

"Outbound?" said Ken.
"She knows better."

On the ramp they had to arc around an old woman who had paused mid-journey with her trash bag on her left and her collapsible cart on her right. "That's okay," she called.

The inbound train had just left. The platform held five people who had missed it: three students, one bearded man, and a tall black woman—an islander, Joanna could tell; her regality proclaimed her origins, that magazine under her arm was probably in French.

SOPHIE WASN'T FAR BEHIND THEM. She had found the subway entrance as soon as she left the little house. While her father was bearing the empty stroller backward through the turnstile, she was beginning her descent from the street. While her mother was choosing inbound, Sophie was thinking about joining the line of token buyers, of promising to pay later. She decided not to risk conversation with the man in the booth. By the time her parents reached the inbound platform she was slipping underneath the turnstile. She started down the ramp.

She saw them before she reached the bottom. Her mother sat on a bench, holding Lily in her lap. Her father, standing, bent over them both. They looked like everyday people, but Sophie wasn't fooled—her mother's knees were knocked together under her coat and her feet were far apart, their ankles bent inward so wearily that the anklebones almost touched the floor. Without seeing her father's face, she knew he was close to tears. An old woman with a cart leaned against the wall. As Sophie appeared the woman said, "Now your reunion," in a conversational tone, though rather loud. Ken turned and unbent: a basketball replay in slow motion.

Joanna took relief like an injection; pain was killed and feeling as well. She saw that the child had undergone some unsettling experience, but Joanna had no sympathy to offer now. Perhaps this once Sophie would be given the blessing of forgetfulness.

And indeed Sophie moved forward with a light tread, as if she had not just witnessed the future unrolling.

Lily attended slackly. But then she raised her mittened hand.

"Phie!"

DAY OF AWE

HE WAS THE LAST JEW in a cursed land.

A ruined country, a country of tricksters. Rich haciendas hid within the folds of mountains. Guns lay under crates of bananas. Even the green parrots practiced deception. They rested in trees, not making a sound; suddenly they rose as one, appearing and departing at the same time, leaving the observer abandoned.

The only Jew!

In truth, there was a second Jew: his son, Lex. They faced each other across the kitchen table. Lex seemed to pity the plight of his father: that on the eve of Yom Kippur there was no corner in the city where a Jew could pray for forgiveness with nine others.

"They all fled to Miami after the revolution," Lex said. "Taking their money with them."

Robert winced.

Lex said, "We'll find you a minyan, Bob." He looked at his father with compassion.

But was it really compassion? Or was it the practiced understanding of a professional social worker? Just as he had adjusted to his son's use of his first name, Robert had reconciled himself to Lex's womanish vocation. But he had not become accustomed to the nods, the murmured assents. He himself was an investment consultant.

"We've gone through the guidebooks," Lex reviewed. "Shall we hunt down a Shapiro in the telephone book? A Katz?"

Father and son laughed. Their own name was Katz.

The little boy looked from one to the other.

He was a thin child despite a seemingly insatiable appetite. His name, Jaime, printed in Lex's hand, adorned the crayoned scribbles taped to the refrigerator.

There they sat, in front of those unambitious efforts, in the scarred kitchen of a small house on a muddy street in the capital city of a Jewless country. Robert was still wearing his pajamas. Far away in Beverly Hills, the drawings of Robert's granddaughter, Lex's niece, also decorated a refrigerator. *Maureen Mulloy*, the signature read. Maureen Mulloy printed her washerwoman's name herself. The Mulloys' Mexican housekeeper hung up the artwork. Who else could do it?—Maureen's parents practiced law twelve hours a day. Jaime. It was pronounced "Hymie." Robert speared a slice of *papaya* from the breakfast platter.

Lex was reading the telephone book. "No Shapiros, Bob. No Katzes, either. I'm not even listed—my phone belongs to the organization."

Robert ate a slice of pineapple.

"I'm going to call the embassy," Lex said.

"Ex," said Jaime, slapping Lex's arm. "Tengo hambre."

"Qué quiero?" Robert attempted. "I mean, qué *quieres* . . ." Lex had already risen. He and Jaime stood side by side, composedly surveying the contents of the refrigerator, a slight young man and a very slight child. "Qué quieres," Robert repeated, softly. His hesitant spoken Spanish was getting him nowhere with the boy. Why had he spent a month listening to those damned language tapes? Why had he come here, anyway?

Five days ago he had descended the aluminum steps of the airliner and stepped onto the tarmac, already blistering at two in the afternoon. He was used to hokey airports. He wasn't used to the absence of jet lag, though—he seldom journeyed from north to south. The sun had stood still on his behalf. No need to nap, no need even to eat, though on the ride from the airport Jaime insisted on stopping for a tamale. "Ex, Ex!" he shouted, pointing to the stall. Lex pulled over. Robert smiled at Lex, indulgent parent communing with indulgent parent. But Lex ignored the smile. His attentiveness toward this soon-to-be-adopted son was meant to be approved, not joined.

The boy dropped consonants, confusing Robert. That first

afternoon, Robert looked at a picture book with him. *Vaca*, cow, became *aca*; *caballo*, horse, *callo*. Little Maureen would become Een, he supposed, if the cousins—could he really call them that?—ever met. They might not meet for a long time. The family was scattered: Robert and Betsy in Massachusetts, their daughter Mulloy née Katz out in California, Lex here in Central America two years already, God knew how much longer.

"I'll stay until the adoption is final," Lex said late that night, after Jaime had finally gone to bed. "That's another six months. Afterwards . . ." He shrugged his thin shoulders. "I won't go to Chicago, that's for sure. I don't want to be in the same city as Ron." Ron was his ex-lover. "Perhaps Jaime and I will come back to Boston."

Robert nodded. "There's a bilingual program in the schools."

"Spare us," Lex rolled his eyes. "We'll continue to talk Spanish at home," he went on. "Jaime will pick up English at school, in playgrounds—as immigrant children have done for generations."

He can hardly speak his own language, Robert didn't say. *He can't count. He doesn't know colors.* "How old is he? Seven, you wrote? He's . . . small."

"We use the evidence of bones and teeth," said Lex. "Central Americans are smaller than North Americans, and those with a lot of Indian blood, like Jaime, are the shortest. I'll invent a birth date when I apply for his passport. I'm going to say he's five. He's about three emotionally—a deprived three. No one ever sent him to school. When I first met him at the local orphanage a year ago he didn't talk at all. He's matured considerably since being with me."

Robert felt weary, as if jet lag had claimed him after all.

And so he had gone to bed, in the narrow room off the kitchen. His window faced an inner courtyard just big enough for a clothesline, a sink, and a single tree that bore hard citrus fruits. There the parrots hid.

After Sunday, Robert was on his own for a few days. Lex was working, and Jaime attended day care. Robert awoke each morning to the sounds of the two at their breakfast. He figured out most of what they were saying. Jaime repeated the breakfast menu, the few chores, the routine of the day care center. Then he repeated them again, and again. Between repetitions Robert heard the rustle of the newspaper and the slur of rubber wheels along a linoleum floor. Jaime was playing with his small toy car. He supplied the motor

with his own throat. "Oom!" Twenty-five years earlier, Robert and Betsy had shared the *Globe* while, at their feet, two charming toddlers rummaged in a pile of Legos. Jaime wasn't ready for Legos, Lex had explained. He wasn't ready even for the starter set Robert had brought as a gift. Jaime didn't get the idea of construction. He had probably never seen toys before the orphanage found him—maybe he'd played with a couple of spoons, or filled an old shoe with dirt. Maureen, Robert remembered with satisfaction and guilt, could already erect elaborate towers.

Before leaving for work, Lex always knocked on Robert's half-open door.

"Entra!" Robert practiced.

Lex would then say something about the day ahead. Would Robert like to visit the university? Lex could give him a library pass. If he wandered into the outdoor market, would he please pick up a pineapple? Jaime, still on the floor with his murmuring car, poked his head between Lex's knees and then raised it, his little golden face between the denimed legs solemn, or perhaps only uncomprehending.

When they were gone Robert heaved himself out of bed. He boiled bottled water for tea and ate three plain crackers. Despite this abstemious caution he invariably passed several loose stools and a quantity of brownish water. "Nothing to worry about as long as there's no blood," Lex had told him after the first episode, the second night of the stay. Lex's voice had been reassuring but his lips were prissy; and Robert, standing outside the bathroom with his belt unbuckled, raised a defiant chin like a child who had soiled his pants.

But the morning diarrhea always left him feeling better, as if he had explosively asserted himself in these austere surroundings. He next read the front page of the newspaper, using the dictionary often. Then he took a shower in cold water and shaved in cold water and got dressed. He stuffed his fanny pack with map, dictionary, currency, and flask. He wore it forwards: a tummy pack. After putting on sunglasses and a canvas cap, he left the house.

He had arrived on a Saturday; by the end of Wednesday, the day before, he had tramped all over the city. He had wandered into the barrios. He refused Chiclets and Valium peddled by street vendors. He stumbled upon a small archaeological museum tended by some

devoted women. There he learned that the great-beaked toucan was considered an incarnation of the devil.

And he stared at the windowless edifice within which members of the National Assembly, according to the new popular insult, farted their disagreements. He traveled by bus to two hot, dusty towns. Both had museums of martyrs. Back in the capital, he had spent late Wednesday afternoon at the huge outdoor market. Pickpockets roamed the place, he had heard. He kept his fingers lightly on his canvas pack.

He bought Betsy a necklace of black coral. Though he loved and admired her, he missed her very little. Her absence this trip had not been a matter of disension—they had farted no disagreements. There were reasons for her not coming: Lex himself had been home recently; his house here had only a single guest bed; and this not altogether regular situation—a young man becoming a father to a young boy—seemed to demand the presence of an unaccompanied older man, *the* older man, the grandfather.

Grandfather! To a child whose whole being seemed at odds with itself—the eyes soft, even tender; the mouth, with its widely spaced teeth, slack; the body taut, subject to occasional spasms. Yet he would become part of the family, a Katz. Jaime Katz. What would Robert's grandfather, a rather sallow person himself, have made of such a development? He recalled Zayde Chaim shawled in silk on the Days of Awe . . . and it was at that moment, standing in the market, his hand on his canvas belly, that he remembered what day it was. The day before the day before Yom Kippur. In twenty-six hours, Kol Nidre would be sung.

Now, on Thursday morning, the embassy answered Lex's inquiry: to its knowledge there was no community of Jews in the city, in the country. Lex hung up. "They have one Jewish staff member. She goes home to Texas for the holidays."

"We've struck out."

"I'm sorry," Lex said, and stood up. "I have to go to work. About tonight . . . I had forgotten Yom Kippur . . . a few people from the organization are supposed to come for dinner."

"Let them come," Robert said. "I'm not such a worshipping, you know. I don't fast. At your bar mitzvah I had to retool my Hebrew, and even then it wasn't so hot."

"Jaime?" Lex called into the bedroom. "Rápido, por favor." He

turned again to his father. "You worked over those syllables like a diamond cutter. Betsy used the transliteration."

"She'd never studied Hebrew."

"But you were heroic. For my sake." He bowed his head.

"I wish I could do it again with my high school Spanish," said Robert, hot with embarrassment.

Lex raised his head. "For his sake," he said, indicating with what seemed to Robert a faggy lift of one shoulder the child in the bedroom. A vat of lava bubbled in Robert's intestines; he managed to contain it. How reckless he'd been to eat that fruit. Jaime was taking his sweet time putting on his backpack. The shabbiest barrio kid in this mess of a country had a backpack. "Vámonos!" Lex said at last.

Jaime came running. Lex went outside to warm up the Jeep. Jaime turned in the doorway and waved a silent good-bye to Robert—he had yet to call him by name. Farewell here was signified by a beckoning gesture. The motion startled Robert every time; it startled him now. He took a step forward, as if the child were really summoning him. Then he halted, hissing. This place! An invitation to come closer was made in an equally ass-backward manner: wrist limp, you wagged the back of your hand at the person you wanted, as if shaking him off.

Was the child laughing at him? No, it was only one of those wet smiles. Robert dutifully mimicked Jaime's come-hither movement. He felt like a cop directing traffic. He felt like a dirty old man. Jaime grinned and banged out. Robert bolted for the bathroom.

HE SPENT YOM KIPPUR EVE with a gaggle of gentiles. They weren't bad, Lex's fellow workers. A high-minded couple in their sixties, slack of belly, gray of hair, giving their final years to just causes. A pretty young nurse. A second, older nurse, freckled and tough. Some others. They ate rice and beans, expertly seasoned by Lex. Jaime played on the floor. Occasionally he whined for Lex's attention. Lex would finish what he'd been saying, then he'd turn his eyes to the boy and listen to the high voice repeating short, insistent phrases, and reply with a "sí" or a "no" or some grave explanation.

The adults talked of the torments of the country, the centuries of cruelty as one generation mistreated the next. "The church has a lot to answer for," said a fierce Canadian woman. "Those first

missionary schools—they taught us how to inflict pain." He wondered what she meant by "us"; then he remembered that she was a Native American, a member of an indigenous people. He had met her earlier in the week when she'd dropped by. With her untidy hair and glasses and dissatisfied mouth she'd reminded him of his cousin from the Bronx. He'd met the churchy couple earlier also, at an evening lecture on cooperatives that Lex had taken him to. But this was the first social gathering Robert had attended, and he realized belatedly, when it was almost over, that it was a party in his honor.

Early the next morning they packed up the Jeep. They were to spend the weekend visiting orphanages in the mountains—Robert, Lex, Jaime, and Janet—the freckled nurse, not the pretty one.

Janet did the driving. She knew how to handle a Jeep. She drove fast on the two-lane highway, passing whenever she could. When they were stopped by a pair of very young men in fatigues, each holding a Tommy gun, she answered their questions with such authority that Robert expected the teenage soldiers to stick out their tongues for her inspection. Instead they waved the Jeep on. Robert jounced along in the front seat. In the back Lex showed Jaime how the big bricks of Legos fit together. Jaime watched differently, his fingers around his toy car.

They stopped late in the morning in a lush little town. There were coffee estates nearby, Janet said. In the courtyard of a restaurant, parrots watched from fronds. Jaime ran toward a cat he knew and settled down in a corner of the courtyard. The proprietress-cook brought the child a dish of pasta before welcoming the others in perfect English. She had a large, curved nose and a wide smile. "She's Chilean," Janet said when the woman had returned to the kitchen. "Her corn lasagna is terrific. She's been active in revolutionary politics." Robert understood: arms smuggling.

Two graceful waiters with angelic faces served them. Robert knew not to take their androgyny seriously. "Girlish on the outside, tough guys within," Lex had said about similar men. "Not gay." Robert did not ask whether Lex had enjoyed a native lover. Some years ago he had ascertained that his son practiced safe sex; he and Betsy wanted to know nothing further.

The corn lasagna was indeed delicious. Jaime shared his pasta with the cat. Robert would have liked to linger over coffee, to walk

around this town and visit its museum of martyrs; to return at the cocktail hour and enjoy an aperitif with the South American adventuress while the parrots dozed. Instead he paid the bill and shook her hand and bid good-bye to the birds with the proper summoning gesture.

In an hour they had left the highway and were climbing. Farms gave way to trees, boulders, scrub. Janet expertly circled craters in the road. Bracing himself against the plunges of the Jeep made Robert weary—or perhaps it was the lunchtime glass of Chilean wine. He leaned against the headrest, closed his eyes . . . and was awakened by something creeping along the side of his neck. He slapped the creature. It was a small hand.

"Sorry, Jaime. Exculpame. Hey!" for the child had slapped him back.

"Jaime." Lex's voice was as authoritative as Janet's. Some low, rapid Spanish followed. Then came a tap on the shoulder and a presentation across that shoulder, in front of his face, of three Lego bricks imperfectly joined.

"Asa," Jaime said.

Casa. House. "Bueno," Robert said, mustering enthusiasm. He turned to meet those attractive eyes, that odd mouth. Lex smiled primly.

Just before two o'clock they reached the town where they were to spend the night. Robert carefully got out.

"You need a back rub," noticed Janet.

The town square was a bare knoll. A church faced the square. Its stucco walls seemed to be unraveling. The one-storied inn sagged toward its own courtyard. Robert was shown to a rear bedroom. From his window he could see oxen.

Janet and Lex invited him to walk to the orphanage with them. "Thanks, no," he said. "I'll sit in the courtyard and read." And write another postcard to little Maureen.

But as soon as they had tramped off, he felt forlorn. He would not stay; he would follow his son.

They had told him that the orphanage lay two miles out of town, on the straight road west. He walked fast, at first. Within five minutes he had caught sight of them, and soon he was passing the low stone huts that they had just passed, each with its open door revealing a single room, the same room—a couple of cane rockers, a table.

The same expressionless woman stood in each doorway. Children played in the mud. Had Jaime been born in such a home? More likely he had sprung from a shack like those Robert was passing now—tin and slats, the latrine in back made decent by a curtain.

Lex and Janet walked together in the middle of the road. Jaime darted from one side to the other. Janet was taller than Lex. Her light brown hair humped over her backpack and dragged, khaki on khaki.

At the end of the road a crowd of small boys waited behind a gate—just a couple of horizontal logs—a not entirely successful attempt to keep out nearby animals. Jaime scrambled between the logs. Lex and Janet vaulted them.

Robert climbed over the top log, his bones creaking. He heard, as if in the distance, the sound of crying. Perhaps it was his own old-man's wail.

HE HAD LANDED amid the boys. Boys, boys everywhere. Boys: grimy triangular faces under black bangs. Boys: wearing clothing that a decade ago and a continent away had been high style—rugby shirts, jans. Boys: none seeming above ten years old, though he knew better. Perhaps some were twelve. Boys: waiting for guns and cholera.

"Bob!" Janet cried. Lex smiled a welcome.

They made immediate use of him, sending him to listen to the complaints of the orphanage director, a fiery young man with a thin mustache. Robert, sitting down, surrounded by boys, riffing through his dictionary every few words, managed to make out that the problem was money, both cash and credit. Supplies were low. The last cook had made off with the radio. Robert wrote down everything the fellow said and then got hustled away to umpire a three-inning softball game. The boys were not adroit. Then Lex arranged an obstacle race. Robert was assigned to hold an inflated clown's hand in front of his chest. This hand had come out of Janet's backpack; she'd blown it up in three exhalations, her freckles enlarging and then diminishing on her cheeks. Each obstacle racer had to slap the hand; some kids slapped Robert by mistake. Their teeth were as white as Chiclets.

Soon they were corralled into a grim refectory. "Cerca me!" some pleaded. He sat down next to a little beige fellow with reddish hair.

All the boys were given crayons and paper. The stuff might have been gold. They drew for half an hour, in blissful silence. Meanwhile Janet examined some inflamed ears—she had an otoscope in her backpack, too. Lex talked with a scowling child in the director's meager office. The child looked less angry after the session.

Robert praised the artwork. He helped the artists print their signatures. The red-haired runt was Miguel O'Reilly. Miguelito was particular about the slant of the apostrophe in his name.

These outcasts—did they know how deprived they were? Lex had told him about them: some abandoned at the gate as infants, some starved and abused before they arrived as toddlers, some rescued from prostitution, or at least reprieved from it. Jaime had served for a while as the mascot of a street gang.

To the boys Robert must seem a patriarch. They were respectful of his Spanish—the stunted vocabulary, the lisp of remote conquerors. They were respectful of his gray hairs, too. In their country a man of his age should already be dead.

The light was reddening, the shadows were lengthening, the parrots would presently lift themselves without a sound from their trees. The afternoon would soon end. Somewhere, elsewhere, maybe in Miami, a congregation was praying together, was feeling united, singular, almost safe.

A child with a birthmark asked to inspect his watch, looked at it gravely, then returned it with a smile. Two others insisted on showing him their dormitory. He peered under the iron cots; he was supposed to laugh at something there, though all he could see was dust. Perhaps a mouse had recently scampered.

He sat down heavily on a cot, startling the children. He drew them close, one against each knee. They waited for his wisdom. "Avinu malkeinu," he muttered.

A bell rang: dinner. They stiffened. He let them go.

Oh the thin, hard, greedy boyness of them, undersized nomads fixed for a few years in a patch of land at the end of nowhere. Cow shit in the yard. Beans for dinner on the good days.

Jaime had entered all the play. He'd had a very good time.

They walked back to the inn in the dusk. Some of the huts were little stores, Robert now noticed. Dim bulbs shone on canned goods and medicines. Televisions flickered in the remote interiors,

illuminating hammocks. How misleading to call this world the third. It was the nether.

Lex had packed a cooler of sandwiches and Cokes that morning. "Jaime can't manage a second restaurant in one day," he now explained to his father.

"What was the first?" Robert wondered. Then he remembered, as if from a rich tapestry seen long ago, the smile of the Chilean woman and the knowing supervision of her lime parrots.

"I have enough food for us all," Lex said.

Janet shook her head. "I'm going to take your father to the café."

The café, behind the inn, was an open kitchen and three tables.

A couple of men dined together at one of the other tables. No menu: today's offering was chicken in a spicy sauce. Robert hoped his stomach could manage it. He bought a bottle of rotgut wine.

"L'chaim," Janet said.

He raised his eyebrows.

"My great-grandfather's name was Isaac Fink," she said. "He was a peddler who wandered into Minnesota by mistake, and stayed. The family is Lutheran to its backbones. Still . . ."

"Still, you are somewhat Jewish," he said politely. "Skoal."

They spoke of Lex's talent and of Jaime's eagerness. They spoke of the children they'd seen that afternoon, and of Janet's work. She planned to spend another few years here. "Then a master's in public health, I think." Her face grew flushed. "I was serious about giving you a back rub."

And perhaps this part-Jew would be willing also to inspect his tongue and massage his weary abdomen. He had assumed she was lesbian. She probably was lesbian. One could be something of everything here. "Thanks, but no," he said. "It's Yom Kippur night."

"Oh, I see," was her bewildered response.

In bed alone he found himself wondering whether the handsome Chilean chef might also be a little bit Jewish. And that native Canadian woman from last night's party—such an expert kvetch. He and Lex should have searched harder for eight more Jews. In a room behind a tailor shop in some town lived a pious old man, too poor to have fled to Miami. In one of the squalid barrios a half-Jewish half-doctor dealt in abortifacient herbs. Atop a donkey, yarmulke concealed by a sombrero, a wanderer sold tin pans.

The entire population could be Jewish, Jaime included: people descended from Indians who feared the toucan—what was a toucan but a bird with a schnoz?—and from haughty Marranos who prayed to Yahweh in the basements of basements.

THE NEXT MORNING found him at last master of his bowels. He packed his overnight case and walked across the square to the crumbling church. Inside, though Christ on the wooden cross was naked, plaster saints wore velvet robes. The townspeople, too, seemed dressed up. He spotted one of the men he'd seen in the café last night. Today the man was sporting the yellow jacket of a gaucho.

Robert sat near the back and listened to the Mass. The sermon began. He did not attempt to understand it, though the Spanish was slow and simple, and the subject was *misericordia*, mercy. *Rachamimi*. He thought about Lex, now packing the Jeep for the day's trip to more orphanages. Lex was settling the bill, too. "This trip's on me," he'd said, refusing Robert's money. An admirable, disappointing fellow. *May you, too, have a son like mine*, Robert thought—the old curse, the old blessing.

A small hand fell on his arm. He twisted his head and saw Jaime. The child danced away, then turned and stood in the open double doorway. Behind him was the treeless square; behind that was the inn, some other houses, the rising hills.

"Ob," Jaime hissed. "Ob!" and he flapped his hand as if warding off a nuisance. Get lost, he seemed to say. Come here, he meant to say. Robert knew the difference now.

Ob. *Ab. Abba*, father, Abraham. *The father of a multitude of nations have I made thee*. Have you? Through whom? Through Maureen Mulloy, a half mick? Through Jaime Katz, an indigenous person?

A multitude of nations: what a vainglorious idea. No wonder we are always in trouble. How about a few good-enough places? he said silently to the priest, to the Christ, to the God rustling in his ear. How about a people that takes care of its children, even those springing from unexalted seed . . .

"Ob!"

Robert rose. He followed his grandson out of the dark, merciful church and into the harsh light.

SETTLERS

ONE EARLY SUNDAY MORNING Peter Loy stood waiting for the bus downtown. It was October, and the wind was strong enough to ruffle the curbside litter and to make Peter's coat flap about his knees, open and closed, open and closed. He wouldn't have been sorry if the wind had removed the coat altogether, like a disapproving valet. It had been a mistake, this long glen-plaid garment with a capelet, suitable for some theatrical undergraduate, not for an ex-schoolteacher of sixty-odd years. He had thought that with his height and thinness and longish hair he'd look like Sherlock Holmes when wearing it. Instead he looked like a dowager.

It didn't matter; this was not a neighborhood that could afford to frown on oddities. Brighton Avenue, where he now stood, was a shabby main street. Congdon Street, where he lived, was home to an assortment of students, foreigners, and old people. A young couple with matching briefcases had recently bought one of the peeling houses in the hope that the street would turn chic; they spent all their free time gamely stripping paint from the interiors. On weekday mornings white-haired women in bathrobes stared from apartment windows while their middle-aged daughters straggled off to work, and then kept on staring. The immobility of the stay-at-home mothers suggested that their daughters had locked them in, but often at nighttime Peter would see one of them moving toward the corner. Her steps would lighten as she neared Brighton Avenue. Here was life! Fresh fish, fish-and-chips, Fishberg the optician . . . Also on Congdon Street was a three-storied frame building