't accepting resumes—what credentials could he ask for?—but these dullards, who sat there in their imitation-silk printed shirts with wrist and chest hairs blooming, begrudged him even their ages and names, and seemed baffled when he asked of their employment histories. Perhaps he should choose the biggest, hairiest among them, or conduct an olfactory sur-

vey and select the most fetid, the greatest stranger to the deodorant aerosol. It would serve Catherine right.

Father Rizzolo's hand was tender from the day's endless 'How do you do's' and he was relieved that the little man with the low tide hairline, the saint's worried eyes, the attaché case, and the permanent-press suit shook hands as feyly as a cat. He gave his name as Massimo La Rocca and his profession as 'musical secretary.'

"Do you mean that you were a secretary to a conductor?" Rizzolo ventured.

"And a composer as well."

"And what came between yourself and this sort of work?"

"My master decomposes," said La Rocca.

The prefect heard his own laughter rinsing the vaulted arch above his head and he saw it reflected in the faces of the remaining youths in the dwindling line. As though priests were not allowed laughter.

"Mr. La Rocca," he said, "what do you know of Catherine of Siena?"

"That she needs someone."

A German named Mauer came to Siena, many years past, to deal in rare books and befriend local men who did not particularly enjoy his friendship; it was a dirty job, and someone had to get paid for it. Rizzolo, liking his company and not minding his predilections (The Bible itself equivocated the issue), wrote letters of introduction on his behalf to clerics and prelates, and members of the threadbare nobility who might happen to have ancestral libraries to sell. Mauer died at his desk, licking a stamp and his widow—a northern blonde whom he married in order to have someone to introduce at cocktail parties—found him slumped forward with his tongue lolling out. She amused herself by pasting the stamp to her husband's forehead with the last of his saliva and then she phoned Rizzolo. He organized the funeral, gave the eulogy, and evidenced saintliness in the behavior of the widow's thirteen-year-old daughter Sabrina, whom he had only glimpsed and nodded hello to previously. He was newly burdened with free time, owing to Catherine's rejection, and he offered to free her from the spirit-crushing public school system. He would tutor her, gratis of course—Mauer hadn't consummated his marriage, hadn't fathered Sabrina, and hadn't left them a red piastra.

Sabrina was one of those rare children who loved school, the solicitude of the teachers who adored her, the companionship of the little girls, and the

airsickness she was beginning to affect upon the little boys. She had a gentle spirit, all told, but she hated Rizzolo and his habit of chiding her for her forgetfulness with a pat under the chin. She was blonde like her mother and very often, while he read aloud to her from Petrarch or Saint Thomas of Aquinas, she would sweep her hair over her face and stare at him through the adornment of gold, willing him into a pig's tail and later a pubic strand, the two possibilities she thought best suited his personality. He obstinately refused to change form and he left off noticing when she hid under her hair. She lost patience and waited for that hand to chuck her jawbone one more time. When it finally did, she snarled and bit him between the knuckles with sharp incisors, which, in later adolescence, would prove themselves in the snapping of key rings and the cracking of lobster shells. The lightning thrill of it ran up his forearm and detonated an electric charge in his funny bone. He found himself waving goodbye to his core belief of celibacy, strictly speaking, and he extended the other hand.

"Do it again, damn you," he said and she did.

She warmed to him under the spell of these biting sessions; it was her first real taste of the carnal authority that she was born with and that had slept in gestation inside her all along. If she wanted to skip the day's geometry lesson, for instance, all she had to do was to threaten not to bite him and he would relent. He went about in black velvet gloves, allowing to anyone who asked that God was testing him with late-blooming eczema. Also, in cataloging Mauer's holdings as a favor to the widow, he found a cache of Asian child porn done in lithography—Buddha figures straddling prepubescent girls with comely and cruel reptilian features so like that of the changeling in Christus's *Portrait of a Lady*. Looking at the prints through his jeweler's monocle, he reminded himself that it was the indulgent God who'd given grace to the early renaissance and the revived Old Testament Patriarch who had sullied it; witness those Botticellis on the bonfires. He was sure to take off his white collar and gold cross before he pleased himself.

Then he got a letter about it. A prank letter on Santo Domenico stationary of all things and actually signed with the willful blasphemy of Catherine's name. He found it folded in the pocket of his black coat as he retrieved it from the church's rack one evening. It detailed everything, the masochistic indulgences with Sabrina, the dowager empress-era kid porn, and the furtive self-adjustments in the attic closet. Who could have known? Who at the chapel? Father Burgio was deaf and myopic and spent whole afternoons in

moral dispute with the whore of Babylon. The sexton could not write his name, let alone an admonishing, Catherinesque letter. La Rocca, the night man, would sit in the front pew doodling musical notations and humming to himself, and Rizzolo often thought that if the chapel should cave in around him, he would mark the occasion with, perhaps, a dart of his eye. It was not inconceivable that his name was being bantered about in relation to a bishop's office and self-styled devil's advocates were known to reap muck in such an instance, but all the letter threatened him with was the forfeiture of his immortal soul; there was not a hint of earthly blackmail in its pristine prose. It was Catherine, herself—it just had to be. He heard all his life of the wrath of a woman scorned and one of life's deepest lessons, he knew from his studies, was that there was verisimilitude in the hoariest of old clichés, such as the interventions of the saints.

He was not a praying man, despite his vocation. All his life he addressed Catherine in the Santo Domenico as though she were merely the person sitting across the room from him. Now he found himself on his knees, alone in his room, speaking properly to her in Latin (Surely, she had learned the language in the afterworld), and begging her to leave him alone and allow him to be the man he always dreamed he could be. The reply he wished for was total silence, but this was not to be. He received two more reprimanding letters; one in his eyeglass case and the other stuck in the sweatband of his bowler. If praying was to no avail, the matter had to be taken in hand. He went by railway to Florence and picked up a mannequin's head and a leaden strongbox at a flea market. He wrapped the mannequin's head in plain cotton swaddling cloth and put it inside the strongbox. When Massimo La Rocca arrived for work the following evening, Rizzolo sent him home, saying he wished to pray alone through the night. He sat in the front pew with the strongbox in his lap and waited for the appropriate midnight.

Bernstein napped before the performance and didn't have time to go over the rehearsal notes. He woke and dressed leisurely, knowing better than to ruin the hush of the pre-celestial mood by rushing. It was foolish to worry anyway. The Viennese Philharmonic knew Mozart, to be sure, and, although he hadn't seen Isaac Stern, the man was booked so where else could he be? He stepped out of the dressing room and walked down the darkened corridor toward the light of the Konzerthaus theater. In the wings three assistants approached him. One lit an L&M and pressed it to his lips, the other followed by cupping

the plastic yarmulke of an oxygen mask over his mouth, and the last gave him a petting with a portable garment vacuum. "Say, where's Stern?" he let slip and the three assistants acted as though they hadn't heard. He stepped into the light and row after row sprung up and applauded. Lenny loved it, reveled in it, and, deep in his heart, he was scared to death of it—four, five thousand people auditing his every move night after night—anybody from anywhere as long as they had evening clothes and the price of admission. He'd worked and studied and plotted his whole life first to get into this room, and then to be able to return to it each season; no small feat for a Jew from Lawrence, Massachusetts. Some of the older ones in attendance tonight had adulated Hitler—who knows, perhaps in this same hall.

The concertmaster brought him a leather-bound copy of the score—a custom in Vienna—and Bernstein had a crisis of short-term memory. He'd been rehearsing the orchestra for the better part of a week, but he had no memory of ever laying eyes on this man before. He knew better than to let on, but, instead, grasped the man's hand and gave him his messianic look; a look as frank as the gaze of a lover, but one that said not 'I love you,' but 'You will love me.' The El Greco eyes of the short, dark, balding man betrayed nothing and Bernstein turned up the heat, and met his own face, deep in the acidic pond of the man's stomach. Something was very wrong here. He'd known musicians all his life and this man was none. This man was as vacant as the angel of death. Lenny's eyes grazed the cover of the score. It said, '*Requiem Mass in D* by Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart' whereas it supposed to be a copy of the *Linz Symphony*. He smelled a prank; a fake concertmaster and the wrong score; the Philharmonic was priming him for a practical joke. Old, tranquil Vienna loved a belly laugh dearly. He could see it in the musicians' faces now. The undue tension, the coiled stillness—they were waiting to pin him with donkey ears. He would give them their cue and the Philharmonic would caterwaul or play some absurdly orchestrated version of *Mary Had A Little Lamb*.

There was nothing to do but to play along. It was terrible manners to outwit a joke, after all. He reached into the lining pocket of his tux and removed his baton, fashioned from the wood of an olive tree planted on the day Israel declared its statehood. He tapped the lectern, made eye contact all around, and then, unsure whether to give an up or a downbeat, he mimed a parting of invisible curtains. He knew from the first notes; that strange enigmatical river, the sound painting in Lenny's mind of Ophelia billowing through

the rushes, this could only be Mozart's unfinished farewell poem. The last time he conducted the *Requiem Mass*, a pope had wept. But where was the joke? What was so amusing about switching the *Linz* for the *Requiem* and willfully confusing the conductor? Shouldn't he at least make a pretense of being angry? Karajan would be hurling chairs by now.

The choir sang in the loft above his head. He was weak with incomprehension and afraid that he would swoon. But—Goddamn!—this did make sense, after all, there was indeed a jest in all of this and Lenny was the only one in on it. What could be funnier than the indefatigable Lenny grown old and senile? He'd woken from his nap thinking he was fourteen years younger. That *Linz* and *Prague* concert was long ago. The true date was January 27, 1988 and Leonard was jointly conducting the Vienna Philharmonic with the ailing Karajan tonight to commemorate Mozart's two hundred and thirty-second birthday. How the world had changed in the space of one nap. Felicia dead of cancer—what, ten years now? The home movies, the correspondence, and a room filled with seashells to remember her by. His children grown and married; one grandchild in the world and another in the making. The man he'd left Felicia for withering of AIDS back in New York. Only the music remained young.

The funniest part of it was that he, the world's foremost conductor (the arthritic, eighty year-old Karajan was a crippled marionette now), was so surprised that he was powerless to do anything with this music. The best he could manage was to fan his arms and grin like a borscht belt comic doing Toscanini—it was conducting him. The hollow places he'd held back from forty years of psychotherapy—old grudges, guilts and jealousies—provided the fossil fuel and he did not resist, and no one even seemed discomfited when his Italian heels levitated off of the platform, and Lenny began his orbit. In the upper galleries, they were laughing along with him. He treaded air, improvised a pirouette, and heard cries of "moonwalk!" and "Villy Jean is not my loover!" The plaster cherubs in the ceiling giggled and pointed; Lenny curled into a fetal ball, tumbling end over end for the sheer infantile joy of it; jeweled hands reached over the balconies to touch him as he rolled by. For years, critics had accused him of upstaging the music by dancing and leaping at the lectern. He couldn't wait to read their grouching about this new flying business.

Then it hit him. He veered, breakneck, around a column at the back of the hall and he knew in an instant that he was not going to live through this, his

ash canister lungs would no doubt dissolve in a minute or two. He would belch black soot and careen to the parquet below. What the hell, though; instant eulogies, his three symphonies, his dances, suites and songs on every quality radio station in the world, and flags of every stripe at half-staff. Pity he wouldn't be around to see it, but he had another engagement. He had another audience as well. The Almighty had His eye on Bernstein for a very long time and, at last, He was reaching out His palm. He wanted God to know that it was all right with him. Given his druthers, he'd die while doing Mahler back at Avery Fisher and he would have assuredly drawn up an alternative guest list, but then again it was kind of a blessing not to be saddled with such details. Sailing, Lenny threw up his hands to the heavens. Okay by Bernstein.

He held two fingers in the air to signal the Hokmah, the second emanation of Jehovah which was His attribute of unfathomable wisdom, as he remembered Israeli Philharmonic musicians, as well as their audience, doing during a tremor in the desert so many years ago. In the middle of an open-air concert, Shostakovich evaporated and he heard a subterranean roaring that came and went like a rain shower, fraying only nerves. Presently, a wit in the upper tier of the Viennese theater wondered aloud if Lenny wasn't gesturing for a bathroom break. He laughed along with the audience and signaled the remaining potencies of God in no particular order, and then all of the possible combinations of these potencies so that his conversation with his maker degenerated into mathematical gibberish—a mad prayer in a deaf language. There were other preparations. It was gauche to die with your clothes on, no? He'd come into the world in no tuxedo. Hovering over the orchestra, he loosened his bow tie and dropped it down the spout of a French horn. The glazed, oxygen-deprived eyes of the brass section, the contorted heads of the violinists—he'd never noticed such things before. Beauty was hard work, wasn't it? Dying should be so hard, thought Lenny as he kicked off his boots and wriggled out of his trousers. There would be a certain justice if dying were as difficult as being born.

He flew over the concertmaster and his suspicions were confirmed; the man played no instrument. He sat there jotting musical notes onto a loose-leaf pad. He caught his eye—death's dark eye—and curled his upper lip, but the man only looked back to the notebook and continued his scribbling. He rose to the choir loft just as the singers widened their mouths to begin the Hostias. He singled out a plump, broad-shouldered matron with cold, ultramarine eyes. Staring her down, he mentally provided her with a commandant's uni-

form and a leather whip. He removed his silken boxers and the matron stretched her jaw and aimed a jagged aural lightning bolt directly at him. Lenny dodged it, light as a wasp.

“Say ahh, baby,” he said and flew on.

Rizzolo didn’t wear a watch; he calculated that it was near to midnight by the color of the moonlight through the apse and by the complete drainage of his patience. He said a four word prayer, “Father, I am ashamed,” and went to the tabernacle. He took out Catherine’s cloth-covered head without looking at it and pretended to himself that he could not feel the mold of her cranium through the black lace gloves he wore even in the bath now. He replaced her head with the mannequin’s in its shroud and dropped the genuine Catherine into the strongbox he’d picked up in Florence. He locked up the church, and set out for the Ombrone River.

Arriving, he recognized something strange in the current—it lurched non-committally, almost spasmodically, like an animal with a broken resolve. He washed his face in the cold water and looked up at the moon with needles in his eyes. The moon falsified into a face; it was her face; there was no mistaking Sodoma’s broad-cheeked, almost Flemish vision of her. He had never been drunk in his life, but he guessed that this was what inebriation must be like, a private theater wherein the heart’s dark wishes were cast as characters and objective reality was subordinated to the status of stage props. He addressed the moon.

“So, you love me after all. No? Will you deny it? If I’m just an ordinary man to you, why did you come back to life? Why did you spy on me? Why did you leave those letters inside my coat? Why would you care? I worshipped you for years and you never gave me a single sign. I fall out of love with you and you’re in my coat, you’re in my eyeglasses, you’re in my hat. Don’t think I don’t understand, I wrote a dissertation on you, after all. There is one quality you love in a man and it isn’t that saintliness you preached in those letters—you love aloofness, signora. You loved it in Jesus and you love it in me. I know how painful it is to love the dead, but I truly cannot imagine your agony, the dead in love with the living. I won’t let you. No, I will not let you imprison your immortal, beatified, canonized soul in a gilded cage. Catherine, I kill you only out of caring.”

The moon was the moon again and he had not yet bidden her goodbye. She was hiding in that moon, slyly delaying the inevitable. Was he man

enough? Had his vows emasculated him or did he possess enough residual virility to take the head from its wrappings? Could he bid her farewell face-to-face, as all lovers must if they are ever to be allowed to love again? He opened the strongbox and tore at the cloth with his eyes closed. The chill penetrated even the gloves as he raised the head high—where he knew the beam of the moon would be. He opened his eyes and looked into a face straight out of an American horror film. She had a monk's circled pate of close-cropped hair, it stood straight up like wheat and it was as green as young corn. Her skin was a blotchy paraffin hidebound to the bones of her face—the prominent pox scars giving her complexion the look of Swiss cheese. She had the eyes of Medusa, filmed-over and inquiring into infinity. Her lips were curled into the white of her gums and she snarled at him with her three remaining front teeth. Her legend was correct, she had to be a saint, with a face like that, she was fit only for the love of God. He threw her head in the river and turned and kicked the strongbox, crushing his toe. He hobbled home with his priest's collar in his mouth, chewing it like taffy.

She came up in a fishing net the next morning and she was in the papers by evening. LEPER'S HEAD FOUND IN THE OMBRONE, the headlines read. Paul VI sent condolences and concerns and offered up masses for the repose of the Leper woman's soul. The press printed her ghoulish photograph and offered substantial rewards for information leading to the total annihilation of whom-ever it was that killed her. In the taverns, however, they dubbed it a 'mercy killing' and drank to her death. Leaden jokes made the rounds. Rizzolo, himself, might have laughed if he had been in any mood for irony. He drafted and redrafted his suicide note and lived from newspaper to newspaper as the investigators canvassed sanitariums as far away as Palermo, offending these institutions with leading questions about runaway patients. Lab tests proved that the woman had been dead for some time—years even. The grave robbing angle reared its head in the newspapers and cranks phoned the police departments, turning in their brother-in-laws and next door neighbors. Rizzolo, more than once, dissolved rat poison in glasses of grappa, toasted Catherine, and lost his nerve as the tumbler touched his lips. Then a local dentist and his wife came forward, claiming that the head belonged to their Atalanta. Years ago she abandoned their home, leaving only a note of apology for having disgraced the family, and they took Atalanta to mean that she had gotten herself pregnant, not that she had contracted an archaic skin disease. Only now did they allow themselves to cry over her. The authorities hastily be-

lieved their story and the matter was put to rest, along with the head, in the garden abutting the Palazzo Pubblico.

Rizzolo went incognito to confession in another parish. He volunteered everything except his identity and the disbelieving voice on the other end of the screen said, "So, you're clear for this life. What about after?"

"Tell me my penance," he droned like a clerk in a records office soliciting the date of yet another inconsequential birth.

The voice answered, "I'm sorry, that's out of my jurisdiction."

Rizzolo vowed to take his case to a higher authority.

Lenny landed in a shower of roses, his naked belly doing its merry little harem jig as the final note of the *Requiem* blissed out into silence—but where was death? His intended climax had gotten away from him; a matter of over-rehearsal, he supposed. He never noticed before how staccato applause sounded, no matter how many hands were clapping. What an incredibly ugly way of saying thanks. What's more, they all looked as habituated as circus seals. How about a few tears? He shivered and one of the aides came out with a dressing gown. The clapping pounded in his temples and the somber little concertmaster put aside his notebook, and got up from his chair. Here it comes. They were stomping in the aisles. What more could they want, his death? He was too exhausted to put up a fight, but he wasn't going to give up without a joke. From five feet away, the concertmaster extended his hand for a shake. Lenny thought fast. He held up one hand for silence and, with the other, he staved off the figure of death in the ill-fitting tux. Vienna quieted and listened. Bernstein leaned to the microphone and whispered "Heil Hitler" and five thousand concertgoers turned to the aisle, as one. Over their shoulders, they heard the sound of Leonard Bernstein laughing alone.

That oughta hold them. He turned to take the dark angel's hand. He found himself gripping something cylindrical and slender and he looked down to find a ballpoint in his palm. The concertmaster extended his notebook. In a heavy Tuscan accent, he said, "Laney, I gotta have-a you autograph."

Rizzolo wrote letters, did favors, pleaded, and pulled strings. Prayer was out of the question. Years passed and he was finally given minor curatorial duties at the Vatican; his job was to transfer the written files concerning the relics of the saints onto microfiche. It seemed the more obscure the saint was, the more minor the body part would be—tibia of Saint Elias of Waziristan, for

instance. In his lonely cubicle, he daydreamed of attaching all of the bones specified in the files and creating a 'supersaint' or a Catholic Golem. His dark gloves aroused suspicion, but he pleaded his eczema as well as the delicate nature of his work. His promised invitation to the Pope's apartments for Sunday dinner was postponed many times—this although he had shadowed His Holiness on his evening walks and he once saw him eating fried squid with tourists along the Spanish stairs. He borrowed money and bought several meat berths from a departing slaughterhouse, and then donated them to a local orphanage to be converted into bunk beds, bragging his deed around the office until everyone knew that there was but one way to get him to be quiet about it. He received an invitation written in gold lettering on marbleized paper.

The Pontiff entered from his private rooms with Massimo La Rocca, dressed as a Jesuit. Massimo had a sharpened pencil behind his ear and although Rizzolo thought that he was prepared for anything, this was anything but anything. The little night man at the Santo Domenico? He'd bid him goodbye in Siena not three years ago and it takes longer to become a Jesuit than it does to become a doctor of medicine. Rizzolo gasped, "La Rocca?" and La Rocca turned and looked at John Paul.

"What's that in Italian, Your Holiness?" he said in English.

"Fortress, Carl," John Paul said. "Rocks they built the church on."

La Rocca's twin whom the Pope called "Carl" extended his hand. "Thanks," he said. He changed his mind when Rizzolo reached with his black glove. "I'll wait until your rash heals, fella," said La Rocca.

"Father Carl is American," the Pope said. "And you are?"

"Italian."

"No, you are who?"

"Father Rizzolo."

"Father Rizzolo, do you know that Father Carl has revolutionized something as ancient as prayer. He takes my conversations with God, writes them down, and he translates them into music, the alphabet corresponding to the major and minor scales. While I am sleeping, he goes into the chapel and plays my prayers on the organ. Just in case God did not hear the first time."

The conversation around the dinner table was Epicurean in nature—the Pope's inner circle droning on about flavorsome wines and elitist inns hewn into the rock in the hills above Rome. The Pope said very little and even his

smile seemed superfluous; there was such an air of beneficence about him that Rizzolo was beginning to believe in haloes, psychic ones anyway. He forgot everything he was going to say and this was to the good; his silence ingratiated him with the Pontiff, and then John Paul looked at him over his roast beef—none of that Asiatic vegetarian nonsense for this old shipyard hand—and said, “What is it you do for us, again, Father?”

Rizzolo said, “Your Holiness, I deal with the bones of great souls.”

“That is a noble undertaking.”

“Undertaking?”

John Paul didn’t get it for a half an instant. When he laughed, the rest of the table laughed as well.

“And has your vocation given you any insights into human nature?”

“Only that the outer shells are hard and that the marrow is dry.”

This time they laughed without the Pontiff’s help. John Paul looked around for more wine. At the height of the laughter, Rizzolo slipped off his black glove and put his right hand into his finger bowl. The ringworm mementos of Sabrina’s teeth, from knuckles to wrist, were scarred in a pattern vaguely resembling the astronomical symbol of the moon in its last quarter. The table quieted instantly.

“Stigmata,” someone whispered.

John Paul was the last to notice and he spent an uncomfortable interval searching through the pockets of his robes for his bifocals. He put them over his eyes, leaned close, drew back and then nudged Massimo’s look-a-like. Rizzolo looked into the Pontiff’s careworn face—a slept-in bed, newly vacated and warm, yes, so warm that you could put your palm to it and read the temperature of its dreams.

“Make a note of that, will you?” the Pope said.

Father Carl wrote something on a napkin and put it into his pocket. This was it; at most he’d have to spend a hundred or two hundred years wind-surfing the cosmos with the unbaptized fetuses of Limbo while the sanctification process moved forward in God’s own time, but not even God could condemn a verified saint. He’d let King David, the adulterer and homicide-conspirator, off the celestial hook, hadn’t he? Anyway, his indiscretions with Saint Catherine of Siena had happened during his unbridled youth and he drowned her dead skull rather than consummate anything. He dried his hand and put his glove back on.

“Pardon me, Your Holiness.”

“Of course,” John Paul said. “Now who do I have to beatify to get a glass of wine around here?”

Bernstein showered and went across the hall in his robe—sandal tongues flapping, parched white shins gleaming—to Karajan’s dressing room in order to apologize. He’d scared away the gala audience and served Mozart a hollow birthday cake. He rapped at the door and there was no answer. He called, in falsetto, “Maestro! Oh, Maestro!” Still no answer. He turned the doorknob. Aristocrats don’t bother with locked doors. Bernstein was born middle class and, many years ago, at the initial flush of *Fancy Free* and *On The Town* fame, he learned the first lesson in the psychology of money when total strangers began to hit him up for loans in nightclubs—there is no hiding and green is not the color of camouflage. Karajan was born knowing that, no doubt. He tasted champagne in the womb and arrived punctually, though naked and squalling, at a cocktail party given in his honor. The door popped open, as Lenny anticipated, and Ben Gay hung in the air, thick and blue as cigarette smoke in the movies. Karajan stood at the wash basin, the Konzerthaus being over three hundred years old and the installing of showers having been in committee for thirty years. The old maestro was stripped to the waist and the sight of him had Lenny wondering if Giacometti ever sculpted in white marble.

“Maestro, I—”

“Linny, this medicine is not vorking.”

Karajan’s hands trembled over the basin, the tap roaring; water pounding the tin bottom. The unguent waxed his knuckles—those hands, those Nazi fellow-traveler’s rabbinical hands. There was a hundred-year-old Rebbe he knew in Brooklyn who couldn’t claim to have once delineated God with the power of Karajan.

“You want to wash it off?” Bernstein asked.

“Yes. But I’m afraida za pain. Imagine, at my age.”

“Chrissake, let me help you.”

He crossed the room and cooled both the rush and the fever of the tap. He took the maestro by the fingers.

“We’re going to go slow. Let me know if you want to stop.”

Karajan flinched at the touch of the water, but said nothing. Lenny felt it dampen the hem of his robe, a trickle running down his leg. He caught sight of himself and his friend and rival in the oval mirror above the basin. The

maestro was grimacing and Bernstein smiled so as to complete the tragicomic emblem.

Karajan said, "Linny, vill ve ever die?"

"Why do you ask that? Is the pain that bad?"

"No. I vant to zee God."

Lenny said, "Why don't you look in the mirror?"