

The Kogi Necklace · *Laurence Goldstein*

IT WAS 1950 when Sam Rosen, his wife Lillian and ten-year-old daughter Natalie arrived in Colombia for a reunion with Sam's younger brother. Morris and Sam had left Europe the same year—1938—when for once Viennese Jews were not fastidious about a new cultural milieu. Finding passage on different Italian cargo boats, they had settled in different Americas: Morris in Barranquilla; Sam in New York, then Pittsburgh. They corresponded, and even did some trading in metals, but not until Morris became a widower did Sam feel compelled to introduce Natalie to her last surviving relative.

Natalie was not surprised that the harbor at Barranquilla looked drabber than she had imagined. The voyage from New York had been a disappointment, neither exotic nor dangerous. And she could predict that Uncle Morris would look nothing like the South American explorer of her illustrated storybook—a watered-down version, she later learned, of *Green Mansions*. Sure enough, when a portly figure in a white work-shirt and baggy green trousers detached itself and pushed through the brown crowds on the dock, he looked just like someone back home, someone who had never had an adventure.

Natalie was embraced and carried from market to market by her grinning uncle, and fed so many pungent fruits and juices she visited the little girl's room constantly. She tried to be quiet, as her childless uncle seemed to prefer, and let his volatile spirits have their accustomed freedom. Morris had promised, in his good night-school English, that despite his mourning, the visit would be a "tropical holiday," especially for his niece, who would see memorable things "off the beaten path." And so after days of hectic tourism in the coastal city they boarded a ferry to Ciénaga, a stopover enroute to a hideaway of the Rosenzweigs—Morris has kept the family name—near the beach resort of Santa Marta. The temperature, mild even in winter, had begun to climb. Natalie sweated all night in her hammock, then at first light joined her parents on the upper deck. As the boat sidled past fields of guinea grass near Ciénaga, they took snapshots and breakfasted on platano cakes and guava jelly.

An imported Studebaker, pitted with rock-bites, waited on the dock. It jolted them mile after mile, first on a main road and then on mining trails which Morris claimed had scarcely been improved since the

Spanish conquistadors used them to search for El Dorado. Finally Morris ordered the driver to let them rest in a small village. They stretched their limbs in the shade and refused all food, except a mango, when Natalie threatened a fuss. She asked, through Morris, where it came from, and a mestizo woman waved vaguely at some trees with dull metallic leaves, meaning not them, but trees like them, somewhere miles away.

“These are Kogi,” Morris explained as farmers drifted in from the fields to gaze at the car. “A sad people. The Spanish came with horses and guns and took their spirit away. They have a jaguar for a god, a cruel god. Come, I’ll show you. Natalie, take my hand.” They walked to a hut nearby and Morris pointed to a crudely drawn cat face over the entrance. “In old times this would have been a skull, to ward off enemies.”

An Indian woman came out and showed them a basket of jewelry. Natalie examined a bracelet made of what looked like fish bones. Morris spoke a few words in the Chibcha dialect and bought some bananas to keep peace.

“They fear their ancestors,” Morris said as they resumed driving. “They won’t live in the same place their fathers are buried. For centuries they moved further up the mountains and further into the country. The most fertile areas they left for the dead. I think they don’t believe that any more.”

“Some beliefs it’s good to lose,” Sam said from the back seat. “I tell Natalie, she has to be careful what she believes. Take what is good from the past, but not superstition. Mama used to tell us one thing I don’t forget, *niyeh kechol hagoyim*, we shall be like all people. That’s right, Natalie?”

She giggled and tried to tickle her father under his shirt. He tickled her instead and the two of them tossed about in the seat, flailing and yelling.

They had been driving parallel to the beach, the Caribbean visible in stretches behind palms and acacias. Finally the car bounced into a clearing and stopped. Without unpacking they walked toward two small huts of timber and palm-thatch. An Indian man emerged from one of them and signalled with his hand.

The Rosenzweigs had erected a trellis beside the huts with creepers trained over it, crimson bougainvillea and flowering vines. Lounging chairs faced the bay, a shallows formed by a hook of stony land. Morris

led them through the sweet-smelling patio toward the water. "This was Bertha's paradise. My Wiener Wald she called it. She planted every tree, every flower. And what good did she get from loving? Tell me, what was the good?" Tears came to his eyes. Natalie was fascinated by her uncle's sorrow, and studied his expressions as her parents led him comfortingly to a chair. At home tears were never shed in her presence, and her own so effectively shamed in recent years that she had lost the habit. Quickly she turned and ran toward the beach, where the Indian had begun a pit-fire for the evening meal.

"I want to see a scarlet too-can," she told him. "Daddy said I would." He shook his head without looking at her.

Next morning the group set out for a hike in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada, and a visit to Indian tumuli, the only monuments of the area. Lillian carried a woven purse filled with yuca cakes and mangos. Sam and Morris strapped on heavy knapsacks which held emergency medical and camping equipment, a large thermos of water, and flares. "We're ready for Mt. Everest," Lillian joked, but Morris, full of his responsibility, listed the disasters that could befall them, even on a day-trip into an often reconnoitered area. He talked till he ran out of breath.

Lillian tapped her head. "*Er ken a velt*," she teased, and he answered sternly, "English. Speak English."

"Look, pretend we're explorers," Morris resumed as they got under way. "The first conquistadors. Natalie here is our historian, our Bernal Diaz. . . ."

Natalie kept in the center of the party, so that snakes would get the others first. Unless they dropped from the trees! She stumbled uncomfortably as she looked from side to side, then up, then down.

". . . we're good people, we have civilization, but we're *goyim*, we love gold, and we love power, and we become crazy with greed when we learn the Indians know how to find El Dorado."

"Stop with your sarcasm," Sam said, already breathing hard. "People are all the same, when there's money."

The trail narrowed as they rounded a slope and felt a stronger, cooler wind blowing toward them in the forest. They marched single-file upward, into cleared eminences where they could rest on boulders and look out over the sea. It was almost noon and very hot when Morris assured them that a half-hour would bring them to the burial place. "We can picnic and nap." He articulated the two verbs slowly, proud of his idioms.

As they advanced, they began to hear the unwelcome sounds of pickaxe against stone, carried from a distance by the wind. Closer to the site they discerned other sounds, of thrashing about, perhaps of clearing.

"It's a human being, isn't it?" Sam asked.

"Yes, probably an Indian." Morris became cautious. He explained that following the assassination of a Populist candidate for the presidency the year before, there had been an insane eruption of murders in the interior of the country, though the coast had remained quiet. This might be an outlaw, a victim of *la Violencia*. If so, he would be armed and probably savage, with that love of killing one saw in the peasant when he reached for his machete on the thinnest pretext.

"We must hide," Morris whispered. "We'll find a place in the woods. We'll eat without making a sound. He won't hear us. Downhill will be easier."

"You and I," Sam said, "we could take a look."

"No, this is worse danger than you think. We'll rest and go back. No more talking now."

Suddenly they heard a loud hooting sound: "Lord! Lord!" and then a kind of cackling laugh.

"Daddy, it's an American," Natalie cried, pulling at Sam's arm. "It's one of us!"

Sam charged heedlessly up the trail, and Morris, pausing long enough to show he disapproved, caught up with him. They returned after twenty minutes. "Someone got here before us," Sam said in a wry, relieved voice, "and he thinks he found El Dorado."

The dirt path descended into a clearing protected from landslides by a dense grove. Sam led the others partway and pointed to a freshly-dug pit near the trees. A head appeared at the top, its brownish-black beard a near match to the upturned loam. It smiled at them. "Don't mind me," it said. "I'm just tryin' to strike it rich. And I hope'n pray I done it."

The group edged closer to the open grave, for they saw that it was one of the tumuli. Artificial mounds stood in discrete copses throughout the grove. On the heaps of earth surrounding the gravedigger's pit, he had placed red and black jars with hemispherical markings, and domestic implements of stone and turtle-shell.

"That ain't nothin'," he said. "Look at what else."

None of them moved. They had not recovered from the fear, and the digger's gaunt, sun-blackened face did not inspire trust. A drooping right eye gave his expression a graceless cunning, his smile was constant,

detached from feeling. As they held back, watching him, his mouth curled downward in scorn or—this passed through Natalie’s mind—fear of them.

When they came forward, the stranger did not climb out of the grave or extend his hand. He said he was Ben Dopson from West Virginia. “Why, we’re neighbors,” he exclaimed with genuine pleasure when Sam said they came from Pittsburgh. “You live just over the hill.”

There was an embarrassed silence. He picked out Natalie as the most likely friend, holding his hands in front of her. “Have you ever in your young life seen hands as scarred as these, child? A lot of years rootin’ in the earth, afraid to lift axe or shovel against a piece a crockery don’t bring more’n a dollar. But that’s food in my belly till the big strike.”

“It’s horrible!” Lillian said, leaning over the pit.

“A hard life, ma’am, but I’ve knowed a durned sight worse.”

Natalie stared at him hard, and thought that he was certainly more like the explorer in her book than was Uncle Morris.

Lillian backed her away from the edge as the others advanced. They could see that Dopson wore only khaki shorts, and that he stood among parts of a skeleton. Jars lay to the left of the remains, with stone artifacts Dopson had wrapped in old rags, and a breastplate shined in one corner. “Gold,” Dopson informed them. “Not a chief but a warrior, and the Kogi buried him with honor.”

He bent down and then held something toward them. “See here, a nose ornament, gold pure gold. But if this here were a chief there be a pot a gold at his feet and gold on his wrists and ankles and a gold crown on his head. When I find me a chief my worries are over. I’ll be rich as Andy Carnegie.” He turned to Sam. “Not that rich a course, nobody but him could be that rich, but I’ll be sittin’ pretty.”

Lillian strode toward him and spat on the ground. “Are you a human being? A vulture! Human beings respect the dead. A monster is what you are!” She began to kick dirt into the grave. Dopson made no move, but Sam restrained her.

“It’s a very sad business,” Morris said.

Dopson folded his arms and looked down. “I’ve opened the earth a lot in my time, sir, and this is the only way that gives any hope. The mines give a body black lung, I learned that from my pa. I’ve done some dredgin’ up the coast here that don’t give enough for beans.

“What’s your line a work in Pittsburgh,” he asked Sam after a pause.

“I’m a jeweler.”

“Well, you know somethin’ of this trade, don’t you? What’ll this here noseplug fetch?”

“Monster!” Lillian rapped at him. “Do you think everyone is a grave robber like you? Stealing from *meysim*, stealing gold from their mouth?”

Dobson stooped and brought up another item. “This necklace is somethin’ special.” He had strung fishing line through twenty pieces of ivory-like stone, smaller pieces at the ends and increasing in size toward the center. Each had been filed according to the same pattern, pointed at one end, squared off at the other; tiny hollowed-out stones lay between the larger pieces to keep them from bunching. A gold figurine in the form of a jaguar’s head divided the two sets of ten.

Natalie knelt and turned the jaguar face up to her own. Dopson leaned closer until his beard touched her shoulder. “When it’s polished and strung with a fine wire—course the ’riginal weared away—hit gonna be a *handsome* thing. That breastplate there and that noseplug gonna go on some collector’s shelf, but this oughta be shown to the world. On a lady’s neck.”

Lillian hissed at Natalie, “Come here! Get away from that graveworm. Sam, please, no business.”

Sam too was watching Natalie. “One moment. You are, then, offering this necklace for sale?”

Dopson held his smile long enough to resemble mockery. “You know its value, sir. These countries are startin’ up their own diggin’ wherever they lay pipe. And everythin’ they dig up they put in a museum. There won’t be nothin’ like this at your fancy stores when you get home. No sir!” His eyes flashed at Sam’s attention and then turned sly. “Now I could take this back with me to the States and get the price I want. It’s more vital to keep diggin’, keep on lookin’ for the big chief. I’ll let it go cheap. ’Cause it’s for her, I can see that.”

Natalie had put the necklace to her throat.

“That’s been lying on a corpse!” Lillian screamed, shaking Natalie’s hand till she dropped it. “It has disease on it! Sam. . . .”

Her tearful voice aimed away from them and lapsed into Yiddish. The others followed her gaze down a ravine, blinking at the spots of brilliant sunlight reflecting back at them.

Natalie said, “Daddy, I want it.”

“Think of her makin’ a day-bew,” Dopson said. “She’ll put high society on its ears.”

“Don’t oversell,” Sam said. “It’s an unusual item, a curiosity, no real value. What do you want for it?”

"I'd get fifty dollars in Barranquilla, but you can have it for forty, save me a trip."

"It's only worth twenty, probably less. Old stone, small piece of gold."

They settled on thirty. Sam unfolded six five-dollar bills from his money belt. "This a-gonna take me a ways, sir. I thank you. Natalie, this is your pa's gift, but it's mine too. As long as you wear it you gonna remember me."

"Monster!" Lillian cried again, and began walking back through the trees toward the road. "Stay here, all of you," she shouted. "Rob the dead. My trip is ruined!"

Sam and Natalie followed, after wrapping the necklace in a handkerchief and folding it into a pocket of the knapsack. Morris stayed a few minutes to talk with Dopson—to bargain for the other gold, Lillian accused him later, generating another in the series of arguments that marred their next few days together and caused them to agree on a curtailed visit.

Her mother's outrage was Natalie's joy, for she had coaxed a favor from her father different in kind from the rings and bracelets she picked out at the store and returned after a week of neglectful wear. On the way down the mountain she held her father's hand, and followed her mother, who would not speak to them. Back at the huts, Natalie took the necklace into the shallows and washed each of the stones and afterward the jaguar's face until its expression of sullen fury gleamed in the clear water.

So many presents came her way in the next fifteen years that the necklace became buried under other castoff tokens in the attic. Keepsakes and toys were piled on top of it and these were surrounded in turn by notebooks and yearbooks of her junior high, high school, and college years. Natalie did not think of the Kogi necklace again until the day in 1963 when she sat near her father's casket and heard him eulogized as someone who denied his wife and daughter nothing. The rabbi lamented, "Sam Rosen escaped an early grave in one continent only to find it in another, preserving from his labors in America one jewel worth more than all his earthly treasure, his beloved Natalie." The rhetoric embarrassed her, and when it became more florid at graveside she lowered her head, dry-eyed, to wish that like her ancestors she could rend her garments in grief. She wondered if there were any way of

signifying her father's presence to herself. The necklace came to mind, with other gifts, and then the service ended, the casket was lowered, and Natalie summoned all her self-control to lead her weeping mother toward the black limousine and the procession of empty days ahead.

Her tribute to him, she knew, must be the career for which he had sacrificed while living. Sam had supported her through an expensive art school as she developed a talent for drawing animal figures. Her job at a gallery specializing in rare prints brought her important contacts but little money, and without her father's weekly check she could not have maintained an apartment downtown or hosted there the intimate parties which brought her work attention and gradually some patronage.

His unexpected death followed by only two weeks Natalie's premier triumph as an artist. She had been invited to a private party to enjoy the autumn foliage at Falling Water, the estate Frank Lloyd Wright designed for the Kaufman family in the woods east of Pittsburgh. Her friend, Morley Straus, had teased her during the evening drive with innuendoes about her being the guest of honor. Inside the house the company treated her with special interest, until, in the last room of the tour, a guest bedroom, Natalie confronted one of her own nature studies. Placed on a shelf within the stone wall, it depicted wood ducks in flight over a lake. The brown and red shades were a match for the desk's color, and, her host pointed out, a suitable illustration of the natural life to which the house and family were wedded.

Natalie approached it with pleasure welling but suppressed in her, and gazed at the shadings she had rendered with so much patience. Her signature—Nathalia Rose—was too large on the canvas; she would never magnify it like that again. But she felt glad that no visitor could overlook it. She turned to the company, who were grinning at her. "Now you're a permanent asset of twentieth-century Art," Morley said.

It could have been a time of celebration, but her father's death made it instead a quiet spell of family duty. Evenings of solemn conversation with her mother succeeded solitary work at the gallery preparing an inventory. As if these would be their last earthly communions, her mother narrated a family chronicle, most of which Natalie had heard in fragments but never in connected sequence. Lillian now took some care to provide transitions between the various anecdotes. Sam's courtship in Vienna, their separation when he received an anonymous warning, her escape the same year after vainly trying to persuade her parents *not* to wait and see, reunion with Sam in New York City and marriage—

these events were amplified with details. Lillian implied the unfinished arc of family history, that Natalie's marriage would constitute the end of their mourning.

One evening Lillian asked about the young man she had been dating.

"I don't know if it's serious or not," Natalie said. "I like his abstracts. The green and white—seascape I think of it—in my apartment, over the fireplace, that's Morley's work."

"In Vienna everyone talked about the abstract, the modern. Express the feelings, they said, but always the ugly came out, never the beautiful. Now people say they painted the horror that was coming, the race laws and the camps. . . . I chased a boy once who painted such pictures but I never heard what happened to him."

Lillian brought out boxes of loose photographs. Annotating each on the back, she explained their history, insistently, until Natalie understood that these stories were to survive Lillian's death, and, by oral transfer, her own as well.

From these mementoes it was an easy step to general housecleaning. They sifted through the attic, dividing trivia from objects redolent of a bygone world. Report cards were burned but dolls saved, dishes set aside for the Temple's rummage sale, hotpads woven by Natalie in the fourth grade preserved—against her protests. "Your children will enjoy them," Lillian said, ending the argument. She placed Sam's belongings in separate boxes; whether these would be kept or discarded Natalie preferred not to ask. About their own things both made whimsical decisions. Sometimes they disputed playfully whether an item was invested with sentimental value, giving it a one to five Nostalgia rating. Once in a while they laughed aloud at their silliness.

It was after several days of salvaging that they uncovered the Kogi necklace. The stone pieces still shone like outsized teeth and the jaguar's head kept its burnished beauty. Lillian looked at it a long time. "For this trash we lost Morris. He never visited—not after what I called him. Sam begged him in letters to come to the States, make it up. I know what he never knew; Morris did come but not to Pittsburgh. A curse is on this necklace for what it did to brothers who loved each other." She threw it into the box of disposable junk.

Natalie rescued it. "It's a beautifully crafted necklace. I can appreciate that now."

"Natalie!"

"Mother!" she mimicked. "The poor necklace never did anything wrong."

“It was taken off a corpse. Your father had no right to buy it and you have no right to keep it. We’ll give it to a museum and they can do what they want.”

Natalie put on the necklace, arranging the pieces so that the jaguar’s head settled in the crevice of her breasts.

“Wear it for spite then!” Lillian glared at her daughter. “I threw a fit once and what good did it do? Morris brought me some fabric, a peace offering. I asked was it a shroud? Was there anything he could give me that wouldn’t have death on it? And what had he done? Took us to the grave is all. But how could I run after a husband with *death* and *death* always in my mouth? Poor Sam punished himself enough. . . . And when he passed away Morris didn’t even write, just a card, a card with a signature.” Lillian began to sob quietly into the arm of her sweater.

Natalie took off the necklace and placed it in a box with her mementoes. She raised her mother gently, led her downstairs into the living room and set her down in an overstuffed chair near the fireplace. She lit a fire and boiled water over it for tea. Lillian had maintained a devotion to the hearth; now she became calm as she watched her daughter perform the familiar rite. They talked about old friends who had drifted away.

“You’ll give the necklace to a museum?” Lillian interrupted after a time.

“Yes, mother.”

There was no greater admirer of the necklace than Morley, and when Natalie accompanied him to dinners or parties she would always find someone there to exclaim over it: “So *this* is the famous antiquity. Morley alerted me you’d be wearing it. How *fierce* he looks! May I feel the stone?” She yielded whenever Morley asked her to display it for a new acquaintance or patron. “I think it’s coming between us,” she joked, holding him away with its length; but the line took on an uncomfortable truth, for however much the necklace pleased her and others it pleased him more. Soon he rather than she began to tell the story of its discovery in Colombia, adding details she no longer bothered to correct.

Her career had reached the plateau of moderate success she suspected it would keep to for many years. Her animal portraits sold well but increasingly to people who saw in them an ideological statement consistent with The Sierra Club or Friends of the Earth. Unlike Morley, she resisted the art-styles enforced on larger and larger numbers by the

counterculture. As beads proliferated she gave up beads; she discarded her batik fabrics, her Navajo ring, a poster of the Russian Revolution; she shortened her hair; she went back to heels when sandals became a national fad. At the end of this dispossession she retired the Kogi necklace, *for good* she told Morley, then gave in to his entreaties that she wear it to a sequence of spring receptions. Gradually, even her representational style weighed on her spirit. She began to experiment with abstract design.

"Is this a strategy or a *real* change?" Morley asked. "Either way it won't work. Only the great of soul undergo meaningful conversions, Nathalia, and that ain't us."

"They're not a bit like yours, you know."

"I wish they were," he said, and then plaintively, "I wish *we* were more alike, or the kind of opposites that attract. You don't show any affection for me at all. I can't advise you on graphics because I'm as weary of abstracts as you are of animals. I want to be *engagé* and seize life. Not just form and color but life!"

Morley could leap out of his pretenses in a moment, but she moved for weeks in the sour memory of his fretting. He was energized by his calling and his sense of crisis. "Give yourself to history," he repeated persuasively as the Sixties advanced, and she did try to perform as a good citizen. At Resistance headquarters she made posters for rallies she never attended, drawing abstracts that concealed her loveless anxiety in the common outrage. But that was not what Morley needed either. When he moved to New York in the summer of 1968 to be "closer to the action," he left a largely unfelt vacancy. She didn't want her art to fill it, or the Movement, or anything else. Without mistaking it for freedom she wanted to inhabit for a short time at least a suspended place where events brought no pain.

Lillian recognized this feeling and honored it. It was not unlike her own lassitude. "We left Vienna to avoid dying," she said to her daughter during a cordial reunion that summer. "Each day we worked for a good life. And now I don't care anymore. I don't want to die, but I don't want to care about it one way or the other."

They sat in front of the fireplace from habit, and both drank iced tea. "I haven't shown you my new work, mother, you wouldn't recognize it. I paint more like Morley now, large swatches of color. I care more about pure color than I ever did."

"And what does Morley care about now?"

“Not about me, if that’s what you mean. The new *Art in America* has some work of his, collages mostly. He does Vietnamese babies stuck to charred newspaper headlines about the bombings.”

“A hack. I always said it.”

“You said some very nice things about Morley.”

“When I thought he had taste. But he doesn’t know good from bad, does he Natalie?”

“I’m not the one to say, am I? I think he did, yes.”

“He liked your necklace. How much taste did that show?”

Natalie raised one eyebrow. “That skunk! I told him to keep his mouth shut. He would have told you just for the dramatic effect, I suppose. And you never turned against me.”

Lillian shook her head.

“I’m taking your advice, though. That necklace is headed for a museum case. I need the tax writeoff. Five hundred maybe? I’ve been offered that much.”

Lillian looked at her a long time, then went to another room. She returned with the morning paper. “You’ll see this in the *Press* tonight anyway. Now I feel better about showing it to you.”

Natalie took the folded paper. If the conversation had not prepared her she would never have recognized the dignified man in the photograph. She sighed and read the copy:

The William Penn Hotel is privileged to welcome Mr. Benjamin Dopson, archaeologist and connoisseur of antiquities. Mr. Dopson has assembled for sale an exhibition of genuine Pre-Colombian relics, including examples of the Aztec, Maya, and Inca civilizations. The public is invited to examine the exquisite gold and silver workmanship of these artifacts. A certificate of authenticity will be provided with each purchase. Friday, June 21, 8 p.m.—By Invitation Only. Saturday, June 22, 9 a.m.-5 p.m.. Admission \$2.50.

Natalie knew immediately that she would attend. The expectation aroused in her not only the intense colors of the Caribbean but voices she tried to suppress, wary of the eerie tenderness that accompanied them. Lillian seemed to follow her daughter’s thoughts partway. “There were wild pineapples the size of oranges,” she said. “Do you remember, Natalie, we cut them open for breakfast before our hike, and how delicious they were.” She pressed her fingers on her eyelids, preoccupied

for several minutes as if the next scenes were being dramatized on the lids. "Tell me what he's like," she said finally. "I'm not capable of hating him anymore."

In a slow season the exhibition became a major cultural event. Natalie's boss received an invitation, which he gave her, and a flyer containing a description of choice items for sale. The same flyer appeared in downtown store windows and on public posting boards. It pointed out that the objects had entered a private collection before the countries of origin enacted laws governing foreign sale of native antiquities, and that years might pass before such valuable works came on the market again. Mr. Dopson had been offered a large sum by West German collectors but preferred to give the treasures an American home, especially in his own part of the country.

The publicity attracted a large crowd on Friday evening. As Natalie's taxi joined a procession inching to the hotel entrance she watched the familiar figures, those she recognized from the Symphony concerts at Heinz Hall and the gallery openings, drift by with their customary grace. The warm evening had prompted many women to choose dresses of nearly transparent fabric—whites, pinks, and beiges adorned with jewels selected to challenge the splendor inside. The peasant look had become fashionable, and Natalie could not help smiling at the pretense of anti-couture in the ethnic outfits parading before her. Some women trailed a chiffon scarf at the wrist or flashed Tyrolese ribbons on the calf; others, more primitive and more chic, wore suits of natural leather, shiny as if waxed. Natalie almost bumped into a cobra-skin jacket as she exited from the cab.

She wore a silk print dress, low-cut to show off the Kogi necklace. Never had the stones felt so heavy on her shoulders and neck, or the jaguar head seemed so large as she stared down her front onto its golden crown. Once inside she accustomed herself to the uneasy feeling that everyone was looking at her; they *were* looking, and so was she at them.

They were professional buyers, not just of art, though they determined the city's official taste, but of iron ore, chemicals and gild-edged securities. She had not guessed that this exhibition would present even them with "gifts of distinction" as the legend on her father's storefront had phrased it. As she moved contentedly among the statuary, idols, and armor, all mounted behind ropes, she overheard astounding prices. They would be paid, she thought gladly, and after a generation of private ownership much of the treasure would devolve into Pittsburgh muse-

ums. The great empires would survive in the wondering eyes of the populace.

When she caught sight of Dopson, her genial feelings were momentarily staggered. He sat at an elevation on a speaker's platform, where he received questions and surveyed his intact collection for the last time. As a publicity gesture he wore a glittering white explorer's outfit, and sat beneath a mural-length color photograph of the jungle. Emaciated, with gray hair brushed straight back and a clean shave that exposed puffy cheeks, he still impressed her by his look of otherworldly strangeness: "like a sacred being," she thought, and then shook her head. "It's just the gold." Touching the necklace, she entered the flow toward him, guarding herself from the press of perfumed bodies moving with her in a wide circle. She glanced at an unusual item from time to time—a gold plate embossed with demons, a ceremonial knife, a totem inset with gems—but her nervous attention constricted as she approached Dopson, her heart beating fast under the necklace. Finally, she stepped out of the crowd onto the staircase below him.

"You wouldn't remember me, Mr. Dopson." She had meant it as a statement but her tone challenged him. When he turned his head, he had a familiar fixed smile; his gleaming false teeth made such a contrast to her recollection that she involuntarily smiled back.

His eyes settled on the necklace. "May I?" he asked in a gentle voice she would never have recognized. She lifted the jaguar's head from her bosom and held it toward him, bowing slightly as he took it in hand.

"I have an excellent memory for such things. Are you the little girl of the party I met in the Sierra Nevadas?"

She nodded.

"And wearing a necklace of more value than you know. I have never seen its duplicate."

His speech awed her, and when he turned to answer some questions she listened spellbound to his smooth replies.

"Your family, I hope, is well." He stared at her face, at the necklace. The movement of his drooping eye sent a chill up her arms.

"My father died several years ago. My mother . . . told me about this show, but didn't come herself."

"Your mother is one of my strongest memories. Tell her I have even dreamed about her, more than once. Digging was never the same after that day. But she didn't stop me, you can see that. And she didn't stop you either."

Natalie looked down and nodded. "But I don't like it anymore. This is the last time I'll be wearing it."

An agent standing beside Dopson had plunged into the crowd and now resurfaced to tell him that someone they had talked about had arrived. Should they go down and meet him?

"No, bring him to me," Dopson said and turned back to Natalie. "Between ourselves, I shall be following your father very soon; if not, this ugly scene would never be taking place."

"I'm very sorry," she said mechanically, and then felt actual sympathy seize her so close she stepped back to keep from touching him.

"I would have been glad to live a bit longer. I've spent my last years virtually alone with all of this." When he waved his hand she saw it tremble. "In Peru I found an Emperor's grave, or so they said when I brought in the experts. That was back home of course. I won't tell you what the Peruvians had to say when they found I slipped outa . . . past their customs inspectors." He chuckled and sat back in his chair. "But that's an old story, that's as much history as the Incas themselves."

The agent reappeared leading a beefy man who seemed accustomed to the homage he received from the crowd. It was Pennsylvania's most powerful voice in Washington, hated at Resistance headquarters as an arbiter of foreign policy. The agent whispered toward Dopson, "He wants the best pieces, that'll sell everything else!"

Dopson did not change expression but looked out over the ballroom and at the treasure on its periphery. "One moment please. I have some last words for this woman."

The group receded and Dopson leaned forward. "I want to ask whether you'd be willing to sell this necklace to me."

She opened her lips but made no sound.

"After tonight I'll be rich, by my standards, with no use for money. I can't be buried with it, I've saved my best gold for that day. And I want the necklace too."

Natalie felt behind her the impatience of people in line. She finally said, "You don't mean you're going to wear it. . . ."

"That's the purpose of it, girl, that's why the Kogi made it. I won't haggle with you. Name your fair price, name any price."

She stepped back again. "Mr. Dopson, I'd give it to you right now, I swear I would. But I can't stand to think of . . . in the grave."

He looked at her coldly. "That necklace belongs to the dead. You know that, little miss." He motioned the waiting group toward him.

It parted to let Natalie pass through and she walked, head down, toward the exit. In the lobby she noticed a policeman staring at her, and for an instant feared that he would think she had stolen the necklace. Even from inside the cab, before it pulled away, she squinted through the side windows to make sure nobody had followed her.

At home she undressed, laying the necklace on a work-table. As she often did at night, she put on an old shirt and shorts, both spattered with paint. Night was a good time to draw, to work out designs and exhaust them so she would not slip them into compositions unawares. This evening she drew impressions of the show: Dopson's face, the politician, a circular flow of pinks and whites within a perimeter of gold. She drew the necklace last, her model lying beside her under a lamp. It was the best sketch, and against her better judgment she wondered if her most recent painting, an abstract of billowing greens and browns standing on the easel, would not be improved by the suggestion of a jaguar's face discernible in the depths of the green. She located a place below the center and yearned to paint it in right away, but she was too tired. She changed into her nightgown and got under the single sheet. It would ruin the design, she thought, as the jaguar's cruel expression hung suspended in her imagination. But she knew that her tears, sudden and irresistible, had nothing to do with the spoiled painting.