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# **SECRET ISAAC**

AN ISAAC SIDEL NOVEL

# **JEROME CHARYN**



# Secret Isaac

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Jerome Charyn

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*WHO'S the lad that barks at us and bites our cheeks? Tiger John, Tiger John.* They sang that in the hall when he wasn't around, those Irishers from the Commissioner's office. They laughed at him and feared him too. You couldn't tell where his rage would fall. He was a crisp little man with gray hair that had lost its shine and turned a bitter yellow. It was like straw, that crop of dead yellow hair, but it didn't ruin his looks. He was sixty-one years old, and he had the energies and the eager face of a slightly dumb boy.

The Irishers couldn't remember if he'd been a captain in the Bronx, or a shoofly for the Chief Inspector. You didn't talk about his past. John had lived in deep winter a long, long time. He was attached to a little Irish club on First Avenue for decrepit and alcoholic cops until he came out of retirement with the Honorable Sammy Dunne. They were brothers of a sort, the Mayor and the Commissioner of Police.

The PC would closet himself for an hour and comb his dead yellow hair. At the old Headquarters John had a fireplace and a private balcony and his own elevator car. He could ride up and down as often as he liked. No one but his First Deputy could use that car. Now he didn't even have a First Deputy to comfort him. His First Dep was gone. Disappeared into the dust. The famous Isaac Sidebottom. This Isaac was always on some idiotic mission.

John had a sudden thirst for tea. He didn't have to yell for his chauffeur. Chinatown was across the street. He chose a small dirty cafe, the China Pot, where he wouldn't be recognized as the "Commish." Policemen didn't come here. It was a hole in the wall on Baxter Street.

You couldn't see Tiger John from the window. He sat at a table that was obscured by the counter, a crooked shelf, and the coffee urn, and he drank green tea. He had chicken buns and a cookie made of almond paste. John felt a sudden wind in the cafe. He looked up from his tea and buns. "Jesus, is that Jamey O'Toole?" he said to the man at the next table. The man was six feet seven, and his legs took up half the China Pot. It wasn't his impossible size that disturbed Tiger John. He could live with such prodigious things. But two Irishmen in the same cafe, that was a bad idea.

Jamey flipped a bankbook into the Commissioner's lap. "A present for you ... from the king." John cupped the little book in his hands and opened it under the table. The amount was six thousand dollars and twenty-three cents. The name was *Nosey Flynn*.

"Boyo," he said in a whisper, "how am I going to create the signature of Mr. Nosey Flynn?"

Jamey told him to use his left fist.

John had a pile of these bankbooks. He held them together with a rubber band. They arrived from Jamey O'Toole with different names in them. The names were always Irish. *Simon Dedalus. Paddy Dignam. Gertrude MacDowell. Molly and/or Leopold Bloom ...*

Who the hell was this king of Jamey's? An Irish thug with an Ivy League education. He removed himself to Dublin, because the freeze was on. The Special State Prosecutor, Dennis Mangen, had begun to ride herd over the City. It was Mangen who made life so miserable for Tiger John. Mangen ate up Police Commissioners.

"Jamey, don't come down here anymore."

"Why not?"

"Because I don't want Mangen to catch your ass in Chinatown. He'll wonder why you've been traveling so far."

Jamey smiled. "What's new with the great god Dennis?"

"Shut your mouth," John said. ~~Mangen had a squad of shooflies, and the shooflies went into every crack. They could have been hiding in the China Pot. "You belong uptown ... go on."~~

O'Toole got up from the table. He had to walk with a slanted step. There was no room for his shoulders in the cafe. He stopped near the door and called back to the Commissioner. "How's your First Dep?"

"I haven't seen a hair of him."

"I have," Jamey said. "He mucks around Forty-seventh Street in filthy clothes."

"That's Sheeny Isaac ... the brains of the Department. He's a bit of a psychopath, if you ask me. Mooning over a dead boy. You remember Manfred Coen?"

"Blue Eyes," Jamey said with a sneer.

"That's the baby. Isaac's daughter put a jinx on Coen."

She was a hungry girl, Marilyn the Wild. The daughter put out for anything in pants. She was the marrying kind. She'd have herself a husband, and shed him in a week. The poor girl went bats in the head. She fell for Isaac's "angel," Blue Eyes Coen. But Isaac wasn't giving Coen away. He tossed him to a family of Bronx pimps, and Blue Eyes got killed. Now Isaac walks around in rags, chasing pimps and lamenting Coen.

"Give him my love, Jamey, if you catch that stinky man on the street."

Both of them hated Sheeny Isaac. O'Toole had been thrown out of the Department, robbed of his pension and shield by Isaac the Brave. He had to grovel for the king. He delivered bankbooks to John in a dirty cafe.

John dialed his chauffeur from the China Pot after O'Toole went out the door. "Christie, I'm on Baxter Street ..." He wouldn't have an Irish chauffeur carry him around. An Irish chauffeur would have sung to him from the driver's seat. John didn't want that much familiarity in his car. Christianson was a Swede, and the Swedes were quiet.

"Cheerio," he said to the Chinese countermen. "So long, boys." His black Mercury was outside the China Pot. He climbed over the curb, and he was gone from Baxter Street, Chinatown, and Police Headquarters. The cushions inside the Mercury were his chief comfort. No one could pester John, attack him as the PC, when he sat on those high cushions.

A blinking light on the radiotelephone box destroyed his good cheer. It was the Mayor's light. John picked up the phone. He had to make sure it was Sammy on the line, and not one of those dunderheads from the Mayor's office.

"Your Honor ... is that you?"

"Himself," the Mayor said.

Sammy had turned remote. He was up for reelection, and he didn't need the Tiger hanging on his tails. *Isaac* was the Mayor's hero. *Isaac* was the grand boy. The newspapers reviled Tiger John. They called him the "Know-Nothing Commish." Isaac could dance in his own shit, and the Police reporters would sniff for gold. They loved whatever sloppy music the First Dep made. It didn't matter to them that Sheeny Isaac had removed himself and gone into the Manhattan wilderness. He was their favorite child.

"I'll be having my bath tonight ... tell the lads to give it a good scrub. How are you, Johnny?"

"In the pink."

He'd become a buffoon for Mayor Sam, a Commissioner who could be trundled in and out of the closet, depending upon the political climate. These were John's closet days. You never found him at the little parties Sam liked to give. John was keeper of the bath. His club had installed a sauna room



for Mayor Sam, so “Hizzoner” would have somewhere to hide. It was John’s function to regulate the sauna’s heated rocks by spilling cups of water over them. Such were the duties of a Police Commissioner.

The Mayor’s light went off. John put the receiver back on the cradle and muttered to himself. *No that he’s in trouble he wants his bath.*

“Take me to the Dingle,” John barked.

Tiger John Rathgar was a Dingle Bay boy. The Dingle was *his* club. It began as a kind of temperance league for drunken Irish cops. The Sons of Dingle had the right cure. They would pour that terrible love of “the whiskey” out of any man. John had an added moral obligation. He would visit with the wives, and seduce them if he could. The Dingles had more than temperance on their minds. They were bully boys in the County of Manhattan. They collected bills for local merchants and delivered votes for Democrats who could afford the price. But they’d grown a little obsolete. They couldn’t whack men and women outside a polling booth, even with Tiger John as “Commish.”

He arrived at a battered storefront on First Avenue: the Dingle Bay. It made no pretense of being a gentleman’s club. It was for the hairy Irish. Crossbones were painted on the window, crossbones and a harp. Its sills were crumbling, and its metal awning was eaten with rust. Yet no other society of Hibernian cops could boast a sauna bath.

John sent the Mercury home to Chinatown and made three long knocks on the club’s iron door. This was a signal to his mates.

He had to knock again. “It’s me ... John.”

The door opened enough to let him through. Jesus, it was dark in there. Those lads didn’t believe in sunlight. They had a fetish about covering their freckled pates. Summer and winter, indoors and outdoors they would wear eight-piece caps of pure Donegal wool. The caps left a deep mark on their foreheads. They were proud of the “Donegal” mark. Others wore black derbies. They were lads from the Retired Sergeants Association who would visit the Dingle from time to time.

John shucked off his suit jacket. He didn’t have to play Commissioner at the Dingle. He could go about in his shirtsleeves and not feel compromised.

“Kiddos, the Mayor’s coming tonight.”

The old men chuckled to themselves. They built a sauna for Mayor Sammy Dunne, but they weren’t so fond of Sam.

“Christ, we haven’t cleared out the piss from the last time he was here ... we won’t disappoint His Grace. We’ll mop up the putrid thing ... how goes it at the Headquarters, John?”

“The usual shit,” he said. “I can’t complain.”

His Chief Inspector was retiring in another few months. McNeill had a castle in the Old Country. He’d live in it like a duke and fish for salmon in his waters. What would happen to John? He was already shy a First Dep. He’d have to whistle for Isaac.

The old men were in a singing mood. They had their bottles of root beer and Tiger John. It was a temperance society, and they wouldn’t keep liquor in the house. They would run next door to sneak Irish whiskey into the root beer.

We’re the Sons of Dingle Bay  
The wild geese who left our home  
Who left our home  
Who left our home  
For Ameriky ...

*It's true, true*, Johnny said. *Wild geese. Gone from home*. The Dingles were lucky. They didn't have to ~~to~~ ~~preside over~~ ~~Police Headquarters~~. They could visit the Mother Country, like Coote McNeill and old Tim Snell, and those other lads from the Retired Sergeants Association. Live in Wexford or Dublin half the year. Bring back neckerchiefs, derbies, and a fresh box of Donegal hats.

We're the Sons of Dingle Bay ...

The song rid him of Sheeny Isaac. John didn't have to think of Isaac, Chief Inspector McNeill, the Mayor's bath. He brushed his tongue over a bottle of root beer and began to sing:

Who left our home  
Who left our home  
For Americky ...

THERE was once an old man who had a worm in his gut. The worm liked to wiggle. The old man would clutch at himself, as if to tear out the insides of his body. He lived at a disgusting hotel on West Forty-seventh Street. The hotel didn't even have a name. It was just off Whores' Row. The pimps stayed clear of him. They kept suites at this hotel for all the "brides" they owned, or managed. The "brides" were black girls under nineteen. At least one of them was pregnant. They enjoyed the old man. He wouldn't snarl at them, or look under their summer shirts. A whore's sweaty nipples couldn't surprise him.

So they talked to the old bum, shared orange drinks, confided in him. These "brides" had their own corners. No one could intrude on their rights. If it rained, they worked out of little storefront parlors. It was a rotten year. Five dollars could get you half the world. There was nothing, nothing they wouldn't do for a man. The "brides" were on the street twenty hours a day. The old man could see the rawness in their necks, the hysteria when they would grab at a john and say, "Honey, goin' out?" The seduction was very thin. The black girls were faithful to their pimps. Most of the white whores, who worked the same streets, hated any man who touched them. They were dykes and religious freaks. They'd grown suspicious of the old bum. They wouldn't kiss their girlfriends in front of him. They tried to get the "players" to run him off the street.

The old man had an odd immunity. It had something to do with the worm. He'd been at war with a retarded family of South American pickpockets and thieves. This family had given him the worm. The old man killed one of them, maimed another, and threw the rest of them into some foreign hell. They were groveling in Barcelona, selling parrots with split beaks. And this old man had their worm in his belly, a hookworm that was eating him inch by inch.

Certain men would step out of shiny Buicks and whisper to the old bum. They were much too regal to be members of any vice squad, and they didn't wear the wide trousers of homicide boys. The pimps would wonder to themselves: who is this geek? Their friends at the nearest precinct grew mum when you mentioned the old man with the worm.

He developed a lousy odor. He didn't think much about changing his pants. He wouldn't shave more than once a week. He fed his worm at a Greek dive on Eighth Avenue and Forty-fifth. He would eat salads and whole wheat bread. Then he'd give in to his appetite and crawl to Ninth Avenue for a cappuccino. It was a weakness he had. Strong coffee and steamed milk.

The coffee was bad for his worm. Its thousand little hooks grabbed at the old man's intestines, and he would stumble through the street, saying, "Fuck, God, shit," or whatever madness came into his head. He would avoid the coffee for five or six days. Then he couldn't help himself.

It was after one of these cappuccino fits, when the worm was twisting him half to death, that he saw her on Forty-third Street. It wasn't a good corner for a prostitute. There was always a heavy load of cops that guarded the trucking lanes around the *New York Times* building. The Mayor was scared of the *New York Times*. He had his Police Commissioner, Tiger John, flood Forty-third Street with cops in and out of uniform. So who had stationed this girlie over here? Some forlorn "player," a beginner pimp who hadn't learned the truths of Times Square? She was no mulatto queen. The old bum watched her in profile. A white whore who didn't have that hard glint of a manhater. She was beautiful. She should have been a rich man's escort, not a bimbo in the street.

The old bum wasn't filled with lecheries. He wouldn't have brought this beauty to his hotel. He had



a daughter with the same skinny ankles. The daughter was a sucker for men. She couldn't keep from getting married and divorced. She was on her seventh husband, and she was only twenty-nine. He decided to play the father to this beauty, chase her from Forty-third Street before the Chief Inspector and his men picked her up. But he was trembling at the fineness of her nose. Why didn't some Cadillac whisk her off to White Plains? She was a girl to marry, not whore with. Then the old man saw the other side of her face.

It was scarred, wickedly scarred. She had the imprint of what seemed to be a knuckle, as if she had been gouged with a metal fist. He took a closer look. The letter "D" had been scratched into her face. A scarlet letter on Forty-third Street.

"Miss, you can't stay here. The cops are fond of this corner. You'd better shove up to Forty-fifth."

"I can't." She smiled, and that gruesome letter wriggled on her cheek. "I don't have a union card. The other girls would bite my ass."

"Who's looking after you?"

"Martin McBride." The smile ended, and the "D" corrected itself.

"Well, this Martin is an idiot. Is he the one who put you in the street?"

The scarred beauty turned agitated.

"Mister, take me somewhere, or go away. Martin doesn't like me talking to strangers."

She didn't have a bimbo's voice, and it confused the old bum. He had no plans to undress her. "What's your name?"

"Annie."

"Annie what?"

"Isn't Annie enough for you?" she said. "It's Annie Powell."

He smuggled her into a French restaurant on Forty-eighth Street, Au Tunnel. The headwaiter was frightened to throw him out. The old bum had twenties in his pocket and a Diners Club card.

Annie Powell laughed. "God, you're crazy."

"Who's Martin McBride?"

"Somebody's uncle," she said. "That's all."

The old man pointed to the scar. "Did he do that?"

"No."

They drank a muscatel, had scallops, green beans, trout, and a chocolate mousse.

"Mister, how are you going to make me earn this meal? I might not be kinky enough for you." He hadn't told her his name.

The bum gave her forty dollars. "Do me a favor, Annie Powell. Stay off the street for the rest of the night."



The old man was irritated. He'd gone to his hotel room, but he couldn't sleep. He had visions of Annie being pawed by bull-dykes in some detention cell. "Shit," he said. He put on his clothes, and he walked downtown to Centre Street. It was the site of the old, neglected Police Headquarters. Its rooms were abandoned now. The Police had moved to a giant red monolith in Chinatown. Only a few extraneous cops watched the floors of Centre Street, for rats and other vermin. Most of the files were removed. Even the photo unit in the basement was gone. There was a guard at the main desk, but the old man had no trouble getting into the building. He didn't have to flash any identification card. He went up to the third floor, walked through a clutch of rooms, and entered an office with an oak door. The office had a telephone. It was the only phone in the building that worked. He dialed the ne

Headquarters and shouted into the phone. "I told you," he said. "A cunt named Annie Powell. If she taken off the street, if she's bothered, if she's touched, I'll flop the whole pussy patrol. And find out who this Martin McBride is. Does he have a nephew with a name that begins with a big D?... yes, a ... like dumb ... or dim ... or dead."

He hung up the phone, and managed to fall asleep. He didn't have much of a rest. A boy from the Mayor's office rang him up. His Honor had fled the coop again, walked out of Gracie Mansion in his pajamas on a midnight stroll.

The old bum took a cab uptown. He had the cabbie rake the streets around Carl Schurz Park. Then he got off. His Honor, Mayor Sam, had gone down to Cherokee Place. He didn't seem deprived in his striped pajamas and a red silk robe. When he saw the old bum he began to weep. He was sixty-nine and he'd turned senile on the Democratic Party over the past two years.

"Laddie, what happened to you?"

"It's nothing, Your Honor," the old bum said. "Just the clothes I'm wearing."

"You gave me a fright," the Mayor said. "We have to fatten you up."

His own aides accused him of being a decrepit fool. He belongs in a nursery, they said. Ancient Mayor Sam. But he had no difficulty recognizing the old bum. The Mayor was as lucid as a man in pajamas could ever be. It wasn't a drifting head that brought him out of his mansion. It was a fit of anxiety. And his politics was shrinking around him. Most of his deputies had abandoned Sammy Dunne. He was Mayor without a Party. He'd become a ghost in the City of New York. You didn't speak of Mayor Sam.

He still wept for the old bum.

"Isaac, I know the enemies you have. They'll eat you alive after I'm gone."

"Let them eat, Your Honor. I've got plenty of hide for them."

"Laddie, what are you talking about? You're skin and bones."

The old bum was thinking of Annie Powell. That scar of hers stuck to him. Annie's "D." He walked to the Mayor home to Gracie Mansion and went to his hotel without a name.

WHY should a whore have turned his head, a bimbo with damaged goods? She couldn't have far very well with that gash on her face. The worm was biting at him. "Cunt," he told the worm, "are you in love with her too?" He would stroll down to Forty-third to be sure no one molested her. He was shuffling with his hands in his pockets didn't please Annie Powell. She couldn't have too many clients with an old bum hanging around. "We're having lunch," he would say. "Come on." It sounded like a threat to her, not an invitation. And she had to leave her corner.

This time he took her to the Cafe de Sports. A bum and a girl in a whore's midriff eating liver pâté. "Annie," he said, "there's going to be a raid at two o'clock. The Commissioner has decided to graze single women off the streets. So you'd better have a long, long lunch."

They had three bottles of wine. "What's your name?" she said, with a drunken growl, "and what the hell do you want from me?"

"Just say I'm Father Isaac."

"A priest," she said, mimicking him, "a priest without a collar ... is it your hotel or mine, Father Isaac?... I perform better in strange hotels."

"Don't bluff me, Annie Powell. You haven't done too many tricks ... I want to know who put you on the street?"

"Mister," she said, "that's none of your business."

The old bum had to let her go. The worm dug into his bowels when he thought of her going in doorways with other men, getting down on her knees for them. He had to find this Martin McBride and break his Irish toes. But Father Isaac had an appointment today. He washed the dirt off his neck. He shaved the hairs under his nose that might have been construed as a crooked mustache. He bought a half-hour's time of the hotel's single bathtub. You wouldn't have recognized him when he stepped out of the tub. The old bum had shed twenty years. He had a pair of argyle socks in his room. He unwrapped the only suit in his closet. A silk shirt materialized from his drawer. A tie from Bloomingdale's. Underpants that were soft enough for a woman's skin. The ensemble pulled together. A younger man, fifty, fifty-one, emerged from the hotel. He had a sort of handsomeness. The worm had helped redefine the contours of his face. It gave him character and fine hollows in his cheeks.

A cab brought him to a lounge at the New School for Social Research. People shook his hand. He was more despised than worshiped here, but everybody knew him. Isaac Sidel, First Deputy Police Commissioner of New York and mystery cop. He was fond of disappearing, of putting on one disguise after the other. He wouldn't sit at his offices on the thirteenth floor of Police Headquarters. Isaac called the new brick monolith a "coffin house." He did all his paperwork at the old, abandoned Police Headquarters. You had to search him out at Centre Street, or in some hobo's alley. Isaac was unavailable most of the time. His deputies were loyal to him. They ran his offices without a piece of discord. Isaac could always get a message inside.

The PC, Handsome Johnny Rathgar, couldn't scold him. Isaac was becoming a hero with all the news services. He would walk into a den of crazed Rastafarians and come out with a cache of machine guns. He settled disputes with rival teenaged gangs in the Bronx, parceling out territories to one and taking away bits from the other. Arsonists and child molesters would only surrender themselves to First Deputy Sidel. Isaac had no fear in him. He danced with any lunatic who came up close. You could throw bricks at him off the roofs. Isaac wouldn't duck his head. The First Dep was in gre

demand. Most organizations in the City wanted to hear him speak. Synagogues, churches, political clubs. Either to heckle him or clap. The Democrats had to live with him for now, because he was close to Sammy Dunne, and it was a little too early to drive "Hizzoner" out of Gracie Mansion. But the Mayor was about to turn seventy, and he couldn't hold a squabbling Party together. The Democrats would lash at Isaac when Sammy vacated City Hall. Republicans were frightened of Isaac's popularity, and the Liberals hated his guts. He was only a cop to them. Isaac despised them all, hating and politicians who would grab the coat of any winner, and sneer at a Mayor's loss of power. He liked the old Mayor, who was being jettisoned by his Party. The Mayor didn't have a chance in the primaries. He was too dumb, too weak, too old. The *Daily News* had already spoken. New York would have its first Lady Mayor, the honorable Rebecca Karp, who'd come to politics via the beauty line. She was Miss Far Rockaway of 1947. She grabbed votes for Democrats with her bosoms, her belly hugs, and her smiles. She'd been a district leader in Greenwich Village. Now she was Party boss of Manhattan and the Bronx. Rebecca needed two boroughs to fight the pols of Brooklyn and save New York from the bumbling political machine of Samuel Dunne.

Isaac was here, at the New School, in liberal territories, to act as the Mayor's dog in a debate with Melvin Pears, sachem of the Civil Liberties Union, and a defender of Rebecca Karp. Isaac could have told Rebecca to shit in her hat, but Mayor Sam was in trouble. He hardly went downtown to visit City Hall. His margins were being eaten away. Isaac was the only voice of strength he had.

Pears was seated with the First Dep at a table near the end of the lounge. The Mayor swore that Melvin was romancing Becky Karp, but Isaac didn't always believe Mayor Sam. Melvin came from an aristocratic family, and he had a pretty wife. He was a man of thirty-five, with a fondness for rough clothes: he had workingman's boots at the New School and a cowboy shirt with a button open on his paunch. The boy likes to eat, Isaac observed, thinking of the worm he himself had to nourish. The wife sat next to Melvin. She had unbelievable gray-green eyes that sucked out Isaac with great contempt. He wondered where her shirts came from. The wife wasn't wearing Western clothes. Isaac felt uncomfortable sitting near those boots of Mel's. He shouldn't have arrived in argyle socks. His bum pants would have held him better in this lounge.

Pears called Isaac a lackey of the Mayor, an instrument of repressive law. Isaac, he said, who drove prostitutes off the street at the Mayor's convenience, without considering the plight of these girls, their histories. "I'll defend every prostitute you haul in," Pears said. "His Honor always sweeps them up before the primaries. You're Sammy's broom."

Isaac growled inside his head. Sammy had enough trouble getting in and out of his pajamas. Isaac couldn't figure what was going on in the street. He had his spies. It wasn't the Civil Liberties Union that was keeping the girls hard at work. You couldn't hold them in a cage for more than half an hour. They had a league of bondsmen holding hands with their "players." The whores multiplied without the Police. Inspectors at Isaac's office claimed to know every dude in town. They talked of a mysterious nigger gang that was organizing pimps into some kind of union. Black Mafia, they said. The "blues" of Sugar Hill. Only you couldn't find any of them. Where were the "blues" of Sugar Hill? It made no sense. Isaac's spies had nothing to sell. They shrugged their shoulders and swore some "heavy shit" was landing in the gutters. That's why Isaac had to go underground, become the old man of Forty-seventh Street. Isaac only trusted what he himself could sniff. And this Melvin Pears was babbling about whores' rights. Every bimbo in Manhattan had more rights and privileges than Rebecca Karp or Pears' green-eyed wife.

Pears had a bald spot, bigger than Isaac's. He was still chopping at the First Dep. "All the glory comes to you," Pears said. "You solve the big murder, the big hit, and anonymous old men and women

are afraid to go out at night.”

Isaac interrupted him. “Would you like us to keep every fourteen-year-old boy in a bullpen after six o’clock?”

Pears leapt on Isaac. “That’s the smug answer you can always get from a cop. Arrest *everybody* and crime will go away.”

Isaac didn’t have Melvin’s courtroom wit. He shut his mouth and let the boy talk. His head drifted to Annie Powell. That “D” on her could sting a man’s eyes. That girl’s no goddamn hooker. She was being punished for something she did. Annie’s sin.

Pears had stopped talking. What was Isaac supposed to do? Defend Mayor Sam? List Police accomplishments? Talk about the new Headquarters and that idiot, Tiger John? Promise an end to sodomy in the women’s house of detention? Isaac talked about Oswald Spengler. Pears scratched his head. Rebecca Karp’s admirers must have considered him a little cracked. “It’s ungovernable,” Isaac said. “... this terrain. Psychosis is everywhere ... in your armpit ... under your shoe. You can smell it in the sweat of this room ... we’re all baby killers, repressed or not ... how do you measure a man’s rage? Either we behave like robots, or we kill. Why do you expect your Police Force to be any less crazy than you?”

There was laughter in the room, some hissing.

Pears shouted at him. “Sidel, you haven’t gotten to the point at all. What do I care about your philosophies? Silly contrivances. Glib remarks. We do have a City, and it has to be governed. And the Mayor, *your friend*, is doing an invisible job.”

The debate was over. People were congratulating Melvin Pears. He’d gotten around the ignorant carp of a half-educated cop. Isaac only had one semester at Columbia College. He couldn’t have told you about the theories of John Locke. He had bits of Nietzsche in him, Spengler, Hegel, and Marx. His readings were savagely curtailed.

Crowds formed close to the lawyer Pears. One old lady came up to Isaac. She was muttering something he couldn’t understand. All Isaac could make out was the green in Mrs. Pears’ eyes.

One of his own inspectors, Marvin Winch, was waiting for him on the curb. Isaac promised himself that he would manufacture several little talks before he entered another lounge. Pears had cut off Isaac’s throat. The First Dep had only a skimpy sense of logic. His ideas came from the worm in his gut. He wasn’t a civilized man.

“Well?” Isaac said to Inspector Winch. “Who’s Martin McBride?”

“A lowlife. He runs with the nigger pimps.”

“Does he have a nephew?”

“Yes, a carload of them. Our Martin’s got nephews everywhere.”

“How many of them have that big *D* I told you about?”

“Only one. Dermott.”

“Dermott McBride?”

“No. He took the Irish out of his name. He shortened it to Bride.”

“Bring that cocksucker to me. I’d like to have a chat with Dermott Bride. We have a girlfriend in common.”

“Isaac, I can’t. Nobody knows where Dermott is.”

“Then plug into your computer and find him for me.”



Oh, they could laugh and call him Sammy’s dunce, but Tiger John Rathgar had eyes and ears, like

any man, and a mouth to bark with and eat cigarette paper when he was in the mood. A year ago “Hizzoner” had said, “Johnny, the pimps have to live like the rest of us. What’s the point of chasing nigger girls off the street? They’ll be strolling again in twenty-four hours.” So John throttled his pussy patrol, yanked out most of its teeth, and then the bankbooks began coming in. With the Irish name inside. Simon Dedalus, Molly Bloom, and all. John didn’t perform one crooked act to earn his *Molly Blooms*. He promised nothing to the pimps of Whores’ Row. Could he help it if Jamey O’Toole tossed bankbooks in his lap?

Now it was an election year, and “Hizzoner” wanted the Black Marias out, wagons to hold nigger prostitutes. John had to activate the pussy patrol. But the Mayor warned him, “No white girls. We can’t afford a mistake. If your lads pick up a housewife, the papers will crucify us. I’m depending on you, Johnny boy.”

John went along with the pussy patrol. His chauffeur, Christianson, put him in front of the Black Marias, which were ancient green wagons with dented roofs. John decided what whores would go in the wagons. He picked the fattest girls, girls with low midriffs and pockmarks on their thighs. The wagons filled up in less than an hour. The girls sat in them and bitched. They couldn’t get away from the heat of their own bodies. They tore at their midriffs to cool themselves, and they took long bites of air. John signaled to his chauffeur. “Christie, I’ve had enough. Come on.”

“Where are we going, boss?”

“To the Mayor’s house.”

Christianson flipped his sirens on and shot across town, ahead of ambulances and fire trucks, and brought the “Commish” to Carl Schurz Park. The policeman came out of his sentry box to salute Tig and John and open the gate for him. John walked under the blue canopy at the side of the house. He loved to visit Gracie Mansion. It was a grand old house with black shutters on the windows and white porcelain rails. Sam had three bedrooms for himself. He was the first bachelor Mayor to occupy the house.

Through the front door Johnny went, under the fanlight, with Sammy’s live-in maid to smile at him and ask about his health. “Thank you, Sarah, I’m tiptop.”

“That’s good, Commissioner John.”

“And how is the Man today?”

“He’s bristling,” she said. “It’s them straw ballots. Everybody’s picking Rebecca to win.”

“It’s meaningless stuff,” John said. “He’ll pull through.”

He walked up the winding stairs on the Mayor’s green carpet. It was almost three o’clock, but the Mayor hadn’t risen yet. John stood outside the master bedroom and knocked on the door.

“Come in, for God’s sake.”

Sam was in his underwear. He put pajamas on for his Police Commissioner and returned to bed. He lay under the covers until Sarah arrived with a pot of coffee and sweet rolls for the two bachelor men. He winked at John when Sarah left. An enormous black accounting book poked out of the covers. It was the Mayor’s budget for the coming fiscal year. Sam kicked at the book with both his feet. “Beck Karp says I can’t add or subtract. But it doesn’t take more than ten fingers to know that the City is sinking in shit. Some wizard in the Comptroller’s office is always finding a million here and there. Then he loses it the next day ... did you run the girlies into the precinct, John?”

“I did.”

Sam fell silent and munched on a sweet roll.

Christ, how do you talk to a Mayor? John finished his coffee, taking care not to break the cup. “Ah,” he said, “you’ll murder Rebecca at the polls.”

But the Mayor wasn’t listening to him. His jaws churned while he stared into the great mirror.

alongside his bed. Poor old man. *Hizzoner can't sustain a conversation. His memory is on the blink.*

John walked out of the master bedroom as quietly as he could. He said goodbye to Sarah and thanked her for the coffee and the sweet rolls. Christie was parked near the gate. He had an envelope for Tiger John.

“Who gave you this?”

Christianson held out his hands to indicate the overwhelming breadth of a giant. “It was that roge cop, O’Toole.”

“O’Toole? How could he tell I was coming to the Mayor’s house?”

Christianson shrugged and pursed his lips.

The PC glared at him, “The Special Prosecutor is on our heels, and you monkey with that whorebo outside Gracie Mansion?... come on. Take me to the Dingle.”

He opened the envelope, and a bankbook spilled out. John didn’t bother with the sums in the book. Five or six thousand, it was the same to him. They were getting cheeky with the “Commish,” the messenger boys. The giant had followed him to Sammy’s gate! He shielded the bankbook in his palm so he could peek at that mother of a name. *Anna Livia Plurabelle*. Go figure out O’Toole and that kind of his in Dublin town. John got his bankbooks if he went after whores or not. What in hell were they paying him for? Would the bankbooks come faster and faster, the more Black Marias he sent out? *Anna Livia and Molly Bloom*.

“The Dingle,” John said, “when do we get to the Dingle?” Then he noticed that the car had stopped.

“Boss, we’ve been sitting here for five minutes.”

“Oh,” John said. He got out of the car, knocked three times, muttered his name, and crept inside with the Dingle Bay boys.



HE was that bum again, but he didn't have a dirty neck, or so much stubble on his face. His cheeks were lean, and he had the suffering look of a suitor. Annie Powell didn't like it at all. The bum was wearing cologne, an after-shave lotion it was. He would scare anybody away with the dark hollows in his eyes. "Jesus," she said, laughing at him. "How am I going to earn my keep? Buy me for half an hour, but don't feed me another lunch. I can't work on a full stomach."

Isaac stole her from Forty-third Street before she could complain. He had the grip of a large monkey. She couldn't free her hand. The pimps and the young black whores laughed at the image of Annie and Isaac trundling along. You would have thought the bum had himself a wife. They went to the Vinaigrette. Isaac bought her little bottles of champagne. His tactics seemed more aggressive today. Annie preferred white wine and green beans. But those little bottles didn't soften the bum. "I can take you off that corner," he said. "I can make it so you won't have a foot of space to prowl on."

"God, you really are a priest ... if you'd like to buy a share of me, you'll have to ask Martin McBride."

"Fuck McBride," Isaac said. "I want you to live with me."

She didn't laugh at his proposal. Her eyes began to sink into her skull.

"I have a place downtown. On Rivington Street. Don't worry. You can have your men. I won't interfere. I'll mix drinks for them. Go out for bottles of wine. But I don't want you on the damn streets."

"Mister," she said, "I don't need an uncle, thanks. I already have a pimp."

Could he tell Annie Powell that she was torturing him and his rotten worm? That he'd bump another john who went near her corner? He was jealous, stupidly jealous, of a girl he hadn't even slept with. That scar had gotten him crazy.

"Who's Dermott?" he said.

She ate a mouthful of fish.

"I asked you about Dermott Bride."

She got up from the table, put her napkin down, and walked out of the restaurant. Isaac was left with three corks and his little bottles of champagne. He phoned his office. A limousine was outside the Vinaigrette in seven minutes. The waiters at the restaurant saw the bum get into that big car. They were wise men. They understood that strange things existed in this world. The very rich often preferred to dress like *cloches*. They wouldn't forget this bum with the scarred beauty, the limousine and the splits of champagne.

Isaac's deputies had located Martin McBride, who lived with a fat wife in eight rooms near Marble Hill. Martin had emphysema. But he had to suffer August in New York. He collected money from the pimps of Manhattan and heard their complaints. He was known in mid-town as "Bagman Martin." He'd been a petty crook for over half his life. Poor Martin didn't have much of a record: arrested as a vagrant two or three times. Short spills in the Tombs. But that was twenty years ago. He'd prospered in his old age.

Isaac's men kidnapped him out of his apartment in a three hundred dollar suit. The old bagman was bewildered. Centre Street was completely black. Why was he being shoveled through the halls? He didn't believe Isaac's deputies were cops. But this was the old Police Headquarters. They deposited him in a back room on the third floor. The room was dark except for the lamp in his face. Who

Jesus was behind that desk?

“Scumbag, is Annie Powell yours, or not?”

“Sir,” the old bagman said, “I don’t know who that sweetheart is.”

“But she happens to know a lot about you ... How’s Dermott these days?”

“Who, sir?”

Isaac reached over his desk to twist McBride’s two ears.

“Ah, the nephew. He’s doing fine.”

“Could it be that you’re working for him, Martin McBride?... that the nickels you collect from every whore’s purse goes to little Dermott?”

“That’s impossible, sir. Dermott’s a Yale man, swear to Christ. Helped put him through the college. He was training for the bar ... but he never got to be a lawyer, sir. The nephew tired of his studies.”

“Where is he now?”

“I haven’t a clue.”

Isaac was tired of twisting ears. He was readying to bang Martin’s head against the wall. But Martin suddenly had a coughing fit. It wasn’t contrived. Isaac could see the awful blue and yellow emphysema on him. He had his deputies send Martin home. He learned nothing from the old bagman. He didn’t get one bit closer to Dermott Bride.

THE pimps wouldn't talk to him. The black whores couldn't even pronounce Dermott's name. Ann would run from him soon as Isaac appeared. She'd have no more lunches or dinners with the old bur He walked into a pornography shop managed by a friendly Russian Jew. The Jew was smart enough read under Isaac's disguise. He knew about the legendary First Deputy of New York.

"Sidel, don't play the schmuck with me. Ask me a question, and I'll answer it, but only if I can."

His name was Lazar. And he carried a pistol under his counter, wrapped in a handkerchief.

"The girl with the scar on her face, who is she? She wasn't here a month ago."

"The gorgeous one?" Lazar said, making perfect breasts with his hands. "The knockout? Sidel, I off of her. She's Dermott's bride."

And he began to titter. Isaac wouldn't smile.

"Who's Dermott?"

"Dermott? Dermott's the king."

He was mum after that. Lazar had to attend to his shop. Isaac was sharp enough not to pull at him Lazar had told him as much as Lazar cared to tell. Dermott's the king. Now Isaac was beginning understand why there was peace on Whores' Row. This Dermott had to be the overlord of all the pimping traffic. Uncle Martin was his bagman, the old boy who settled Dermott's accounts. But why didn't some gang of mavericks slit Martin's throat? Was Dermott that much of a king? And how could he hold his little empire together if you couldn't catch sight of him? It all didn't fit. Isaac Sidel shouldn't have been ignorant of the emperor of Times Square.

He had no more time to ruminate in a pornography shop. He was expected at John Jay. Isaac gave lectures twice a week at the School of Criminal Justice. He walked to his hotel, shaved, put on a pair of fresh dungarees. That was Isaac's teaching clothes.

The worm itched when he arrived at John Jay. It was a bad sign for Isaac. The worm was hardly even wrong. He had a new pupil in his class. Melvin Pears' green-eyed wife. She sat at the back of the room with a notebook in her hands. That notebook inhibited Isaac. He forgot to prance around the classroom. He stood near the window and talked about the futility of criminal justice. "The Bronx is dying," he said to the young firemen and cops in his class. "Street by street. We can't send in artillery. The kids would only burn all our tanks. Soon the edges of Manhattan will go ... then you'll have towers on the East Side with machine-gunners in the lobby ... you'll need armed guards to get you and out of the supermarkets."

One of the firemen raised his hand. "First Deputy Sidel, what can we do about it?"

"Go into the Bronx," Isaac said. "Build over all the rubble. Why can't we have shopping plazas at Crotona Park?"

The cops giggled to themselves. The areas around Crotona Park looked as if they'd been napalmed. There were more arsonists in the Bronx than grocers. These cops would have figured Isaac for a bolshevik if he wasn't the First Dep. They enjoyed jeremiads from a deputy police commissioner. You could light up in class. Isaac didn't care what kind of junk you smoked. But that green-eyed lady worried him. Was she going to use Isaac's words against old Sam in Becky Karp's bid for Mayor? He could watch her scribbling between her legs. That's no place to keep a notebook.

She was there, in the same seat, at his next class. The worm nearly hobbled him. He had to lean against the wall. "Sure," he muttered to himself. "It's not too hard to recognize a traitor. Especial

when she has green eyes.” But he wouldn’t coddle to her, sweeten his own talk. He mentioned Stalinist solutions. “Mobilize. The cops can’t do it themselves. Have a goddamn citizens’ army. Fight the shit who won’t cooperate. Bring back Joe DiMaggio. Get Willie Mays to build a new Polo Grounds . . . behind the Grand Concourse. Where’s Durocher now? Take ten percent off everybody’s salary . . . tithe for the Bronx . . . no, make it twenty percent.”

The cops laughed, but that green-eyed wife of Pears clutched her notebook. Isaac grew sad. I’m burying Mayor Sam. He ended the class twenty minutes before the bell. He tried to skirt away from Mrs. Pears. She trapped him at the exit. He would have had to crawl under her bubs to get around her. She put a slip of paper in his hand. The specks in her eyes were incredible. They flashed shiny green dust like small planets about to break apart. He was jealous of Melvin Pears. Isaac also had a wife, Kathleen. A tough Irish lady who had married him before he was twenty. The wife was in real estate. She developed swamps in Florida, had ten suitors and a million in the bank, and she didn’t need a cock who liked to go around in bum’s pants. He saw her once or twice a year. They made love if Kathleen was in the mood. It was more of a friendly hug than anything else. Now he had to deal with Mrs. Pears.

“I didn’t mean to blunder into your class . . . I’m sorry . . . it’s just that I was interested in what you had to say . . . can you come to dinner tomorrow night?”

“Your husband’s too tough for me, Mrs. Pears.”

“I’m Jennifer,” she said. “Jenny . . . Mel likes you . . . don’t mind his scowls . . . he has to practice making faces to satisfy all the juries . . . he’s much nicer at home.”

HE expected Rebecca Karp to come out of the closet and eat off his neck with the hors d'oeuvres. It was only a party of three: Pears, his wife, and Isaac Sidel. Jennifer hadn't been wrong. Melvin wasn't the lawyer at home. He offered Isaac sucks from his hash pipe. The First Dep smoked with Mr. and Mrs. Pears. Why not? He was fifty-one. He ought to have a taste of hashish before he died. It didn't offend the worm, and it warmed Isaac's head. But he couldn't let go of the cop in him. "Mel, did you ever hear of an ex-law student named Dermott Bride?... went to Yale."

"I don't think so," Pears said, and they all took sucks from the pipe. "I couldn't scribble a bribe without some hash in me," he said. "I always work better when I'm stoned."

Isaac didn't see a nudge of affection between husband and wife. Their bodies seemed to exist in some kind of neutral sphere. It's the hash, Isaac figured. They probably fuck three times a day. Melvin had the grace not to mention Rebecca Karp. And Isaac didn't talk about the Mayor. A little sleepy boy came out of one of the rooms. He wore fireman's pajamas. He ran to his father. "Alex, say hello to Isaac."

He shook hands with Alexander Pears, who had his father's mouth and his mother's green eyes.

"Isaac's a policeman ... smarter than Dick Tracy."

Alexander was four and a half. He kissed his father and went to bed. He couldn't stop looking at Isaac. Jennifer was in the kitchen putting whipped cream on a pie. Thank God there had been no politics tonight. Pears didn't say a word about why the Police Commissioner ran prostitutes off the street. Isaac was the one who started to talk about hookers. He was dreaming of Annie Powell. "There are certain pimps. They get their fingers on a girl. And she's owned for life ... or until she gets ugly and has to be shipped to Nova Scotia, where anything that walks will pass as a woman."

He noticed Jennifer standing over him. "Sorry if that sounds cruel. But it's a fact. You know, if a girl's too beautiful, and her pimp is afraid of losing her, sometimes he'll scar her face. It's a fantasy he has ... he thinks the scar devalues her in the eyes of other men. But it doesn't always turn out that way. The scar can make her even more desirable. And the pimp will lose her anyway."

They had cognac and chunks of pecan pie. Melvin slumped into his chair and fell asleep. Isaac whispered with some embarrassment to Mrs. Pears. Melvin was snoring hard. Jennifer didn't apologize. She accompanied Isaac to the door. The worm was rising in his gut. The cognac caused his bald spot to twitch. The hash must have been like a love potion to Isaac. He had Mrs. Pears against the door. That's how he found himself. A stumbling man. His tongue was deep in her mouth while he swallowed half her face. He could still hear Melvin snore. That fucking kiss, there was no end to it. The worm didn't keep Isaac's clock. He could have been gnawing at her for an hour. What if the gentleman wakes up? Or the little boy in the red pajamas marches out of his room and sees mama with Dick Tracy's tongue in her mouth? It was Isaac's nervousness that got them apart. He told her about his hotel. "It's too decrepit to have a name. You don't have to meet me there ..."

He was downstairs, on Madison and Seventy-ninth, outside Melvin's place. What the fuck was it all about? Was it some game plan in Melvin's head to bring him over to Rebecca Karp? Feed the boy some hash, get the wife to kiss him, and he'll fly from Mayor Sam? His tongue was raw as shit. Did Jennifer entertain every guest in a similar way? He was so busy kissing her, he hadn't even felt her tits. God, he was dumb about women. His wife Kathleen was right to head for Florida. You couldn't get much companionship from a cop who was married to his own love of mystery and technique. He

slept with a hundred women, whores and businessmen's wives, and while he probed, stroked, and sucked, his head would grind away at some caper that had been bothering him. The First Dep solved a quarter of his mysteries in bed. Fucking seemed to drive the trivia out of him, to hold his concentration for detail. But that was before the Guzmann family gave him his worm. The worm had idled Isaac's need for sex. That's why this tonguing business with Jennifer was crazy to him. It's the hash, Isaac said. The hash roused a part of him that the worm had laid to rest. He was convinced he wouldn't see Mrs. Pears again. She'd avoid his classes. She'd never come to a shithouse hotel.

Isaac hobbled to West Forty-seventh Street. He changed into his bum's clothes. He had this urge to prowl. Annie wasn't at her corner. So what? Was she sucking off a tie manufacturer from Hoboken? Isaac would murder the son of a bitch. He'd hold every whore in detention, white or black, to run Annie's trade. Let no man finger that scar. The First Dep was going mad. He wanted to kiss that "Dermott Bride" had put on her. To feel the ridges in it with his mouth. He'd keep his tongue in his own face. The tongue was for Mrs. Pears.

She must have given him a bit of luck, Melvin's green-eyed wife. Isaac saw Martin McBride outside Lazar's pornography shop. The bagman wasn't alone. He had Jamey O'Toole with him. Tiny Jim. O'Toole was a renegade cop. Isaac's own investigators, the First Dep's "rat squad," had brought evidence against Tiny Jim. He'd been taking bribes without mercy, "black rent," breaking the heads of local businessmen to further the cause of protection agencies in Brooklyn and the Bronx. Isaac put him out on his ass. O'Toole lost his pension money, but you couldn't hurt a lad who was six feet seven and had a pair of fists on him that could give shorter men a permanent headache. O'Toole was still in business. He'd lent himself out to Dermott and Martin McBride. He was the old bagman's walking shotgun. There weren't too many gangs in New York that would meddle with Jamey O'Toole. You'd need a hatchet to get at him. A bullet would only leave a little nipple in his chest.

But Isaac had a worm to hearten him. He wanted to devil this O'Toole. "Jamey," he said, "I hear your old shield is lying in the property clerk's drawer."

O'Toole had a warm smile for Isaac. "How are you, Chief? It's hard to remember all the different uniforms you own. Isaac, I don't have a grudge, I swear ... but keep out of the alleys, will you? You could fall and lose one of your eyes on the ground. Have you met my employer, Martin McBride? Martin, don't be fooled by the man's stink. It's Isaac himself, the First Deputy of New York."

McBride's fist was soft and wet in Isaac's hand.

"We're already old friends," Isaac said. "Martin visited me ... at Centre Street."

McBride's fist shot out of Isaac's hand.

"O'Toole, take a message to Dermott, will you, please? Tell him I'm fond of his Annie ... and I'd like to dig my own initial into his royal Irish face."

Martin scampered behind O'Toole.

Jamey didn't harden to the First Dep. "You'll have to forgive me, Chief. I don't think I'll relay the message. It's a declaration of war, you see. And I might be caught in the middle. You'll have to sin to Dermott yourself."

"I would, if you'd tell me where he is?"

"That's your problem, Chief. Dermott, he doesn't like the notoriety. He's in a bit of retirement now. But you might send him a postcard. If you could get the proper stamps."

O'Toole walked off, taking Martin by the hand.

ISAAC went to brood in his hotel. You needed some Celtic harp to unwind an Irishman's words. Fucking O'Toole. Proper stamps? Retirement? Dermott had to be out of the country. And Martin was doing his trade for him, with O'Toole serving as the muscle. The Italian lads wouldn't soil their fingers with black whores in the street. But not even O'Toole could fight off every nigger gang; there were plenty of "blues" that would have been willing to strangle pimps for nickels and dimes. They were all getting pieces of the pot. That was Dermott's magic. Then why was he in such a shroud?

The bum didn't come out of his room. Knocks on the door couldn't get him off his unmade bed. The worm itched at him and forced him to recognize a face. He had a visitor. Jenny Pears. She wasn't sure it was Isaac until he put on another shirt. He began arranging pillows. She laughed at his pathetic urgency to clean up four weeks of filth. She liked Isaac's room.

He tried to explain. "Have to live this way ... on a heavy case."

"Why are you so skinny," she said.

"Jennifer, I was a fat man until a year ago. Had the thickest neck in Manhattan. But I was trying to hook a gang of thieves. The Guzmans. I lived with them six months. Had to make them think I was broken with the cops. But that was a smart family. I did their chores and they put a worm in my belly. And the worm's been feeding off me ever since."

"Isaac, there are hospitals, you know. Laboratories that can shrink your worm, dissolve it, kill it, prevent it from growing new tails."

"I've had my fill of hospitals. Used to run up to Presbyterian like a religious man. They fluoroscoped me, gave me pills to eat. Nothing happened. And I've been growing fond of my worm."

Isaac begged her to let him wash up. Jennifer refused. Her body gave him the chills. She didn't have a flaw on her back. Her thighs had a strange burnish in Isaac's room. He loved the circles her nipples made, pinkish mounds. What was Melvin's wife doing in his room? Why wasn't Pears with her, her head resting in her groin? Her low, mother's breasts didn't bother him at all. It was amazing to Isaac. He moved in her with a gentleness, a slow, soft rhythm that he'd never had in his possession before. Was the worm bridling him, holding him back? Was it that creature who was making Jennifer Pears not him? With its own smooth motion, its worm's rocking parts? Do worms have pricks and tongues? Isaac wanted her out of his room.

"Late," he said. "An appointment with the Mayor. Christ, we have to be at this synagogue by six." It was no lie. The little Irish Mayor had to crawl to the Hebrews for votes, run to obscure shuls in the five boroughs. He'd already lost the Irish vote. The Irish loved Rebecca. She was a former beauty queen and she had a loud voice, wit, humor, and pishogue. She was five feet eight and could tell you a good story. His Honor was nearly a dwarf. Five feet one without his shoes. He was a Party loyalist, a bureaucrat who could barely put two sentences together. He'd had his great rise three and a half years ago. He was chairman of the Potholes Complaint Board, a member of the Landmarks Commission, and an unpaid governor of the Manhattan Shelter for Women. Sam had never finished high school. He seemed perfect for the Mayor's job. The pols liked his mumness, his devotion to their cause. The other candidates, six growling men, were chewing at each other's throat. The Dems turned to Sam. They rewarded him for fifty years of labor. He'd carried milk pails for Party bosses, lit the fires in Democratic clubrooms, slept on his knees in City Hall. But he arrived at Gracie Mansion in the wrong year. "Hizzoner" had a corpse in his arms. The City died on Sammy Dunne. It was fighting bankrupt



and a terrible loss of jobs.

“Hizzoner” wouldn’t step out in his own car. He was afraid people would jeer at him. So Isaac sent a limousine to collect the Mayor at Gracie Mansion. Jennifer watched the First Dep get into his synagogue clothes. She had more affection for Isaac the bum. She kissed him goodbye and left him to struggle with his cuffs. The limousine was waiting for Isaac outside the hotel. Mayor Sam was hiding in the back seat. He didn’t question Isaac’s choice of hotels. He might bully Handsome John Rathgave, the Police Commissioner, but he had absolute faith in Sheeny Isaac.

The car took them to Hollis, Queens. Sam and Isaac had to engage a shul full of retirees, pensioners and their wives who were worried about their own shrinking revenues, crime in their housing projects and the worth of a Mayor who wouldn’t come out of his mansion. They were for Rebecca of the Rockaways. They were indulging Isaac and Sam out of boredom, anger, and frustration. The Mayor had nothing to say. His tongue lolled in his mouth while he whispered to Isaac on the podium. “Jesus God, will you save us now?” Isaac saw the bitterness of their plight. An Irish Mayor and an apostate in a house full of Jews. Isaac had never prayed in a synagogue. But he and Sam had to wear skullcaps over their brains. Isaac became the good policeman for Mayor Sam, but question after question was beginning to break his hump. He had pity for these old men and women. They were stroked at election time, and then forgotten. That was the law of politics. Functionaries ran the City, men and women in gray buildings, who didn’t even know there was a synagogue in Hollis, and wouldn’t have cared if Rebecca would scream about more golden age clubs, but the same functionaries would rule whether she got in or not. Still, Isaac had to lapse into petty lies. He invented master plans for Mayor Sam Dunne: more cops to walk old women to the bank, patrols to discourage baby thieves, police sergeants to talk about better burglar alarms. The worm was biting him fierce. It had little tolerance for Isaac’s shit.

Then the auditorium mellowed. It had no idea of Isaac’s apostasy. The synagogue figured it was just talking Jew to Jew. One old woman mentioned *their* Nobel laureate. What did Isaac think of Moses Herzog and Saul Bellow? All Isaac could remember about cuckold Moses was that he liked to fornicate belly to belly, face to face. Thoughts of Jennifer Pears crept into him. He had a sudden desire to ravage every inch of her, to lose that gentleness the worm had thrust on him, and eat her out like a crazy Chinaman. His Honor, who was incapable of reading any book, nudged Isaac. “We have them now. Tell them about Herzog’s Bellow.”

Isaac mouthed some blather about Herzog and the modern Jew, and he and Sam were permitted to go. The worm dug at Isaac in a miserable fashion. He had to keep wrenching from side to side in the limousine. But Sam was happy. “You got them,” he said, “you got them with Herzog’s Bellow.”

Something was drilling in Isaac’s skull. “Your Honor, you must know every Irish society in New York ... does any of them carry a member named Dermott Bride? A rich man, a man who might make contributions here and there.”

Sam wasn’t listening. He kept singing, “Herzog’s Bellow, Herzog’s Bellow,” and Isaac thought he’ll lose the primary mumbling that song. And Molly would probably get a kiss from Mr. Bellow and throw Isaac to the dogs.

HE wasn't wrong about Jenny. She didn't come to his hotel again. Ah, she's found another primitive guy. Jesus, with a body like that? And those green eyes. He looked for her at John Jay College. There was no green-eyed lady taking down his words. His lectures fell to shit. He stopped caring if the Mayor won or lost. He had only Dermott Bride to consider. His deputies rang him at the hotel. There had no news of Dermott, but Melvin Pears had invited him to a party, a party for Rebecca, at his campaign headquarters in an abandoned Dodge showroom on West Fifty-third. Isaac thought, pish on Becky Karp. He wasn't going to lend himself as a whipping boy to her campaign, appear as the curiosity cop, so Rebecca and her people could get at Mayor Sam through him. But Jennifer might be at the party. Jenny of the flawless back. Isaac arrived at the Dodge showroom in dungarees.

The showroom was packed. All the movie stars had come out for Ms. Rebecca. Streisand; Dustin Hoffman and his wife. The First Dep went unrecognized until Rebecca grabbed him by the shoulder and pulled on him. "Isaac," she said, "Isaac." Even the worm could feel one of Becky's shoulder grips. Isaac was squeezed into her like a bunny rabbit. It was a calculated move on Rebecca's part. She wanted him near enough so she could whisper into his throat. "Cocksucker," she said. This was the Rebecca Isaac enjoyed. "I'll stick your balls in a jar of honey and give them to the rats for a lick. Fuckface, why did you marry yourself to a sinking man? You're not supposed to be a fool."

Isaac wiggled out of Rebecca's bear hug and kissed her on the mouth. "Senile he is. There are days Sam can't remember his name ..."

"Then come over to us," she said.

Isaac smiled, but his lips were narrow, and Rebecca realized she'd just been given a Judas kiss.

"Cunt, he's a better Mayor than you'll ever be."

He would have gone out, tunneled under Streisand's kinky hair on his way to the door, but he discovered Jennifer standing with one of Rebecca's aides, a boy with red eyebrows. They were smiling, talking under their breath. What hotel did *he* live at? Did the boy have red hair on his chest? Would he like to borrow Isaac's worm? Would she fuck him in a doorway? Isaac bullied through the crowd of campaigners, and snatched Jennifer away from the boy. "My savior," she said. "With that iron grip ... what synagogue do you have on your agenda today?... Isaac, my husband's about three feet behind us. *Mel*. Do you remember him?"

"He won't notice," Isaac said. The First Dep was in a burly mood. "He's fixing strategies for Rebecca."

So they walked down to Isaac's hotel. He was into her body before she could get her panties off. It was a kind of friendly rape. He licked her armpits, filled her navel with spit, and sucked between her legs with a brutal energy. He left marks on her thighs, souvenirs for Melvin to look at.

"Isaac, why are you so angry at me?"

"Who knows?"

Was he getting even with the worm, showing it the authentic Isaac, who could take any woman into his bed. He began to eat her nipples like a goddamn baby. She stroked his head, held it there, and the worm had screwed him again. The lust was gone. "Stay with me," he said. "Tonight."

"Isaac, how can I?... I have a four-year-old at home ... and Mel."

"Telephone the kid. Tell him Dick Tracy will play with him tomorrow if he goes to sleep. Mel can take care of himself."

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