

Gerhardt Schitt, Head Coach and Athletic Director at the Enfield Tennis Academy, Enfield MA, was wooed fiercely by E.T.A. Headmaster Dr. James Incandenza, just about begged to come on board the moment the Academy's hilltop was shaved flat and the place was up and running. Incandenza had decided he was going to bring Schitt on board or bust — this even though Schitt had then just lately been asked to resign from the staff of a Nick Bollettieri camp in Sarasota because of a really unfortunate incident involving a riding crop.

By now, though, pretty much everybody now at E.T.A. feels as though stories about Schitt's whole corporal-punitive thing must have been pumped up out of all sane proportion, because even though Schitt still does favor those high and shiny black boots, and yes the epaulets, still, and now a weatherman's telescoping pointer that's a clear stand-in for the now-forbidden old riding crop, he has, Schitt, at near what must be seventy, mellowed to the sort of elder-statesman point where he's become mostly a dispenser of abstractions rather than discipline, a philosopher instead of a king. His felt presence is here mostly verbal; the weatherman's pointer has not made corrective contact with even one athletic bottom in Schitt's whole nine years at E.T.A.

Still, although he now has all these *Lebensgeföhrtins*<sup>31</sup> and prorectors to administer most of the necessary little character-building cruelties, Schitt does like his occasional bit of fun, still.

So but when Schitt dons the leather helmet and goggles and revs up the old F.R.G.-era BMW cycle and trails the sweating E.T.A. squads up the Comm. Ave. hills into East Newton on their P.M. conditioning runs, making judicious use of his pea-shooter to discourage straggling sluggards, it's usually eighteen-year-old Mario Incandenza who gets to ride along in the side-car, carefully braced and strapped, the wind blowing his thin hair straight back off his oversized head, beaming, and waving his claw at people he knows. It's possibly odd that the leptosomatic Mario I., so damaged he can't even grip a stick, much less flail at a moving ball with one, is the one kid at E.T.A. whose company Schitt seeks out, is in fact pretty much the one person with whom Schitt speaks candidly, lets his pedagogical hair down. He's not close to his prorectors, particularly, Schitt, and treats Aubrey

delint and Mary Esther Thode with a formality that's almost parodic. But often of a warm evening sometimes Mario and Coach Schitt will find themselves out alone under the East Courts' canvas pavilion or the towering copper beech west of Comm.-Ad., or at one of the initial-scarred redwood picnic tables off the path out behind the Headmaster's House where Mario's mother and uncle live, Schitt savoring a post-prandial pipe, Mario enjoying the smells of the calliopsis alongside the grounds' quincunx paths, the sweetish pines and the briars' yeasty musk coming up from the hillside's slopes. And he actually likes the sulphury odor of Schitt's obscure Austrian blend. Schitt talks, Mario listens, generally. Mario is basically a born listener. One of the positives to being visibly damaged is that people can sometimes forget you're there, even when they're interfacing with you. You almost get to eavesdrop. It's almost like they're like: If nobody's really in there, there's nothing to be shy about. That's why bullshit often tends to drop away around damaged listeners, deep beliefs revealed, diary-type private reveries indulged out loud; and, listening, the beaming and bradykinetic boy gets to forge an interpersonal connection he knows only he can truly feel, here.

Schitt has the sort of creepy witness of old men who still exercise vigorously. He has surprised blue eyes and a vivid white crewcut of the sort that looks virile and good on men who have lost a lot of hair anyway. And skin so clean-sheet-white it almost glows; an evident immunity to the sun's UV; in pine-shaded twilight he is almost glowingly white, as if cut from the stuff of moons. He has a way of focusing his whole self's concentration very narrowly, adjusting his legs' spread for the varicocles and curling one arm over the other and sort of drawing himself in around the pipe he attends to. Mario can sit motionless for really long periods. When Schitt exhales pipe-smoke in different geometric shapes they both seem to study intently, when Schitt exhales he makes little sounds variant in plosivity between P and B. 'Am realizing whole myth of efficiency and no waste that is making this continent of countries we are in.' He exhales. 'You know myths?'

'Is that like a story?'

'Ach. A made-up story. For some children. An efficiency of Euclid only: flat. For flat children. Straight ahead! Plow ahead! Go! This is myth.'

'There aren't any flat children, really.'

'This myth of the competition and bestness we fight for you players here: this myth: they assume here always the efficient way is to plow in straight, go! The story that the shortest way between two places is the straight line, yes?'

'Yes?'

Schitt can use the stem of the pipe to point, for emphasis: 'But what then when something is in the way when you go between places, no? Plow ahead: go: collide: *kabong*.'

'Willkiers!'

'Where is their straight shortest then, yes? Where is the efficiently quickly straight of Euclid then, yes? And how many two places are there without there is something in the way between them, if you go?'

It can be entertaining to watch the evening pines' mosquitoes light and feed deeply on luminous Schitt, who is oblivious. The smoke doesn't keep them away.

'When I am boyish, training to compete for best, our training facilities on a sign, very largely painted, stated WE ARE WHAT WE WALK BETWEEN.'

'Gosh.'

It's a tradition, one stemming maybe from Wimbledon's All-England locker rooms' tympana, that every big-time tennis academy has its own special traditional motto on the wall in the locker rooms, some special aphoristic nugget that's supposed to describe and inform what the academy's philosophy's all about. After Mario's father Dr. Incandenza passed away, the new Headmaster, Dr. Charles Tavis, a Canadian citizen, either Mrs. Incandenza's half-brother or adoptive brother, depending on the version, C.T. had taken down Incandenza's founding motto — *TE OCCIDERE POSSUNT SED TE EDERE NON POSSUNT NEFAS EST*<sup>32</sup> — and had replaced it with the rather more upbeat *THE MAN WHO KNOWS HIS LIMITATIONS HAS NONE*.

Mario is an enormous fan of Gerhardt Schitt, whom most of the other E.T.A. kids regard as probably bats, and as w/o doubt mind-looseningly discursive, and show the old pundit even token respect mostly because Schitt still personally oversees the daily drill-assignments and can, if aggrieved, have Thode and delint make them extremely uncomfortable more or less at will, out there in A.M. practice.

One of the reasons the late James Incandenza had been so terribly high on bringing Schitt to E.T.A. was that Schitt, like the founder himself (who'd come back to tennis, and later film, from a background in hard-core-math-based optical science), was that Schitt approached competitive tennis more like a pure mathematician than a technician. Most j.r.-tennis coaches are basically technicians, hands-on practical straight-ahead problem-solving statistical-data wonks, with maybe added knacks for short-haul psychology and motivational speaking. The point about not crunching serious stats is that Schitt had chued Incandenza in, all the way back at a B.S. 198933 U.S.T.A. convention on photoelectric line-judging, that he, Schitt, knew real tennis was really about not the blend of statistical order and expansive potential that the game's technicians revered, but in fact the opposite — *not-order*, *limit*, the places where things broke down, fragmented into beauty. That real tennis was no more reducible to delimited factors or probability curves than chess or boxing, the two games of which it's a hybrid. In

short, Schitt and the tall A.E.C.-optics man (i.e. Incandenza), whose fierce flat serve-and-haul-ass-to-the-net approach to the game had carried him through M.I.T. on a full ride w/ stipend, and whose consulting report on high-speed photoelectric tracking the U.S.T.A. mucky-mucks found dense past all comprehending, found themselves totally simpatico on tennis's exemption from stats-tracking regression. Were he now still among the living, Dr. Incandenza would now describe tennis in the paradoxical terms of what's now called 'Extra-Linear Dynamics.'<sup>34</sup> And Schitt, whose knowledge of formal math is probably about equivalent to that of a Taiwanese kindergartner, nevertheless seemed to know what Hopman and van der Meer and Bolletieri seemed not to know: that locating beauty and art and magic and improvement and keys to excellence and victory in the prolix flux of match play is not a fractal matter of reducing chaos to pattern. Seemed intuitively to sense that it was a matter not of reduction at all, but — perversely — of expansion, the aleatory flutter of uncontrolled, metastatic growth — each well-shot ball admitting of a possible responses, n<sup>2</sup> possible responses to those responses, and on into what Incandenza would articulate to anyone who shared both his backgrounds as a Cantorian<sup>35</sup> continuum of infinities of possible move and response, Cantorian and beautiful because infoliating, *contained*, this diagrate infinity of infinities of choice and execution, mathematically uncontrolled but humanly *contained*, bounded by the talent and imagination of self and opponent, bent in on itself by the containing boundaries of skill and imagination that brought one player finally down, that kept both from winning, that made it, finally, a game, these boundaries of self.

'You mean like the baselines are boundaries?' Mario tries to ask.

'*Lieber Gott! neiti* with a plosive disgusted sound. Schitt likes best of all smoke-shapes to try to blow rings, and is kind of lousy at it, blowing mostly wobbly lavender hot dogs, which Mario finds delightful.

The thing with Schitt: like most Europeans of his generation, anchored from infancy to certain permanent values which — yes, OK, granted — may, admittedly, have a whiff of proto-fascist potential about them, but which do, nevertheless (the values), anchor nicely the soul and course of a life — Old World patriarchal stuff like honor and discipline and fidelity to some larger unit — Gerhardt Schitt does not so much dislike the modern O.N.A.N.ice U.S. of A. as find it hilarious and frightening at the same time. Probably mostly just *alien*. This should not be rendered in exposition like this, but Mario Incandenza has a severely limited range of verbatim recall. Schitt was educated in pre-Unification *Gymnasium* under the rather Kantian-Hegelian idea that jr. athletics was basically just training for citizenship, that jr. athletics was about learning to sacrifice the hot narrow imperatives of the Self — the needs, the desires, the fears, the multiform cravings of the individual appetitive will — to the larger imperatives of a team (OK, the State)

and a set of delimiting rules (OK, the Law). It sounds almost frighteningly simple-minded, though not to Mario, across the redwood table, listening. By learning, in *palestra*, the virtues that pay off directly in competitive games, the well-disciplined boy begins assembling the more abstract, gratification-delaying skills necessary for being a 'team player' in a larger arena: the even more subtly diffracted moral chaos of full-service citizenship in a State. Except Schitt says *Ach*, but who can imagine this training serving its purpose in an experialist and waste-exporting nation that's forgotten privation and hardship and the discipline which hardship teaches by requiring? A U.S. of modern A. where the State is not a team or a code, but a sort of sloppy intersection of desires and fears, where the only public consensus a boy must surrender to is the acknowledged primacy of straight-line pursuing this flat and short-sighted idea of personal happiness:

'The happy pleasure of the person alone, yes?'

'Except why do you let delint tie Pennulis and Shaw's shoes to the lines, if the lines aren't boundaries?'

'Without there is something bigger. Nothing to contain and give the meaning. Lonely. *Verstiegenheit*.'<sup>36</sup>

'Bless you.'

'Any something. The *what*: this is more important than that there is something.'

Schitt one time was telling Mario, as they respectively walked and tottered down Comm. Ave. eastward into Allston to see about getting a gourmet ice cream someplace along there, that when he was Mario's age — or maybe more like Hal's age, whatever — he (Schitt) had once fallen in love with a tree, a willow that from a certain humid twilight perspective had looked like a mysterious woman aswirl with gauze, this certain tree in the public *Platz* of some West German town whose name sounded to Mario like the sound of somebody strangling. Schitt reported being seriously smitten with the tree:

'I went daily to there, to be with the tree.'

They respectively walked and tottered, ice-cream-bound, Mario moving like the one of them who was truly old, mind off his stride because he was trying to think hard about what Schitt believed. Mario's thinking-hard expression resembles what for another person would be the sort of comically distorted face made to amuse an infant. He was trying to think how to articulate some reasonable form of a question like: But then how does this surrender-the-personal-individual-wants-to-the-larger-State-or-belowed-tree-or-something stuff work in a deliberately *individual* sport like competitive junior tennis, where it's just you v. one other guy?

And then also, again, still, what are those boundaries, if they're not baselines, that contain and direct its infinite expansion inward, that make tennis like chess on the run, beautiful and infinitely dense?

Schitt's thrust, and his one great irresistible attraction in the eyes of Mario's late father: The true opponent, the enfolding boundary, is the player himself. Always and only the self out there, on court, to be met, fought, brought to the table to hammer out terms. The competing boy on the net's other side: he is not the foe: he is more the partner in the dance. He is the what is the word *excuse* or *occasion* for meeting the self. As you are his occasion. Tennis's beauty's infinite roots are self-competitive. You compete with your own limits to transcend the self in imagination and execution. Disappear inside the game: break through limits: transcend: improve: win. Which is why tennis is an essentially tragic enterprise, to improve and grow as a serious junior, with ambitions. You seek to vanquish and transcend the limited self whose limits make the game possible in the first place. It is tragic and sad and chaotic and lovely. All life is the same, as citizens of the human State: the animating limits are within, to be killed and mourned, over and over again.

Mario thinks of a steel pole raised to double its designed height and clips his shoulder on the green steel edge of a dumpster, pirouetting halfway to the cement before Schitt darts in to catch him, and it almost looks like they're doing a dance-floor dip as Schitt says this game the players are all at E.T.A. to learn, this infinite system of decisions and angles and lines Mario's brothers worked so brutally hard to master: junior athletics is but one facet of the real gem: life's endless war against the self you cannot live without.

Schitt then falls into the sort of silence of someone who's enjoying mentally rewinding and replaying what he just came up with. Mario thinks hard again. He's trying to think of how to articulate something like: But then is battling and vanquishing the self the same as destroying yourself? Is that like saying life is pro-death? Three passing Allstonian street-kids mock and make fun of Mario's appearance behind the pair's backs. Some of Mario's thinking-faces are almost orgasmic: fluttery and slack. And then but so what's the difference between tennis and suicide, life and death, the game and its own end?

It's always Schitt who ends up experimenting with some exotic ice-cream flavor, when they arrive. Mario always chickens out and opts for good old basic chocolate when the moment of decision at the counter comes. Thinking along the lines of like Better the flavor you know for sure you already love.

'And so. No different, maybe,' Schitt concedes, sitting up straight on a waffle-seated aluminum chair with Mario beneath an askew umbrella that makes the flimsy little table it's rooted to shake and clank in the sidewalk's breeze. 'Maybe no different, so,' biting hard into his tricolored cone. He feels at the side of his white jaw, where there's some sort of red welt, it looks like. 'Not different' — looking out into the Ave.'s raised median at the Green Line train rattling past downhill — 'except the chance to play.' He

brightens in preparation to laugh in his startling German roar, saying 'No? Yes? The chance to play, yes?' And Mario loses a dollop of chocolate down his chin, because he has this involuntary thing where he laughs whenever anyone else does, and Schitt is finding what he has just said very amusing indeed.

## YEAR OF THE DEPEND ADULT UNDERGARMENT

Tuesday, 3 November, Enfield Tennis Academy: A.M. drills, shower, eat, class, lab, class, class, eat, prescriptive-grammar exam, lab/class, conditioning run, P.M. drills, play challenge match, play challenge match, upper-body circuits in weight room, sauna, shower, slump to locker-room floor w/ other players.

'... to even realize what they're sitting there feeling is unhappiness? Or to even feel it in the first place?'

1640h.: the Comm.-Ad. Bldg.'s males' locker room is full of clean upper-classmen in towels after P.M. matches, the players' hair wet-combed and shining with Barbicide. Pemulis uses the comb's big-toothed end to get that wide-furrowed look that kids from Allston favor. Hal's own hair tends to look wet-combed even when it's dry.

'So,' Jim Troeltsch says, looking around. 'So what do you think?'

Pemulis lowers himself to the floor by the sinks, leaning up against the cabinet where they keep all the disinfectants. He has this way of looking warily to either side of him before he says anything. 'Was there like a central point to all that, Troeltsch?'

'The exam was talking about the syntax of Tolstoy's sentence, not about real unhappy families,' Hal says quietly.

John Wayne, as do most Canadians, lifts one leg slightly to fart, like the fart was some kind of task, standing at his locker, waiting for his feet to get dry enough to put on socks.

There is a silence. Showerheads dribble on tile. Steam hangs. Distant ghastly sounds from T. Schacht over in one of the stalls off the showers. Everyone stares into the middle distance, stunned with fatigue. Michael Pemulis, who can stand about ten seconds of communal silence tops, clears his throat deeply and sends a loogie up and back into the sink behind him. The plate mirrors caught part of its quivering flight, Hal sees. Hal closes his eyes.

'Tired,' someone exhales.

Ortho Stice and John ('N.R.') Wayne seem less fatigued than detached; they have the really top player's way of shutting the whole neural net down for brief periods, staring at the space they took up, hooded in silence, removed, for a moment, from the connectedness of all events.

'Right then,' Troeltsch says. 'Pop quiz. Pop test-question. Most crucial difference, for Leith tomorrow, between your historical broadcast TV set and a cartridge-capable TP.'

Disney R. Leith teaches E.T.A.'s History of Entertainment I and II as well as certain high-level esoteric Optics things you needed Permission of Inst. to get into.

'The Cathodeluminescent Panel. No cathode gun. No phosphenic screen. Two to the screen's diagonal width in cm. lines of resolution, total.'

'You mean a high-def. viewer in general, or a specifically TP-component viewer?'

'No analogs,' Struck says.

'No snow, no faint weird like ghostly double next to UHF images, no vertical roll when planes fly over.'

'Analog v. digitals.'

'You referring to broadcast as in network versus a TP, or network-plus-cable versus a TP?'

'Did cable TV use analogs? What, like pre-fiber phones?'

'It's the digitals. Leith has that word he uses for the shift from analogs to digitals. That word he uses about eleven times an hour.'

'What did pre-fiber phones use, exactly?'

'The old tin-can-and-string principle.'

'"Seminal." He keeps saying it. "Seminal, seminal."'

'The biggest advance in home communications since the phone he says.'

'In home entertainment since the TV itself.'

'Leith might say the Write-Capable CD, for entertainment.'

'He's hard to pin down if you get him on entertainment qua entertainment.'

'The Diz'll say use your own judgment,' Pemulis says. 'Axford took it last year. He wants an argument made. He'll skewer you if you treat it like there's an obvious answer.'

'Plus there's the Interlace de-digitizer instead of an antenna, with a TP,' Jim Struck says, squeezing at something behind his ear. Graham ('Yard-guard') Rader is checking his underarm for more hair. Freer and Shaw might be asleep.

Stice has pulled his towel down slightly and is fingering the deep red abdominal stripe a jock's waistband leaves. 'Boys, I ever become president, the first thing to go's elastic.'

Troeltsch pretends to shuffle cards. 'Next item. Next like flash-card. De-fine *acutance*. Anybody?'

'A measure of resolution directly proportional to the resolved ratio of a given pulse's digital code,' Hal says.

'The Incster has the last word once again,' says Struck. Which invites a

chorus:

'The Halster.'

'Halorama.'

'Halation.'

'Halation,' Rader says. 'A halo-shaped exposure-pattern around light sources seen on chemical film at low speed.'

'That most angelic of distortions.'

Struck says 'We'll be like *lying* for the seats all around Inc tomorrow.' Hal shuts his eyes: he can see the page of text right there, all highlighted, all yellowed up.

'He can scan the page, rotate it, fold the corner down and clean under his nails with it, all mentally.'

'Leave him alone,' Pemulis says.

Freer opens his eyes. 'Do a dictionary-page for us, man, Inc.'

Stice says 'Leave him be.'

It's all only half-nasty. Hal is placid about getting his balls smacked around, they all are. He does his share of chops-busting. Some of the littler kids who take their showers after the upperclassmen are hanging around listening. Hal sits on the floor, quiescent, chin on his chest, just thinking it's nice finally to breathe and get enough air.

The temperature had fallen with the sun. Marathe listened to the cooler evening wind roll across the incline and desert floor. Marathe could sense or feel many million floral pores begin slowly to open, hopeful of dew. The American Sleeply produced small exhalations between his teeth as he examined his scratch of the arm. Only one or two remaining tips of the digitate spikes of the radial blades of the sun found crevices between the Tortoliras' peaks and probed at the roof of the sky. There were the slight and dry locationless rustlings of small living things that wish to come out at night, emerging. The sky was violet.

Everyone in the locker room's got a towel around his waist like a kilt. Everyone except Stice has a white E.T.A. towel; Stice uses his own sort of trademark towels, black ones. After a silence Stice shoots some air out through his nose. Jim Struck picks liberally at his face and neck. There are one or two sighs. Peter Beak and Eyan Ingersoll and Kent Blott, twelve, eleven, ten, are up sitting on the blond-wood benches that run in front of the

lockers' rows, sitting there in towels, elbows on knees, not taking part. So is Zoltan Csikzentmihalyi, who's sixteen but speaks very little English. Idris Arslanian, new this year, ethnically vague, fourteen, all feet and teeth, is a shadowy lurking presence just outside the locker-room door, poking the non-Caucasoid snout in occasionally and then withdrawing, terribly shy. Each E.T.A. player in 18-and-Unders has like four to six 14-and-Unders kids he's supposed to keep his more experienced wing over, look out for. The more the E.T.A. administration trusts you, the younger and more generally clueless the little kids in your charge. Charles Tavis instituted the practice and calls it the Big Buddy System in the literature he sends new kids' parents. So the parents can feel their kid's not getting lost in the institutional shuffle. Beak, Blort, and Arslanian are all in Hal's Big Buddy group for Y.D.A.U. He also in effect has Ingersoll, having traded Todd ('Postal Weight') Possalthwaite to Axford off the books for Ingersoll, because Trevor Axford found he so despised the Ingersoll kid for some unanalyzable reason that he was struggling against a horrible compulsion to put Ingersoll's little fingers into the gap by the hinges of an open door and then very slowly close the door, and came to Hal almost in tears, Axford had. Though technically Ingersoll is still Axford's and Possalthwaite Hal's. Possalthwaite, the great lobbber, has a weird young-old face and little wet lips that lapse into a sucking reflex under stress. In theory, a Big Buddy's somewhere between an R.A. and a prorector. He's there to answer questions, ease bumpy transitions, show ropes, act as liaison with Tony Nwangi and Tex Watson and the other prorectors specializing in little kids. Be somebody they can come to off the record. A shoulder to climb up on a footstool and cry on. If a 16-and-Under gets made a Big Buddy it's kind of an honor; it means they think you're going places. When there's no tournament or travel, etc., Big Buddies get together with their quart-to-sexet in small-group private twice a week, in the interval between P.M. challenge matches and dinner, usually after saunas and showers and a few minutes of sitting slumped around the locker room sucking air. Sometimes Hal sits with his Little Buddies at dinner and eats with them. Not often, however. The savvy Big Buddies don't get too overly close with their L.B. epebes, don't let them forget about the unbridgeable gaps of experience and ability and general status that separate epebes from upperclassmen who've hung in and stuck it out at E.T.A. for years and years. Gives them more to look up to. The savvy Big Buddy doesn't rush in or tread heavy; he holds his own ground and lets the suppliants realize when they need his help and come to him. You have to know when to tread in and take an active hand and when to hang back and let the littler kids learn from the personal experience they'll have to learn from, inevitably, if they want to be able to hang. Every year, the biggest source of attrition, besides graduating 18s, is 13-15s who've had enough and just can't hang. This happens; the administration accepts it; not everyone's cut out for what's required of

you here. Though C.T. makes his administrative assistant Lateral Alice Moore drive the prorectors bats trying to ferret out data on littler kids' psychic states, so he can forecast probable burnouts and attritive defections, so he'll know how many slots he and Admissions'll have to offer Incomings for the next term. Big Buddies are in a tricky position, requested to keep the prorectors generally informed about who among their charges seems shaky in terms of resolve, capacity for suffering and stress, physical punishment, homesickness, deep fatigue, but at the same time wanting to remain a trustworthy confidential shoulder and wing for their Little Buddies' most private and delicate issues.

Though he, too, has to struggle with a strange urge to be cruel to Ingersoll, who reminds him of someone he dislikes but can't quite place, Hal on the whole rather likes being a Big B. He likes being there to come to, and likes delivering little unpretentious minilectures on tennis theory and E.T.A. pedagogy and tradition, and getting to be kind in a way that costs him nothing. Sometimes he finds out he believes something that he doesn't even know he believed until it exits his mouth in front of five anxious little hairless plump trusting clueless faces. The twice-weekly (more like once-weekly, as things usually pan out) group interfaces with his quintet are unpleasant and only after a particularly bad P.M. session on the courts, when he's tired and on edge and would far rather go off by himself and do secret stuff in underground ventilated private.

Jim Troeltsch feels at his glands. John Wayne is of the sock-and-a-shoe, sock-and-a-shoe school.

'Tired,' Ortho Stice again sighs. He pronounces it 'tard.' To a man, now, the upperclassmen are down slumped on the locker room's blue crush carpet, their legs straight out in front of them, toes pointing out at that distinctive morgue-angle, their backs up against the blue steel of the lockers, careful to avoid the six sharp little louvered antimildew vents at each locker's base. All of them look a bit silly naked because of their tennis tans; legs and arms the deep sienna of a quality catcher's mit, from the summer, the tan just now this late starting to fade, but feet and ankles of roabbelly-white, the white of the grave, with chests and shoulders and upper arms more like off-white — the players can sit shirtless in the stands at tournaments when they're not playing and get at least a bit of thoracic sun. The faces are the worst, maybe, most red and shiny, some still deep-peeling from three straight weeks of outdoor tournaments in August-September. Besides Hal, who's atavistically dark-complected anyway, the ones here with the least bad piebald coloring are the players who can tolerate spraying themselves down with Lemon Pledge before outdoor play. It turns out Lemon Pledge, when it's applied in pre-play stasis and allowed to dry to a thin crust, is a phenomenal sunscreen, UV-rating like 40+, and the only stuff anywhere that can survive a three-set sweat. No one knows what jr. player

at what academy found this out about Pledge, years back, or how: rather bizarre discovery-circumstances are envisioned. The smell of sweat-wet Pledge out on the court makes some of the more delicately constituted kids sick, though. Others feel sunscreen of any kind to be unconscionably pussified, like white visors or on-court sunglasses. So most of the E.T.A. upperclassmen have these vivid shoe-and-shirt tans that give them the classic look of bodies hastily assembled from different bodies' parts, especially when you throw in the heavily muscled legs and usually shallow chests and the two arms of different sizes.

'Tard tard tard,' Stice says.

Group empathy is expressed via sighs, further slumping, small spastic gestures of exhaustion, the soft clanks of skulls' backs against the lockers' thin steel.

'My bones are ringing the way sometimes people say their ears are ringing, I'm so tired.'

'I'm waiting til the last possible second to even breathe. I'm not expanding the cage till driven by necessity of air.'

'So tired it's out of *tired's* word-range,' Pemulis says. '*Tired* just doesn't do it.'

'Exhausted, shot, depleted,' says Jim Struck, grinding at his closed eye with the heel of his hand. 'Cashed. Totalled.'

'Look.' Pemulis pointing at Struck. 'It's trying to think.'

'A moving thing to see.'

'Beat. Worn the heck out.'

'Worn the *fuck*-all out is more like.'

'Wring dry. Whacked. Tuckered out. More dead than alive.'

'None even come close, the words.'

'Word-inflation,' Stice says, rubbing at his crewcut so his forehead wrinkles and clears. 'Bigger and better. Good greater greatest totally great. Hyperbolic and hyperbolicker. Like grade-inflation.'

'Should be so lucky,' says Struck, who's been on academic probation since fifteen.

Stice is from a part of southwest Kansas that might as well be Oklahoma. He makes the companies that give him clothes and gear give him all black clothes and gear, and his E.T.A. cognomen is 'The Darkness.'

Hal raises his eyebrows at Stice and smiles. 'Hyperbolicker?'

'My daddy as a boy, he'd have said "tuckered out"!' 'I do just fine.'

'Whereas here we are sitting here needing whole new words and terms.'

'Phrases and clauses and models and structures,' Troeltsch says, referring again to a prescriptive exam everyone but Hal wishes now to forget. 'We need an inflation-generative grammar.'

Keith Freer makes a motion as if taking his unit out of his towel and holding it out at Troeltsch: 'Generate this.'

'Need a whole new syntax for fatigue on days like this,' Struck says. 'E.T.A.'s best minds on the problem. Whole thesauruses digested, analyzed.' Makes a sarcastic motion. 'Hal?'

One semion that still works fine is holding your fist up and cranking at it with the other hand so the finger you're giving somebody goes up like a drawbridge. Though of course Hal's mocking himself at the same time. Everybody agrees it speaks volumes. Idris Arslanian's shoes and incisors appear briefly in the doorway's stream, then withdraw. Everyone's reflection is sort of cubist in the walls' shiny tiling. The name handed down paternally from an Umbrian five generations past and now much diluted by N.E. Yankee, a great-grandmother with Pima-tribe Indian S.W. blood, and Canadian cross-breeding, Hal is the only extant Incandenza who looks in any way ethnic. His late father had been as a young man darkly tall, high flat Pima-tribe cheekbones and very black hair Brylcreemed back so tight there'd been a kind of enforced widow's peak. Himself had looked ethnic, but he isn't extant. Hal is sleek, sort of radiantly dark, almost otterish, only slightly tall, eyes blue but darkly so, and unburnable even w/o sunscreen, his untanned feet the color of weak tea, his nose ever unpeeling but slightly shiny. His sleekness isn't oily so much as moist, milky; Hal worries secretly that he looks half-feminine. His parents' pregnancies must have been all-out chromosomal war: Hal's eldest brother Orin had got the Mom's Anglo-Nordo-Canadian phenotype, the deep-socketed and lighter-blue eyes, the faultless posture and incredible flexibility (Orin was the only male anybody at E.T.A.'d ever heard of who could do a fully splayed cheerleader-type split), the rounder and more protrusive zygomatics.

Hal's next-oldest brother Mario doesn't seem to resemble much of anyone they know.

On most of the nontravel days that he doesn't Big Buddy with his charges, Hal will wait till most everybody's busy in the sauna and shower and stow his sticks in his locker and stroll casually down the cement steps into E.T.A.'s system of tunnels and chambers. He has some way he can casually drift off and have quite a while go by before anyone even notices his absence. He'll often stroll casually back into the locker room just as people are slumped on the floor in towels discussing fatigue, carrying his gear bag and substantially altered in mood, and go in when most of the littler kids are in there peeling Pledge-husks off their limbs and taking their turn showering, and shower, using one of the kids' shampoo out of a bottle shaped like a cartoon character, then hike the head back and apply Visine in a Schacht-free stall, gargle and brush and floss and dress, usually not even needing to comb his hair. He carries Visine AC, mint-flavored floss, and a traveller's toothbrush in a pocket of his Dunlop gear bag. Ted Schacht, big into oral hygiene, regards Hal's bag's floss and brush as an example to them all.

'So tired it's like I'm almost high.'



'But not pleasantly high,' Troeltsch says.

'It'd be a pleasanter tiredness-high if I didn't have to wait till fucking 1900 to start all this studin',' Stice says.

'You'd think Schitt could at least not turn up the juice the week before midterms.'

'You'd think that the coaches and the teachers could try and get together on their scheduling.'

'It'd be like a pleasant fatigue if I could just go up after dinner and hunker on down with the mind in neutral and watch something uncomplex.'

'Not have to worry about prescriptive forms or acutance.'

'Kick back.'

'Watch something with chase scenes and lots of stuff blowing up all over the place.'

'Relax, do bongos, kick back, look at lingerie catalogues, eat granola with a great big wooden spoon,' Struck says wistfully.

'Get laid.'

'Just get one night off to like R and R.'

'Slip on the old environmental suit and listen to some atonal jazz.'

'Have sex. Get laid.'

'Bump uglies. Do the nasty. Haul ashes.'

'Find me one of them Northeast Oklahoma drive-in burger-stand waitresses with the great big huge titties.'

'Those enormous pink-white French-painting tits that sort of like *tumble* out.'

'One of those wooden spoons so big you can barely get your mouth around it.'

'Just one night to relax and indulge.'

Pemulis belts out two quick verses of Johnny Mathis's 'Chances Are,' left over from the shower, then subsides to examine something on his left thigh. Shaw has a spit-bubble going, growing to such exceptional size for just spit that half the room watches until it finally goes at the same moment Pemulis breaks off.

Evan Ingersoll says 'We get off Saturday for Interdependence Day Eve, though, the board said.'

Several upperclass heads are cocked up at Ingersoll. Pemulis makes a bulge in his cheek with his tongue and moves it around.

'Flubbafubba': Stice makes his jowls fly around.

'We get off classes is all. Drills and challenges go merrily on, delint says,' Freer points out.

'But no drills Sunday, before the Gala.'

'But still matches.'

Every jr. player presently in this room is ranked in the top 64 continentally, except Pemulis, Yardley and Blott.

There'd be clear evidence that T. Schacht's still in one of the toilet stalls off the showers even if Hal couldn't see the tip of one of Schacht's enormous purple shower thongs under the door of the stall right by where the shower-area entryway cuts into his line of sight. Something humble, placid even, about inert feet under stall doors. The defecatory posture is an accepting posture, it occurs to him. Head down, elbows on knees, the fingers laced together between the knees. Some hunched timeless millennial type of waiting, almost religious. Luther's shoes on the floor beneath the chamber pot, placid, possibly made of wood, Luther's 16th-century shoes, awaiting epiphany. The mute quiescent suffering of generations of salesmen in the stalls of train-station johns, heads down, fingers laced, shined shoes inert, awaiting the acid gush. Women's slippers, centurions' dusty sandals, dockworkers' hobnailed boots, Popes' slippers. All waiting, pointing straight ahead, slightly tapping. Huge shaggy-browed men in skins hunched just past the firelight's circle with wadded leaves in one hand, waiting. Schacht suffered from Crohn's Disease,<sup>43</sup> a bequest from his ulcerative-colitic dad, and had to take carminative medication with every meal, and took a lot of guff about his digestive troubles, and had developed of all things arthritic gout, too, somehow, because of the Crohn's Disease, which had settled in his right knee and caused him terrible pain on the court.

Freer's and Tall Paul Shaw's racquets fall off the bench with a clatter, and Beak and Blott move fast to pick them up and stack them back on the bench, Beak one-handed because the other hand is keeping his towel fastened.

'Because so that was let's see,' Struck says.

Pemulis loves to sing around tile.

Struck's hitting his palm with a finger for either emphasis or ordinal counting. 'Close to let's call it an hour run for the A-squads, an hour-fifteen drills, two matches back to back.'

'I only played one,' Troeltsch injects. 'Had a measurable fever in the A.M., delint said to throttle down today.'

'Folks that went three sets only played one match, Spodek and Kent for an instance,' Stice says.

'Funny how Troeltsch how his health always seems to rally when A.M. drills get out,' Freer says.

'—like conservatively two hours for the matches. Conservatively. Then half an hour on the machines under fucking Loach's beady browns, sitting there with the clipboard. That's let's call it five hours of vigorous nonstop straight-out motion.'

'Sustained and strenuous exertion.'

'Schitt's determined this year we ain't singing no silly songs at Port Washington.'

John Wayne hasn't said one word this whole time. The contents of his locker are neat and organized. He always buttons his shirt all the way up to

the top button as if he were going to put on a tie, which he doesn't even own. Ingersoll's also getting dressed out of his underclassman's small square locker.

Stice says 'Except they seem to forget we're still in our puberty.'

Ingersoll is a kid seemingly wholly devoid of eyebrows, as far as Hal can see.

'Speak for yourself, Darkness.'

'I'm saying how stressing the pubertyizing skeleton like this, it's real short-sighted.' Stice's voice rises. 'I'm I supposed to do when I'm twenty and in the Show playing nonsensical and I'm skeletally stressed and injury-prone?'

'Dark's right.'

A curled bit of cloudy old Pledge-husk and a green thread from a strip of GauzeTex wrap are complexly entwined in the blue fibers of the carpet near Hal's left ankle, which ankle is faintly swollen and has a blue tinge. He keeps flexing the ankle whenever it occurs to him to. Struck and Troeltsch spar briefly with open hands, feinting and bobbing their heads, both still seated on the floor. Hal, Stice, Troeltsch, Struck, Rader, and Beak are all rhythmically squeezing tennis balls with their racquet-hands, as per Academy mandate. Struck's shoulders and neck have furious purple inflammations; Hal had also noticed a boil on the inside of Schacht's thigh, when Ted'd sat down. Hal's face's reflection just fits inside one of the wall-tiles opposite, and then if he moves his head slowly the face distends and comes back together with an optical twang in the next tile. That post-shower community feeling is dissipating. Even Evan Ingersoll looks quickly at his watch and clears his throat. Wayne and Shaw have dressed and left; Freer, a major Pledge-devotee, is at his hair in the mirror, Pemulis also rising now to get away from Freer's feet and legs. Freer's eyes have a protrusive wideness to them that the Axhandle says makes Freer always look like he's getting shocked or throttled.

And time in the P.M. locker room seems of limitless depth; they've all been just here before, just like this, and will be again tomorrow. The light saddening outside, a grief felt in the bones, a sharpness to the edge of the lengthening shadows.

'I'm thinking it's Tavis,' Freer says to them all in the mirror. 'Where there's excess work and suffering can fucking Tavis be far behind.'

'No, it's Schitt,' Hal says.

'Schitt was short a few wickets out of the old croquet set long before he got hold of us, men,' Pemulis says.

'Pemster and Hal.'

'Halation and Pemurama.'

Freer purses his little lips and expels air like he's blowing out a match, blowing some tiny grooming-remnant off the big mirror's glass. 'Schitt just does what he's told like a good Nazi.'

'What the *hail* is that supposed to mean?' asks a Stice who's well known for asking How High Sir when Schitt says jump, now feeling at the carpet around him for something to throw at Freer. Ingersoll tosses Stice a wopped-up towel, trying to be helpful, but Stice's eyes are on Freer's in the glass, and the towel hits him on the head and sits there, on his head. The room's emotions seem to be inverting themselves every couple seconds. There's half-cruel laughter at Stice as Hal struggles to his feet, rising in careful stages, putting most of his weight on the good ankle. Hal's towel falls off as he does his combination. Struck says something that's lost in the roar of a high-pressure toilet.

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'Because none of them really meant any of it,' Hal tells Kent Blott. 'The end-of-the-day hatred of all the work is just part of the work. You think Schitt and delint don't know we're going to sit in there together after showers and bitch? It's all planned out. The bitches and moaners in there are just doing what's expected.'

'But I look at these guys that've been here six, seven years, eight years, still suffering, hurt, beat up, so tired, just like I feel tired and suffer, I feel this what, dread, this dread, I see seven or eight years of unhappiness every day and day after day of tiredness and stress and suffering stretching ahead, and for what, for a chance at a like a pro career that I'm starting to get this dreddy feeling a career in the Show means even *more* suffering, if I'm skeletally stressed from all the grueling here by the time I get there.'

Blott's on his back on the shag carpet — all five of them are — stretched out splay-limbed with their heads up supported on double-width velourish throw-pillows on the floor of V.R.6, one of the three little Viewing Rooms on the second floor of the Comm.-Ad. Bldg., two flights up from the locker rooms and three from the main tunnel's mouth. The room's new cartridge-viewer is huge and almost painfully high-definition; it hangs flat on the north wall like a large painting; it runs off a refrigerated chip; the room's got no TP or phone-console; it's very specialized, just a player and viewer, and tapes; the cartridge-player sits on the second shelf of a small bookcase beneath the viewer; the other shelves and several other cases are full of match-

cartridges, motivational and visualization cartridges — Interlace, Tat-suoka, Yushitryu, Syber-Vision. The 300-track wire from the cartridge-player up to the lower-right corner of the wall-hung viewer is so thin it looks like a crack in the wall's white paint. Viewing Rooms are windowless and the air from the vent is stale. Though when the viewer's on it looks like the room has a window.

Hal's put on an undemanding visualization-type cartridge, as he usually does for a Big Buddy group-interface when they're all tired. He's killed the volume, so you can't hear the reinforcing mantra, but the picture is bright and bell-clear. It's like the picture almost leaps out at you. A grayling and somewhat ravaged-looking Stan Smith in anachronistic white is at a court's baseline hitting textbook forehands, over and over again, the same stroke, his back sort of osteoporotically hunched but his form immaculate, his foot-work textbook and effortless — the frictionless pivot and back-set of weight, the anachronistic Wilson wood stick back and pointing straight to the fence behind him, the fluid transfer of weight to the front foot as the ball comes in, the contact at waist-level and just out front, the front leg's muscles bunching up as the back leg's settle, eyes glued to the yellow ball in the center of his strings' stencilled W — E.T.A. kids are conditioned to watch not just the ball but the ball's rotating seams, to read the spin coming in — the front knee dipping slightly down under bulging quads as the weight flows more forward, the back foot up almost *en-pointe* on the gleaming sneaker's unscuffed toe, the no-nonsense flourishless follow-through so the stick ends up just in front of his gaunt face — Smith's cheeks have hollowed as he's aged, his face has collapsed at the sides, his eyes seem to bulge from the cheekbones that protrude as he inhales after impact, he looks desiccated, aged in hot light, performing the same motions over and over, for decades, his other hand floating up gently to grasp the stick's throat out in front of the face so he's flowed back into the Ready Stance all over again. No wasted motion, egoless strokes, no flourishes or tics or excesses of wrist. Over and over, each forehead melting into the next, a loop, it's hypnotizing, it's supposed to be. The soundtrack says 'Don't Think Just See Don't Know Just Flow' over and over, if you turn it up. You're supposed to pretend it's you on the bell-clear screen with the fluid and egoless strokes. You're supposed to disappear into the loop and then carry that disappearance out with you, to play. The kids're lying there limp and splayed, supine, jaws slack, eyes wide and dim, a relaxed exhausted warmth — the flooring beneath the shag is gently heated. Peter Beak is asleep with his eyes open, a queer talent E.T.A. seems to instill in the younger ones. Orin had been able to sleep with his eyes open at the dinner table, too, at home.

Hal's fingers, long and light brown and still slightly sticky from tincture of benzoin,<sup>46</sup> are laced behind his upraised head on the pillow, cupping his own skull, watching Stan Smith, eyes heavy too. 'You feel as though you'll

be going through the exact same sort of suffering at seventeen you suffer now, here, Kent?'

Kent Blott has colored shoelaces on his sneakers with 'Mr.-Bouncery-Bounce-Program'-brand bow-biters, which Hal finds extraordinarily artless and young.

Peter Beak snores softly, a small spit-bubble protruding and receding. 'But Blott surely you've considered this: Why are they all still here, then, if it's so awful every day?'

'Not every day,' Blott says. 'But pretty often it's awful.'

'They're here because they want the Show when they get out,' Ingersoll sniffs and says. The Show meaning the A.T.P. Tour, travel and cash prizes and endorsements and appearance fees, match-highlights in video mags, action photos in glossy print-mags.

'But they know and we know one very top junior in twenty even gets all the way to the Show. Much less survives there long. The rest slog around on the satellite tours or regional tours or get soft as club pros. Or become lawyers or academics like everyone else,' Hal says softly.

'Then they stay and suffer to get a scholarship. A college ride. A white cardigan with a letter. Girl coeds keen on lettermen.'

'Kent, except for Wayne and Pemulis not one guy in there needs any kind of scholarship. Pemulis'll get a full ride anywhere he wants, just on test-scores. Since's aunts'll send him anywhere even if he doesn't want to play. And Wayne's headed for the Show, he'll never do more than a year in the O.N.A.N.C.A.A.'s.' Blott's father, a cutting-edge E.N.T. oncologist, flew all over the world removing tumors from wealthy mucous membranes; Blott has a trust fund. 'None of that's the point and you guys know it.'

'They love the game, you're going to say.'

Stan Smith has switched to backhands.

'They sure must love something, Ingersoll, but how about for a second I say that's not Kent's point either. Kent's point's the misery in that room just now. K.B., I've taken part in essentially that same bitter bitchy kind of session hundreds of times with those same guys after bad P.M.s. In the showers, in the sauna, at dinner.'

'Very much bitching also in the lavatories,' Arslanian says.

Hal unsticks his hair from his fingers. Arslanian always has a queer faint hot-doggyish smell about him. 'The point is it's ritualistic. The bitching and moaning. Even assuming they feel the way they say when they get together, the point is notice we were all sitting there all feeling the same way together.'

'The point is togetherness?'

'Shouldn't there be violas for this part, Hal, if this is the point?'

'Ingersoll, I —'

Beak's cold-weather adenoids wake him periodically, and he gurgles and

his eyes roll up briefly before they level out and he settles back, seeming to stare.

Hal creatively visualizes that Smith's velvety backhand is him slo-mo slapping Evan Ingersoll into the opposite wall. Ingersoll's parents founded the Rhode Island version of the service where you order groceries by TP and teenagers in fleets of station wagons bring them out to you, instead of supermarkets. 'What the point is is that we'd all just spent three hours playing challenges against each other in scrotum-tightening cold, assailing each other, trying to take away each other's spots on the squads. Trying to defend them against each other's assaults. The system's got inequality as an axiom. We know where we stand entirely in relation to one another. John Wayne's over me, and I'm over Struck and Shaw, who two years back were both over me but under Troeltsch and Schacht, and now are over Troeltsch who as of today is over Freer who's substantially over Schacht, who can't beat anyone in the room except Pemulis since his knee and Crohn's Disease got so much worse, and is barely hanging on in terms of ranking, and is showing incredible balls just hanging on. Freer beat me 4 and 2 in the quarters of the U.S. Clays two summers ago, and now he's on the B-squad and five slots below me, six slots if Troeltsch can still bear him when they play again after that illness-default.'

'I am over Blott. I am over Ingersoll,' Idris Arslanian nods.

'Well Blott's just ten, Idris. And you're under Chu, who's on an odd year and is under Possalhwair. And Blott's under Beak and Ingersoll simply by virtue of age-division.'

'I know just where I stand at all times,' muses Ingersoll.

SyberVision edits its visualization sequences with a melt-filter so Stan Smith's follow-through loops seamlessly into his backswing for the exact same next stroke; the transitions are gauzy and dreamlike. Hal struggles to hike himself up onto his elbows:

'We're all on each other's food chain. All of us. It's an individual sport. Welcome to the meaning of *individual*. We're each deeply alone here. It's what we all have in common, this aloneness.'

'*E Unibus Pluram*,' Ingersoll muses.

Hal looks from face to face. Ingersoll's face is completely devoid of eyebrows and is round and dustily freckled, not unlike a Mrs. Clarke pancake. 'So how can we also be together? How can we be friends? How can Ingersoll root for Arslanian in Idris's singles at the Port Washington thing when if Idris loses Ingersoll gets to challenge for his spot again?'

'I do not require his root, for I am ready,' Arslanian bares canines.

'Well that's the whole point. How can we be friends? Even if we all live and eat and shower and play together, how can we keep from being 136 deeply alone people all jammed together?'

'You're talking about community. This is a community-spiel.'

'I think alienation,' Arslanian says, rolling the profile over to signify he's talking to Ingersoll. 'Existential individuality, frequently referred to in the West. Solipsism.' His upper lip goes up and down over his teeth.

Hal says, 'In a nutshell, what we're talking about here is loneliness.'

Blott looks about ready to cry. Beak's palsied eyes and little limb-spasms signify a troubling dream. Blott rubs his nose furiously with the heel of his hand.

'I miss my dog,' Ingersoll concedes.

'Ah.' Hal rolls onto one elbow to hike a finger into the air. 'Ah. But then so notice the instant group-cohesion that formed itself around all the pissing and moaning down there why don't you. Blott. You, Kent. This was your question. The what looks like sadism, the skeletal stress, the fatigue. The suffering *unites* us. They want to let us sit around and bitch. Together. After a bad P.M. set we all, however briefly, get to feel we have a common enemy. This is their gift to us. Their medicine. Nothing brings you together like a common enemy.'

'Mr. delint.'

'Dr. Tavis. Schitt.'

'Delint. Watson. Nwangi. Thode. All Schitt's henchmen and henchwomen.'

'I hate them!' Blott cries out.

'And you've been here this long and you still think this hatred's an accident?'

'Purchase a clue Kent Blott!' Arslanian says.

'The large and economy-size clue, Blott,' Ingersoll chimes.

Beak sits up and says 'God no not with *pliers*!' and collapses back again, again with the spit-bubble.

Hal is pretending incredulity. 'You guys haven't noticed yet the way Schitt's whole staff gets progressively more foul-tempered and sadistic as an important competitive week comes up?'

Ingersoll up on one elbow at Blott. 'The Port Washington meet. I.D. Day. The Tucson Whataburger the week after. They want us in absolute top shape, Blott.'

Hal lies back and lets Smith's *ballet de se* loosen his facial muscles again, staring. 'Shit, Ingersoll, we're all in top shape already. That's not it. That's the least of it. We're off the charts, shape-wise.'

Ingersoll: 'The average North American kid can't even do one pull-up, according to Nwangi.'

Arslanian points down at his own chest. 'Twenty-eight pull-ups.'

'The point,' Hal says softly, 'is that it's not about the physical anymore, men. The physical stuff's just pro forma. It's the heads they're working on here, boys. Day and year in and out. A whole program. It'll help your attitude to look for evidence of design. They always give us something to hate,

really hate together, as big stuff looms. The dreaded May drills during finals before the summer tour. The post-Christmas crackdown before Australia. The November frezation, the snot-fest, the delay in upping the Lung and getting us under cover. A common enemy. *I* may despise K. B. Freer, or' (can't quite resist) 'Evan Ingersoll, or Jennie Bash. But *we* despise Schirt's men, the double matches on top of runs, the insensitivity to exams, the repetition, the stress. The loneliness. But we get together and bitch, all of a sudden we're giving something group expression. A community voice. Community, Evan. Oh they're cunning. They give themselves up to our dislike, calculate our breaking points and aim for just over them, then send us into the locker room with an unstructured forty-five before Big Buddy sessions. Accident? Random happenstance? You guys ever see evidence of the tiniest lack of coolly calculated structure around here?'

'The structure's what I hate the most of all,' Ingersoll says.

'They know what's going on,' Blott says, bouncing a little on his tailbone. 'They *want* us to get together and complain.'

'Oh they're cunning,' Ingersoll says.

Hal curls himself a bit on one elbow to put in a small plug of Kodiak. He can't tell whether Ingersoll's being insolent. He lies there very slack, visualizing Smith pounding overhairs down onto Ingersoll's skull. Hal some weeks back had acquiesced to Lyle's diagnosis that Hal finds Ingersoll — this smart soft caustic kid, with a big soft eyebrowless face and unwrinkled thumb-joints, with the runty, cuddled look of a Mama's boy from way back, a quick intelligence he squanders on an insatiable need to advance some impression of himself — that the kid so repels Hal because Hal sees in the kid certain parts of himself he can't or won't accept. None of this ever occurs to Hal when Ingersoll's in the room. He wishes him ill.

Blott and Arslanian are looking at him. 'Are you OK?'

'He is tired,' Arslanian says.

Ingersoll drums idly on his own ribcage.

Hal usually gets secretly high so regularly these days this year that if by dinner time he hasn't gotten high yet that day his mouth begins to fill with spit — some rebound effect from B. Hope's desiccating action — and his eyes start to water as if he's just yawned. The smokeless tobacco started almost as an excuse to spit, sometimes. Hal's struck by the fact that he really for the most part believes what he's said about loneliness and the structured need for a *we* here; and this, together with the Ingersoll-repulsion and spit-flood, makes him uncomfortable again, brooding uncomfortably for a moment on why he gets off on the secrecy of getting high in secret more than on the getting high itself, possibly. He always gets the feeling there's some clue to it on the tip of his tongue, some mute and inaccessible part of the cortex, and then he always feels vaguely sick, scanning for it. The other thing that happens if he doesn't do one-hitters sometime before dinner is he feels

slightly sick to his stomach, and it's hard to eat enough at dinner, and then later when he does go off and get off he gets ravenous, and goes out to Father & Son Market for candy, or else floods his eyes with Murine and heads down to the Headmaster's House for another late dinner with C.T. and the Mooms, and eats like such a feral animal that the Mooms says it does something instinctively maternal in her heart good to see him pack it away, but then he wakes before dawn with awful indigestion.

'So the suffering gets less lonely,' Blott prompts him.

Two curves down the hall in V.R.-5, where the viewer's on the south wall and doesn't get turned on, the Canadian John Wayne's got LaMont Chu and 'Sleepy T.P.' Peterson and Kieran McKenna and Brian van Vleck.

'He's talking about developing the concept of tennis mastery,' Chu tells the other three. They're on the floor Indian-style, Wayne standing with his back against the door, rotating his head to stretch the neck. 'His point is that progress towards genuine Show-caliber mastery is slow, frustrating. Humbling. A question of less talent than temperament.'

'Is this right Mr. Wayne?'

Chu says '... that because you proceed toward mastery through a series of plateaus, so there's like radical improvement up to a certain plateau and then what looks like a stall, on the plateau, with the only way to get off one of the plateaus and climb up to the next one up ahead is with a whole lot of frustrating mindless repetitive practice and patience and hanging in there.'

'Plateaux,' Wayne says, looking at the ceiling and pushing the back of his head isometrically against the door. 'With an X. *Plateaux*.'

The inactive viewer's screen is the color of way out over the Atlantic looking straight down on a cold day. Chu's cross-legged posture is textbook. 'What John's saying is the types who don't hang in there and slog on the patient road toward mastery are basically three. Types. You've got what he calls your Despairing type, who's fine as long as he's in the quick-improvement stage before a plateau, but then he hits a plateau and sees himself seem to stall, not getting better as fast or even seeming to get a little worse, and this type gives in to frustration and despair, because he hasn't got the humbleness and patience to hang in there and slog, and he can't stand the time he has to put in on plateaux, and what happens?'

'Geronimo!' the other kids yell, not quite in sync.

'He bails, right,' Chu says. He refers to index cards. Wayne's head makes the door rattle slightly. Chu says, 'Then you've got your Obsessive type, J.W. says, so eager to plateau-hop he doesn't even know the word *patient*, much less *humble* or *slog*, when he gets stalled at a plateau he tries to like *will* and *force* himself off it, by sheer force of work and drill and will and practice, drilling and obsessively honing and working more and more, as in frantically, and he overdoes it and gets hurt, and pretty soon he's all chronically messed up with injuries, and he hobbles around on the court still

'Banzai! El Bailo! See ya!'

'It's Delint!'

'A quiet chat!'

'Geronzai!'

They all want to know how Wayne does it, #2 continentally in 18's at

LaMont Chu and T. P. Pe

'Toddler, I admire your savvy, I admire a kid's certain worldly skepticism,

try it with only two, so like I've got just two cards here, and I hold them up,

Oris P. Lord clears his throat: "The ante."

1e.

we got some chance you lose track but with two? With just *two*?

oss anchored around both wrists:

reed.

er chugging, one of his kids holding Kleenex at the ready.

Breathe the tennis here. These are *autonomical*. *Accretive* means *accumulating*,



through sheer mindless repeated motions. The machine-language of the muscles. Until you can do it without thinking about it, play. At like fourteen, give and take, they figure here. Just do it. Forget about is there a point, of course there's no point. The point of repetition is there is no point. Wait until it soaks into the hardware and then see the way this frees up your head. A whole shitload of head-space you don't need for the mechanics anymore, after they've sunk in. Now the mechanics are wired in. Hardwired in. This frees the head in the remarkablest ways. Just wait. You start thinking a whole different way now, playing. The court might as well be inside you. The ball stops being a ball. The ball starts being something that you just know *ought* to be in the air, spinning. This is when they start getting on you about concentration. Right now of course you have to concentrate, there's no choice, it's not wired down into the language yet, you have to think about it every time you do it. But wait till fourteen or fifteen. Then they see you as being at one of the like crucial plateaus. Fifteen, tops. Then the concentration and character shit starts. Then they really come after you. This is the crucial plateau where character starts to matter. Focus, self-consciousness, the chattering head, the cackling voices, the choking-issue, fear versus whatever isn't fear, self-image, doubts, reluctances, little tight-lipped cold-footed men inside your mind, cackling about fear and doubt, chinks in the mental armor. Now these start to matter. Thirteen at the earliest. Staff looks at a range of thirteen to fifteen. Also the age of manhood-rituals in various cultures. Think about it. Until then, repetition. Until then you might as well be machines, here, is their view. You're just going through the motions. Think about the phrase: Going Through The Motions. Wiring them into the motherboard. You guys don't know how good you've got it right now.'

James Albrecht Lockley Struck Jr. of Orinda CA prefers one long Q&A-type interface, with V.R.8's viewer playing ambient stuff against relaxation-vistas of surf, shimmering ponds, fields of nodding wheat.

'Time for about maybe two more, me droogies.'

'Say it's close and the guy starts kettwanging you. Balls are way in and he's calling them out. You can't believe the flagrancy of it.'

'Implicit this is a no-linesman situation, Traub, you're saying.'

Creepily-blue-eyed Audern Tallat-Kelpsa chimes in: 'This is early rounds. The kind they give you only two balls. Honor systems. All of a sudden there he is kettwanging on you. It happens.'

'I know it happens.'

Traub says, 'Whether he's outright kettwanging or just head-fucking you. Do you start kettwanging back? T'it for tat? What do you do?'

'Do we assume there's a crowd.'

'Early round. Remote court. No witnesses. You're on your own out there. Do you kettwang back.'

'You do not kettwang back. You play the calls, not a word, keep smiling. If you still win, you'll have grown inside as a person.'

'If you lose?'

'If you lose, you do something private and unpleasant to his water-jug right before his next round.'

A couple of the kids have notebooks and studious nods. Struck is a prized tactician, very formal in B.B. group-sessions, something scholarly and detached about him his charges often revere.

'We can discuss private water-jug unpleasantness on Friday,' Struck says, looking at his watch.

A hand raised by the violently cross-eyed Carl Whale, age thirteen. Acknowledgment from Struck.

'Say you have to fart.'

'You're serious, Mobes, aren't you.'

'Jim sir, say you're playing out there, and suddenly you have to fart. It feels like one of those real hot nasty pressurized ones.'

'I get the picture.'

Now some empathic murmurs, exchanged looks. Josh Gopnik is nodding very intensely. Struck stands very straight to the right of the viewer, hands behind his back like an Oxford don.

'I mean the kind that's real urgent.' Whale looks briefly around him. 'But that it's not impossible it's actually a need to go to the bathroom, instead, masquerading as a fart.'

Now five heads are nodding, pained, urgent: clearly a vexing sub-14 issue. Struck examines a cuticle.

'Meaning defecate is what you mean, then, Mobes. Go to the bathroom.' Gopnik looks up. 'Carl's saying the kind where you don't know what to do. What if you think you have to fart but it's really that you have to shit?'

'As in it's a competitive situation, it's not a situation where you can go bearing down and forcing and see what happens.'

'So out of caution you don't,' Gopnik says.

'—fart,' Philip Traub says.

'But then you've denied yourself an urgent fart, and you're running around trying to compete with a terrible hot nasty uncomfortable fart riding around the court inside you.'

Two levels down, Ortho Stice and his brood: the little libraryish circle of soft chairs and lamps in the warm foyer off the front door to subdorm C:

'And what he says he says it's about more than tennis, mein kinder. *Mein kinder*, well it sort of means my family. He eyeballs me right square in the eye and says it's about how to reach down into parts of yourself you didn't know were there and get down in there and live inside these parts. And the only way to get to them: sacrifice. Suffer. Deny. What are you willing to give. You'll hear him ask it if you're privileged to ever get an interface. The



call could come at anytime: the man wants a mano-to-mano interface. You'll hear him say it over and over. What have you got to give. What are you willing to part with. I see you're looking a little pale there, Wagenknecht. Is this scary you bet your little pink personal asses it's scary. It's the big time. He'll tell you straight the fuck out. It's about discipline and sacrifice and honor to something way bigger than your personal ass. He'll mention America. He'll talk patriotism and don't think he won't. He'll talk about it's patriotic play that's the high road to the thing. He's not American but I tell you straight out right here he makes me proud to be American. Mein kinder. He'll say it's how to learn to be a good American during a time, boys, when America isn't good its own self.'

There's a long pause. The front door is newer than the wood around it.

'I'd chew fiberglass for that old man.'

The only reason the Buddies in V.R.8 can hear the little burst of applause from the foyer is because Struck won't hesitate to pause and consider silently as long as he has to. To the kids the pauses spell dignity and integrity and the still-water depth of a guy with nine years in at three different academies, and who has to shave daily. He exhales a slow breath through rounded lips, looking off up at the ceiling's guilloche border.

'Mobes, if it's me: I let it ride.'

'You let it out come what may?'

'A la contraite. I let it ride around inside all day if I have to. I make an iron rule: nothing escapes my bottom during play. Not a toot or a whistle. If I play hunched over I play hunched over. I take the discomfort in the name of dignified caution, and when it's especially bad I look up at sky between points and I say to the sky Thank You Sir may I have another. Thank You Sir may I have another.'

Gopnik and Tallat-Kelpsa are writing this down.

Struck says, 'That's if I want to hang for the long haul.'

'One side of the gingival mound, then up over the apex and down over the other side of the gingival mound, using you should cultivate a certain amount of touch with the string.'

'Now the big question of character is do we let a fluke of a probably one-in-a-hundred lapse in concentration make us throw up our faggy hands and go dragging characterlessly back to our dens to lick the whimpering wounds, or do we narrow our eyes and put out the chin and say Pemulis we say we say Pemulis, Double or Nothing, when the odds remain so almost crazily stacked in our favor today.'

'So they do it on purpose?' Beak is asking. 'Try to make us hate them?'

Limits and rituals. It's almost time for communal dinner. Sometimes Mrs. Clarke in the kitchen lets Mario ring a triangle with a steel ladle while she rolls back the dining-room doors. They make the servers wear hairnets and little Ob/Cynish gloves. Hal could take out the plug and nip down into

the tunnels, maybe not even all the way down into the Pump Room. Be only twenty minutes late. He's thinking in an abstract absent way about limits and rituals, listening to Blott give Beak his aperçu. Like as in is there a clear line, a quantifiable difference between need and just strong desire. He has to sit up to spit in the wastebasket. There is a twinge in a tooth on his mouth's left side.

25. More like July–October, actually.

26. Synthetically enhanced enkephalin, an opiate-like pentapeptide or so-called endorphin manufactured in the human spine, one of the compounds prominently involved in the infamous 'CadaverGate' scandal that brought down so many funeral directors in the Year of the Perdue Wonderchicken.

27. Metro Boston subdialectical argot — origin unknown — for cannabis, pot, grass, du-Bois, dope, ganja, bhang, herb, hash, m. jane, kif, etc.; with 'Bing Crosby' designating cocaine and organic methoxies ('drines), and — inexplicably — 'Doris' standing for synthetic dickies, psychs, and phenys.

28. Monoamine-oxidase inhibitors, a venerable class of antidepressants/anxiolytics, of which Paroxetine — SmithKline Beecham's product-name for tranylcypromine sulfate — is a member. Zolof is serralline hydrochloride, a serotonin-reuptake-inhibitor (SRI) not all that dissimilar to Prozac, manufactured by Pfizer-Roerig.

29. Electro-Convulsive Therapy.

30. A neutral boric acid eyewash, a kind of turbo-charged Visine, available over-counter from Wyeth Labs, with its own eye-cup of apothecary-blue plastic that's downright gorgeous when held up to a window's light.

31. Schitt's term for Mr. A. delint, which means technically 'soulmate' or 'spouse' but isn't meant at all sexually w/it delint, we can rest assured.

32. Roughly, 'They Can Kill You, But the Legalities of Eating You Are Quite a Bit Dicier.'

33. I.e., 'Before Subsidization' or the beginning of the subsidized O.N.A.N.ite lunar calendar under President Gentile; see *swb*.

34. A.k.a. 'E.L.D.', that still-green shoot off the pure branch of math that deals with systems and phenomena whose chaos is beyond even Mandelbrotian math's Strange Equations and Random Attractants, a delimiting reaction against the Chaos Theories of fractal-happy meteorologists and systems analysts, E.L.D., whose post-Côdellian theorems and nonexistence proofs amount to extremely lucid and elegant admissions of defeat in certain cases, hands thrown up w/complete deductive justification. Incandenza, whose frustrated interest in grand-scale failure was unflagging through four different careers, would have been all over Extra-Linear Dynamics like white on rice, had he survived.

35. I.e., presumably, 'of-Georg-Cantor,' Cantor being a 1900s-era set-theorist (German also) and more or less founder of transfinite mathematics, the man who proved some infinities were bigger than other infinities, and whose 1905-ish Diagonal Proof demonstrated that there can be an infinity of things between any two things no matter how close together the two things are, which D. Proof deeply informed Dr. J. Incandenza's sense of the transstatistical aesthetics of serious tennis.

36. Low-Bavarian for something like 'wandering alone in blasted disorienting territory beyond all chartered limits and orienting markers,' supposedly.

37. Wheelchair.

38. Ghostly light- and monster-shadow phenomenon particular to certain mountains; e.g. q.v. Part I of Goethe's *Faust*, the Walpurgisnacht six-toed danceathon on the Harz-Bröcken, in which there's described a classic 'Bröckengespenstflänom.' (*Gesperrst* means specter or wraith.)

39. Marathe's superior in the A.F.R., a the leader of the Wheelchair Assassins' U.S.A. cell, and the former boyhood friend of Rémy Marathe's late older brothers, both struck and killed by trains.<sup>b</sup>

a. *Les Assassins des Fauteuils Rollents*, a.k.a. Wheelchair Assassins, pretty much Québec's most dreaded and rapacious anti-O.N.A.N. terrorist cell.

40. In other words, M. Fortier and the A.F.R. (as far as Marathe knew) believed that Marathe was functioning as a kind of 'triple agent' or duplicitous 'double agent' — at Fortier's direction, Marathe had pretended to approach B.S.S. seeking to trade knowledge of the A.F.R.'s anti-O.N.A.N. activities for protection and medical care for his hideously ill wife (Marathe's) — only (as far as Marathe can know) Marathe and very few B.S.S. operatives know that Marathe is now only *pretending* to pretend to betray, that M. Steeply is fully aware that Marathe responds to B.S.S.'s summonses with what M. Fortier believes is his (Fortier's) full knowledge, that M. Fortier is not (as far as Marathe and Steeply can reasonably posit) aware that Steeply and B.S.S. are aware that Fortier is aware of Marathe's meetings with Steeply, and that Marathe's own violent death will be the smallest of his (Marathe's) problems should his Mont-Tremblant counter-tyranny come to suspect the even-numbered total of his final loyalties.

41. Intra-O.N.A.N. sobriquet for 'acting as a double agent'; similarly w/ 'tripling,' and so on.

42. The 'thing of important' seems to be that Marathe's A.F.R. superiors believe he only is pretending to betray them in order to secure advanced U.S. cardiac-prosthetic technology for his wife, but that in fact he really *is* betraying them (the superiors, his country) — probably actually for that medical tech — and is thus only pretending only to pretend.

43. Chronic inflammation of the terminal ileum and adjacent tissues, named in dubious honor of a Dr. Crohn in B.S. 1932.

44. Professional euphemism for involuntary interrogation, either w/ or w/o physical inducements.

45. See Note 304 *swb*.

46. Over-the-counter topical stuff for the corticization of skin, tincture of benzoin facilitates the development of the kinds of callus that don't get blood-blisters underneath. Way more common and universal among serious players than Lemon Pledge. Finding the smell of t. of b. nauseous, some junior players prefer an applied layer of corn starch or baby powder, which makes the t. of b. easier to wash off later but also leaves weird little white fingerprints over everything you touch.

47. *Le Front de la Libération de la Québec*, rather a younger and rowdier and less implacably businesslike cell than the A.F.R., and symbolically adopting certain cultural customs, musics and motifs associated with Hawaii, supposedly an ironic nod to the idea that Québec is now, too, a kind of annex or territory of the U.S., a Canadian province only on paper, and separated from its real captor-nation by distances of space and culture that are unbridgeable.

48. The progressive asymmetrical narrowing of one or more cardiac sinuses; can be either atherosclerotic or neoplastic; rare before continental interdependence; now the third-leading cause of death among adults of Québec and New Brunswick and the seventh among adults of the Northeastern U.S.A.; associated with chronic low-level exposure to 2,3,7,8 Tetrachlorodibenzo-P-Di- and -Trioxin compounds.

49. Redundancy *sic*.

50. Said galoots also known, in the old founder's AA circle, Enfield MA's White Flag Group, as 'The Crocodiles.'

51. Syntax *sic*, which had helped drive Mrs. Avril Incandenza — her Op-Ed letters and formal complaints apparently ignored at every political level — to help found the Militant Grammatians of Massachussets, ever since a bramble in the flank of advertisers, corporations, and all fast-and-loose-players with the integrity of public discourse — see *swb*.

52. The Gas Chromatography/Mass Spectrometry scan uses particle-bombardment and a