

ELWIN'S WAY

Elwin said, "But, Betsy...", caught himself, and stopped speaking. He was talking with his daughter, Margaret, and he'd called her by his deceased sister's name again. It was not such a serious slip, but it had a history; because he'd been arguing, though gently, with Margaret, the slip brought his feelings to the level of frustration where he chose to fall silent. It was better to stop talking than to risk feeding her preconceptions further. Once, he'd overheard her say to a health aide, "He thinks I'm Betsy again." He often overheard things that she said, and he wondered just how bad she thought his hearing was. He thought to tell her once that he could recall Betsy, not so long dead, with such acute immediacy at times that the fact of her non-existence would surprise him. But Margaret listened to most of these revelations with intense little nods that made him suspicious. Now, they stared at each other, he, thin, eighty-three, with a narrow graying head, and slumped back in his chair; she, forty-six, squarish and plump, looking pinched and hurt, and uncertainly balanced on the edge of his bed.

The day had begun on a frustrating note, with a long conversation with Harold Dunning, the manager of Applewood, the nursing home that was now Elwin Conway's home. Elwin had been lobbying hard across a snack room table to get a certain type of birdfeeder affixed to each resident's window, clear plastic feeders that stuck to the glass with suction cups and allowed people to actually watch birds feeding just on the other side. His plan had the

residents paying for the feeders and the seed and the Applewood management responsible for keeping them filled. Dunning hadn't liked the idea of maintaining all those feeders.

Elwin had finally clapped his hands on his knees. "Look, you lift out the little tray, fill it up, and slip it back in. It's simple!"

Dunning had politely stuck to his guns. "The maintenance people won't like it, Elwin. Having to fill those feeders all the time, then removing all of them every time the windows are cleaned."

"How often do they clean those windows? And who's paying their salaries anyway?"

"Well, they're supposed to be cleaned monthly, but there's been such a turnover this year."

"Hey, what if I filled them? You know, as a volunteer."

"Well, that gets into liability."

Elwin fell silent. Dunning's face, with furrowed imploring brow and small set lips, all but disappeared before his eyes. His mind had become absorbed in a quick estimation of the number of occasions in his lifetime when he'd witnessed sound plans undone by laziness and stupidity concealed by a thin coating of dime-store logic. He felt his own face redden as his thoughts roared off into mysterious sectors of maddening inquiry, huddled dark questions whose answers probably lay on the other side of the grave. What an impoverished age!, he concluded. It seemed that the mission of the Dunnings of the world was to calculate the minimum level of service due to others. What was their fear? That if you gave the old folks a birdfeeder then next they'd be clamoring for an aviary or a brood of free-range chickens? He

was getting very hot. He dropped his head forward to cool off. When he was ready to speak again, he found that he'd closed his eyes. When he opened them, Dunning was gone.

Later, Elwin concluded that Margaret had been enlisted by Dunning to talk some sense into him, appeal to him, make him more reasonable, aka pliable. Dunning had once used her to try to talk him into submitting more fully to the ministrations of the paid staff, instead of insisting on doing every little thing on his own, such as fetching his eat-in meals rather than calling down for them to be delivered. It had been just after Margaret said, "You get so upset about the littlest things" that he made the slip and called her Betsy. He had been visited by recollections of go-arounds with his sister, decades ago, when she was trying to manage the family like a third parent. And Margaret even looked like Betsy had back then: the careful hair-do, and the buttoned-up blouses and inevitable cardigan, even in summer.

Still, something made him want to keep trying with his only daughter. The children of so many of his homemates seemed to be motivated by a kind of spiritual anemia feeding vicariously on the last-dash intensity of the deathbed. He believed that Margaret was prompted instead by the conviction that her own life, with its wholesome cycles and satisfying stability, could be adapted for any personality. Always he felt the weight of her ungranted wishes upon the two of them.

"Margie, Harold Dunning just wants a hassle-free existence. Like with those birdfeeders. Couldn't be bothered."

"Maybe he thought it would be a waste, Dad. People probably would just get tired of them in a month or so."

Elwin looked at Margaret carefully. Sometimes talking to her was like talking to someone from another planet. How could she for one moment imagine that anyone except the worst of his sad, imprisoned, and in more than a few cases, totally immobile homemates would ever tire of seeing small, beautifully colored, exquisitely shaped creatures flitting to and from the proposed feeders? Kids tired of such things but not aging adults. His whole being sagged to think of the distance between her appraisal and the reality of living on the brink of extinction in a nursing home. To see chickadees, goldfinches, cardinals, nuthatches, wrens, even common sparrows, flashing like bits of life itself within reaching distance of these old fastened bodies.... Birdfeeders and other such improvements should be "mandatory fixtures in nursing homes"--so he should have said to Dunning when he'd had the chance. It should be federal law that every nursing home--sorry, *assisted living facility*--face a school yard or public playground so that children could be seen. The old--oh sorry, *seniors*--should have windows on life, vividly lived, instead of mood-altering drugs and TV sets.

How could one ever explain these matters to someone with a mentality like Margaret's? It all exhausted him finally. It would make better sense for him to just go to sleep.

He *did* go to sleep. When he raised his head, the room was empty and a comforter had been laid across him and pressed up under his chin. His aloneness struck him with a greater force than usual. A few weeks before, his suitemate had died in the middle of the night. The sound of his dying had awakened Elwin; he thought the man was just having a bad dream, breathing like that, but then he started gasping. Elwin pressed the call button forever it seemed while the gasping turned to frightened cries. Staff began to accumulate and flail and

stream around each other as Sam was bundled up and wheeled away, never to return. Since that night, Elwin had been stalling Dunning about taking on a new suitemate.

Now, the evening aide for his wing tapped on his open door and said, "Dinner time, Elwin!" She always paused in the doorway for a smile from him which he always, after some deliberation, supplied. He supposed that the moment of deliberation might suggest that he did not recognize her.

"I know, Jeannie, thank you. And how are *we* this evening?" He used the euphemistic "we" with a wry pitch that made his favorite nurses smile.

"Just fine. Are you coming to bingo tonight?"

He laughed quietly because she always asked him that. "No, no. My bingo days are over." At one time, for about a month, he'd been an avid and enthusiastic player, managing four or five cards himself while keeping an eye on those of several of his slower homemates. But it was gambling, wasn't it?--he'd come to recognize the sullen power of its attraction as that of any addiction, time-killers by any other name.

After the aide had gone, he pushed from the chair to his feet and started for the dining hall. In the corridor he walked along as briskly as he was able with one hand sliding along the rail to keep the weight off his bad hip joint. Each hallway had such a railing, and it was Elwin's conviction that such an imaginative installation had once been the suggestion of a resident such as himself, and probably one with a similar bum hip.

Elwin's particular hip was the result of a poorly healed fracture, the result in turn of a simple fall from a chair that he'd been standing on to watch a naked neighbor washing at her bathroom sink. It had been a moment of compelling and unmitigated voyeurism, seven years

past already. His wife had been alive then. He'd had the brilliant idea of peering high up between his own bathroom curtains to avoid detection. He'd gotten a long eyeful of that honey-colored beauty across their separating isthmus of lawn before he'd lost his balance and come down hard, the flimsy curtains in hand. His wife found him, injured and embarrassed.

"What in the world...?" she'd cried.

"I was fixing the light!"

But seeing her puzzled, fluttery look at the perfectly fine light fixture, he blurted out, "No, I mean the curtains!"

He remembered every detail of the episode as he shuffled down the hallway of Applewood Homes, and, in fact, began to giggle at the absurdity of his explanation to his wife. The giggles rose to serious proportions, actually robbing him of breath. Finally, he had to stop walking. What a ridiculous thing to say! Writhing on the bathroom floor, holding a bent curtain rod in one hand and completely swathed in downed curtains, and announcing that he'd been trying to fix the light, no, the curtains. The expressions on his wife's face! She had looked through the naked window and there was the naked neighbor staring back at her. All at once he was laughing helplessly to himself, but squeakily because he was trying to conceal it.

Two female aides passed him. "Are you all right, Mr. Conway?" asked the taller one. They brushed on, smiling over their shoulders, and then faced frontwards, briefly joined arms, and burst out laughing. Their laughter bounced off the hard beige walls.

In the dining room Elwin discovered that Holland Oatley had not come down to dinner again. He sat down and flagged an aide from Holland's wing and inquired about him. The

nurse said that she'd tried to persuade Holland to come, but he was still sitting in the TV room when she'd left the wing.

"TV's a drug," said Elwin. "Strong as any other, I'll bet. They should do a study, they'd find withdrawal symptoms and everything. Anyway, Holland's suicidal, you know."

"Oh, no. I would not say such a thing."

"Really. The colostomy bag was a terrible blow. He's a terminally proud man."

"Terminally proud?"

She was from one of the islands and had a lovely accent.

"My terminology, describes someone who'd rather die than do certain things."

"Oh my," she said.

He smiled at her. She was about thirty-five. She had a family, a husband and a bunch of kids who crammed into a little car every evening and came to get her.

"You're Marie, right?"

"Maria."

Elwin nodded and tapped the table top with one bent finger braced by a thumb.

"Holland's lost in some place in his brain, my dear. One day, the president of a big company, then, boom!, a widower, a retiree, and then a cancer victim. It's like coming down stairs on your head."

Maria laughed hard, raising her hand to her mouth and disturbing her calm posture for just a moment. "How you talk, Mr. Elwin! Oh my how you talk!"

Should he preach at her that the very old have losses just piling up in their lives? A man like Holland had big holes in him, and no easy ways to fill them.

Maria gave him a little bow and strolled off and Elwin was left alone for the moment with his thoughts. He believed that sometimes you had to do certain things. And mostly the things you *had* to do bunched up on the young and old sides of your life. The things he'd had to do when young were travel, flirt with women, drive fast, fight the Koreans, keep a good job, support the union cause.... Now, a very different set of must-do's were crowding forward to be considered. Assert his desires, was one of them--loudly, and with a set expression. Speak his mind on everything that mattered to him, at once and directly, was another. Few of the old imperatives of decorum meant anything to him anymore. Most of them needed to be smashed completely, at every possible opportunity.

Elwin felt gloom rolling up around him. Yes, he thought, when people come to Applewood it's not for a temporary stay. They come here to be cared for while waiting out the remaining portions of their lives. They come here to die. But gloomier still to Elwin was that even here, at the last stop before death's door, he might still be wedding himself to unworkable ideas. It perplexed him how life remained so unfamiliar a territory, always like a new town with too many street signs missing. All his life he'd been a fighter and a pusher--local zoning, third party politics, green space, quality control--and always by the impetus of certain believed-in ideas. But many of these ideas had not held up over time. He'd once thought Ronald Reagan to be the model of the humble public servant, and abortion issues continued to muddle in his brain. He'd believed, for example, that nobility of spirit took only one form, perhaps to be defined as stoic. But now, whenever he drifted about in his

memories, he could envision dozens of occasions during his marriage when he could have easily enriched his wife's existence by simply sharing more of his inner life with her. Now she was dead.

The gloom cut short his appetite, which came irregularly as it was. He ended up eating very quietly among Ellen and a sampling of her regulars, smiling and nodding at points to give the impression that he was paying closer attention than he was. Later, when he walked back to his room, he had to pass the function hall where they were already setting up for bingo. The administration couldn't abide the idea of bird feeders, but somehow assigning staff hours to a big noisy mindless game of bingo every other night made sense to them. In three separate rooms, one in each wing, huge TV sets went from dawn to midnight seven days a week. It was warehousing was what it was. They stored the dying here.

He made his way back slowly to his room, occasionally peering in at the few others who had chosen to remain in their rooms, or were so far beyond the capacity to choose that they were simply parked there. The ones wheeled out into the halls he often greeted and even touched. He shook their hands or pressed their shoulders. Some nodded at him, some spoke, some brushed his hand away, others just sat. Surely some of these fellow old people were as locked into confusion or arrested by regret as he.

In his room, Elwin sat down and picked up a book, but soon dropped it on his bed. He sat back in his chair and floated among clear memories of his sister, Betsy, when the two of them were growing up in Providence, Rhode Island. The energy they'd had back then! He remembered the Saturdays when they hung around the company where their father, a jeweler, had worked. The whirring of tiny, high-speed machinery; the smell of hot flux and

vaporized wax; the sight of their father and a few others in brightly lit spaces within glass partitions set throughout the big dark building. The jewelers worked with frightening concentration, peering intently through glasses with extra lenses swung up on straight, brittle-looking struts. And all the thousands of little boxes! He and Betsy would sneak outside with fistfuls of them and run wild through the downtown where the channels ran right through the city. They'd drop the boxes over the cast iron rails, pimped with rivets, then walk along, making up stories about houseboats and barges and sometimes bombing the boxes with rocks. A direct hit would pop the top off a bobbing, seaborne box. Some would swamp and sink.

Something was distracting him. Was that music he heard in the hallway? Could the bingo be over already? He looked to the clock on the wall, but of course that was not the correct time. The clocks were not wired to a central system but powered by separate batteries that weakened at different rates or died altogether; you never knew what time it was in this place. He needed a pocket watch, he reminded himself. Something that kept time and had a face large enough to accommodate his eyesight. Maybe he could ask Margaret to get him one. You used to get the things for about ten bucks at Ace Hardware stores. A task like that was something she could latch onto.

The music continued. He rose as if beckoned and walked out into the hallway. For a moment, the notes were drowned out by sounds of commotion which Elwin recognized as typical bingo hysteria. When those noises subsided, there was the music again--a single voice looping easily through a sonorous grid of chords. It seemed to come from the doorway that he was now approaching.

Inside the room an ancient woman he didn't recognize sat crumpled in a wheelchair. Her head seemed to grow from the center of her chest, and just below her chin, stretching between her thin hands, was a silver radio. It looked cold and heavy, that machine. It lay across her stick-thin legs with only a thin layer of dressing gown to cushion them. The woman looked at him quizzically, her long fish's mouth turned forcibly down and her brows furled over the top of her eyeglasses. The music played on.

"That's beautiful," said Elwin, coming forward into the room. "You must be a new arrival."

The woman blinked and pulled the machine closer to her chest.

"Did you record that yourself? They used to have people come here and perform, you know."

The woman did not reply. She fumbled with the machine for a moment, then snapped it off and hugged it to her middle.

"Hey..."

Someone else was in the room now, and Elwin turned to find one of the staff reaching towards him. Her name was Mandy, or Nancy, or something like that.

"Mr. Conway, were you invited in here?"

The question didn't register at first, or rather it did but it seemed like more than one question.

"The music..."

"Mr. Conway, you're disturbing Mrs. Freeley."

The attendant was turning him right around on his feet by walking around him with his arm in her two hands. After his deployment in Korea, he and a few of his buddies lucked into a stopover in Rome. All of a sudden they were walking through palaces and museums, all of them twisting their caps in their hands. In one enclosed courtyard there had been a statue of a beautiful little girl, just about half life size, and it had been mounted on an axle set in its tall pedestal. Its one bare arm was shiny from being touched and turned by so many people.

"I was trying to..."

"Well, you know you're not supposed to enter rooms uninvited."

"You think I was going to steal her damned machine!"

"I'm not saying that, and you don't need to raise your voice."

"I'm not yelling!"

Back in his room he fumed to himself. He sat in his chair, pulling on his fingers one at a time. He remembered an occasion over a year ago when a young man, a boy really, had come and sung for all the residents. He had been very moved by the performance. It wasn't so much the actual singing as the demeanor of the boy. He just *sang*, and when he wasn't singing he just said what he wanted to--right out, words springing from his head unrehearsed and unadorned and they were always the right words. It had been a revelation--a glimpse of the best of the new. If that easy, trusting, world-by-the-tail bravado was the result of tumbled social taboos, then so be it, thought Elwin. He had gradually concluded that this young person could do whatever he wanted, and the excitement of that thought shortened his breaths.

Unfortunately, the memory was clouded by an incident that those in authority would probably conclude was another instance of his irrational behavior. In a wild attempt to

support what in the boy's own self would probably be nothing more than involuntary responses, Elwin had seized his hand and pressed a five-dollar bill into it. (He still dressed and carried a wallet.) The boy looked at him, laughed, shook his curly head, blushed around his sparse beard, thanked him, laughed again, and loped off. If Elwin had only said "Keep it up!" or "Never change!" or something like that, perhaps his sentiment would have been pressed home instead of merely shocking and embarrassing the poor kid.

The trouble was, he didn't know how to act. He scared old ladies in their rooms, puzzled and embarrassed young performers, continually frustrated his daughter. He'd *never* known how to act, not even as a little kid when free spiritedness was expected. His early teachers, mostly nuns with a variety of different headdresses, probably concluded that he was a spirit too free to be in synch with anyone else. The nuns were constantly holding square dances, and round and round the children went, boys in brown knickers and girls in blue dresses, and sure enough, eventually, he'd be alone at the edge of the circle and some poor girl whirling off without an arm to link with. The circle would slowly fall apart and everything would grind to a halt.

The nuns didn't know what to make of him so they always marked his conduct "U" for "Unsatisfactory" on report cards. His mother was alarmed but open to suggestions. She must have seen him for what he was--earnest, passionate, and confused--because she never punished him, but would often stare into his face as if looking for clues. Sometimes he misinterpreted her looks; she might be wondering if he were some strange boy who'd wandered into her house. Eventually, after yet another report card with a heart-stopping "U" in the conduct column, he'd concocted the mad scheme of running away from home as a way

to improve his behavior. He explained his plans to his mother in a sealed letter which he left on the bed after he'd packed: He would wear his school clothes at all times, and would wash and sleep in gas station rest rooms. He'd do his homework there too, using the toilet lid as a desk top (it all made perfect sense), and that's why he packed all of his books with his clothes in a big suitcase. At all other times he would wander about practicing good conduct, whatever that was. His sister Betsy caught him in the midst of his preparations and ran downstairs to tell his mother. He had to pass them both in the kitchen to get out the back door. His sister yanked on their mother's apron shouting "Mom, look Mom, he's leaving!," but his mother kept right on mashing potatoes in a pot on the stove. It was dusk, in winter, the food on the stove was steaming.

He'd gotten about half a block from the house when the cold and the weight of the suitcase began to erode his determination. Pride forced him farther down the block, but he had to keep putting down the suitcase every few steps. Snow swirled thinly around him. Finally, cold and tired both, he turned back. He had to walk past his mother again. She was still at the stove, stirring away. The warm, cozy kitchen was suffused with delicious smells.

Upstairs on his bed he'd sat in his coat and stared at the wall. He stared at the wall and hoped his mother would come up to see him. He couldn't go to see her, just couldn't. His letter to her, explaining his plan, was open on the bed. Finally, he heard her footstep on the stairs and things inside him began to break up. He couldn't even look at her. When her arms came around him he fell against her and burst into tears.

"I don't know what to do!" he wailed.

"I know, Elwin, I know," she said, and just kept rocking him.

Back in the present moment, Elwin found himself alone in his Applewood room, and without his mother. She'd been dead now for over twenty years, but in the quiet empty room her presence seemed palpable to him. He sat in his chair, pulsing with gratefulness, his eyes misted, missing her with a terrible keen pain to the heart. His mother had kept his running away letter all her life; he doubted if in all that time he'd ever really learned how to act.

Later he was awakened in his chair by Leon, the big Haitian night attendant, who'd come to maneuver him into his bed.

"I don't see enough of you, Leon," he said weakly.

"No sir. That's the problem working nights."

The next day one of the social workers came to see him. Her name was Alison Cullicut, and he'd seen her before. He knew what was up. She was called in when certain matters required "conflict resolution," a new discipline that was all the rage. He'd seen her go into action when one of the homemates had feuded with another over the alleged hoarding of magazines. Another time she'd appeared in the hallways after a loud squabble, the second in a series, among a homemate and relatives over the provisions of a will.

She stood in the doorway, pressed blouse, pleated wool skirt, and wine-colored loafers.

"Mr. Conway?"

"Elwin's the name, Miss."

Alison Cullicut had a small private office where soon the two of them sat across a desk from one another. She started out with some predictable introductory material. A certain pattern had been noticed in his behavior recently, and by several people (numbers lent credibility, it would not be a matter of his word against so and so's.) In certain people's

opinions, things had gotten to the point where there was sufficient reason to at least bring some observations to his attention, nip things in the bud, and, more important, channel his "creative" and "enthusiastic" energies in a more "productive direction" (he recognized positive-sounding vernacular when he heard it; it had been used to open up manipulative elbow room in union negotiations.) Did he wish to participate in a group workshop that she conducted twice a week?

He stared into her seamless face, bright as a new china plate. Make no mistake though, something in her was as hard as stoneware. She had merely to jot down certain notes on her forms and matters would escalate: mandatory appointments with the shrink, art therapy classes, or, worst of all, medication.

"Wouldn't you rather be doing something else?" he said.

She came forward at the ready, plopping her forearms down on her desk blotter. "Nope. I love my job."

That struck him as a profound statement, chock-full of implications. By comparison, then, his recent behavior was involuntary, the manifestations of a personality locked in misery? And my, my, to love a job where you spent hours with the most indomitable types. Bitter women giving endless vent to seven decades of oppression, infantile old men flinging their moods about in turgid rant; the confused, the caved-in, the heroic but defeated, the truly great but merely old, and then, of course, the truly nuts.

"Miss Cullicut, I like what I'm doing too. Mr. Dunning and I are going at it, I know, but..."

"It's not appropriate to just walk into another person's room, Mr. Conway, especially a female's. That might be perceived as..."

Margaret came into the room, still in her coat. She clutched her handbag before her as if it contained a gun.

"I've asked your daughter to come here because..."

He fell back. "Jesus..."

Alison Cullicut had a small window in her office. Elwin could see gray winter sky interwebbed by thin bare branches. It was a big world out there.

"The group sessions are a good way to check in with others. My experience is that participants discover that they're not alone with certain feelings..."

Elwin could smell lunch--macaroni and cheese, he guessed. He was very hungry all of a sudden. He'd only picked at his last two meals.

"His sister Betsy once called me about a letter he'd written her. I don't know if I should mention it..."

"As far as your reluctance to share a room..."

He cut in. "Why don't we get to approve our roommates? I went through hell with my last one. All he did was talk about America going down the crapper. His words, for God's sake."

A whooshing noise started up from a vent, hot dry air pumped in from somewhere.

"I think you should see Dr. Mallory again. Your appetite hasn't improved and..."

"It's been that way for years," Margaret put in. "My husband thinks..."

The night he'd run away from home, there had been three pots steaming on the stove. Potatoes, green beans, and one more thing. He could almost taste it, but he wasn't quite sure...

"I could suggest to Mr. Dunning that he instigate some kind of roommate screening. Perhaps a questionnaire that could be reviewed..."

Elwin thumped his hands down on the arms of his chair. "That guy died in his sleep. I woke up and he was gasping, slow at first then faster and faster. He sounded like a train over there. He stopped, choked, died. I didn't know what to do! I froze in my bed, flicking that damned call switch forever. Nobody came. Hey, if somebody's going to die right across the room from me, let it be somebody I can like. Let it be somebody I can take in my goddam arms."

The two women were looking at him in silence. *Gravy! That's what had been in the third pot. Wonderful home-made gravy, the kind made from real drippings.*

He had lunch with Margaret in the cafeteria. She sat across from him with a smile of relief as he lit into a second helping of macaroni and cheese. "Conflict always did wonders for your appetite," she said.

"The trouble is," said Elwin, "people assume that anybody can be made to fit in. Maybe this just isn't the right place for me."

"Dad, you're such an ingrate. We thought this would be the perfect place for you. You've always been such a social person." She laughed, then added "In your way."

Elwin looked up from his plate. "I won't ask what way that is. But, sweetheart, I'm grateful. You did the best you could."

"Well, don't talk as if this place is a failure! It's too early to tell. You haven't even been here a year yet."

Elwin's attention drifted though he remained aware of his daughter's peevish look. The whole problem with places like Applewood was their basic premise that if they could just find the right combination, smooth off a rough edge here and there, everybody could fit together. He thought, It takes such a load of maintenance to run a place like this! From what he'd been told, it had been even worse at Betsy's nursing home in Seattle. He wanted to tell Betsy, or rather Margaret, that Applewood was little more than a minimum-security prison--except they had to use psychology and medication in place of bars and locks--but he doubted she would appreciate the thesis.

"Are you all right, Dad?"

"I'm not sure. That little twit back there, with her phony baloney smile. She's got her work cut out for her if she wants to grease my axle."

"You're being very unfair. Al and I went through a great deal to find this place for you. You didn't want to keep living with us, you'll recall." She looked as if she might cry. One minute laughing, one minute about to cry; he couldn't keep track of her.

Elwin put down his fork and reached across the table and patted his daughter's wrist.

"Hey, hey, hey. You're great. Stop being so responsible for everything."

But she was responsible for him, and that was the trouble. He sat in the chair in his room after she'd left and thought for a long time. It was Margaret and Al who'd come up with the idea of selling his house. That was the conclusion they reached when faced with the mangy state of the lawn and the peeling paint. He hadn't minded any of those things. He'd

thought to get a dog to make the house seem less empty, but they all pointed out the need to walk the animal on icy nights and he with a weak hip. He tried an apartment for a while--first floor entry, not too far from the stores--but the second winter was pretty rough. He got confused while driving, scraped a car in a parking lot, and whoosh! No more car. People didn't clear their walks anymore, and trips to the store took on the dimensions of minor expeditions. Getting to the bank, getting to the doctors.... He really hadn't minded but the sight of him struggling along affected people. Some of them must have gotten after Margaret. Eventually, she started driving him around so much that he should have bought her a chauffeur's cap.

She and Al insisted that he move in with them, what with Gerrid in college and out of the house. He almost bit--Christ, with all the big and little tasks they were taking on for him he might as well be residing in close range. Burden, plain and simple, but then it would be 24/7 if he moved in with them. And what, the three of them negotiating TV programs every night, Gerrid circling with edgy politeness when he was home for college breaks? No thank you.

When Betsy lost her husband, everyone talked about Elwin's teaming up with her on either coast, but then her health began to fail so quickly and, within a year, she'd slipped away from them. But, but, but.... The hour rolled up when the Applewood presented itself as the only solution.

Dunning came by Elwin's room later that same afternoon. "I was talking with Allison," he explained, "and she thinks you've got a point about pre-approval of new roommates. We screen in the office, but maybe we don't include residents in the process enough."

"Huh. Well, now you're talkin."

But Dunning had something else on his mind. His big head was bobbing about like a toy's, his straight red hair flopping on his forehead. "In the meantime, though, I need a favor."

Elwin laughed and said, "Okay, okay, so you've got someone you want to move in here?"

Someone who'd been slated for a private room, until a financial snafu was discovered.

Mr. Delhaney was installed in Elwin's suite three days later. He was tall, very thin, and bent into a C-shape by the habit of standing stooped with his knees tightly locked. His skin had a peculiar grayish pallor that struck Elwin right off. The man's skin seemed to pull the light from the room. It glowed, glowed gray, while the rest of the room dimmed just slightly.

Almost to enhance that quality, Mr. Delhaney stood a few feet from the window, looking out. He took that position immediately after unpacking, which, because no one had come with him, he did alone. He stood by the window again after lunch, for nearly two hours, and then again during the last light of the day before dinner.

At one point Elwin said, "Why not have a seat?"

Delhaney didn't look at him. "Couldn't see out then."

Days later, Delhaney was still looking out the window. Periodically he would sigh.

Towards dinner time of the third night, he suddenly flopped back into his chair and, with the last light of the day pulled into his gray skin, moaned "I knew I'd end up this way."

Elwin looked up from his magazine. "What way?"

Delhaney looked at him briefly, then turned his head back to the window with a weak smile. To Elwin, the room sagged with Delhaney's awesome sadness. The man was an

emotional black hole! Every laugh, every ray of sunlight, every air-borne nutrient would be sucked into his empty center. This guy was going to kill him.

Elwin paced the halls most of that evening after supper. It was some time before he admitted to himself that he was planning to escape from Applewood. He didn't fit in, and that was that. It was time to go. But where, exactly? He'd figure that out later. Going would require more than a little planning, he couldn't just walk out the front door. Leon or Jacob sat at the desk there, all night. Besides, they locked all the doors at some point. He could drop his packed suitcase out the window, then retrieve it later--except that the windows weren't the kind that opened.

He wandered towards the kitchen, peering back where the cooks worked. There was a big double steel door back there, with a single steel door beside it. The single door had a crash bar, but later on, he discovered that they looped a locked chain through the swinging doors that lead to the kitchen. Great. In the event of a fire, all the old folks would cook. Dunning and his crew were evidently more worried about escapes and pilfering than fires. It was definitely time to go.

Just before he fell asleep, he realized that he could not take his suitcase, stored at the back of his closet for holiday visits to his daughter's house. He'd never get out the door with it. Instead, he'd have to smuggle items out under his coat, stash them somewhere, then later on pack them all in a nylon tote or something similar. He concluded with excitement that he was getting somewhere with his planning. Soon Delhaney could be just as alone as he evidently wished to be.

The nylon tote proved to be elusive. All the next day Elwin combed the halls, peering into rooms when the coast was clear. While he walked, he made a mental list of what he would need to take with him. Just enough to live on, no more. He'd have to be mobile. He'd already concluded that he'd probably be living in and out of shelters, and he knew of one to start with--the Shattuck Hospital out by Franklin Park, just a few miles away. Years ago, he'd seen men lining up in the early afternoon for a night's bed. At some point, he could get some money from his modest bank account.

By dusk, he'd filched two plastic shopping bags from a store room. Later, he forced himself to eat a big dinner, then slept fitfully. He had a brief but frightening dream in which he was lost, and alone, but there was an element of adventure to it, and when he awoke the chronic, drifting sadness he'd been feeling had lifted away.

On the final morning, he took a short walk along the front of the building, then, looking around, stepped briefly behind the short bank of low hedges and drew a shopping bag and some folded clothes from under his overcoat. At lunch he ate as much as he could then took another walk. This time he was joined by two other homemates, both males in baggy coats, intrepid types like himself. One of them swayed in a walker. Behind them, Elwin could see a new aide, a plump young woman in a parka, smoking a cigarette beside the front door. Abruptly, she shivered, stamped out the cigarette, and went inside. Elwin tried to outwait the two homemates, but they appeared to be dug in as if they were engaged in a competition. Finally, Elwin walked over to where his other clothes were hidden. He drew out the final batch from under his coat, then spent several confusing minutes balancing his belongings between the two bags. His hands shook so that the plastic bag of toiletries rattled, and the

leaves beneath his feet crackled noisily; however, no one besides the two curious homemates seemed to be witnessing the event. Satisfied, Elwin straightened up with both bags in hand and walked back to the sidewalk.

"Not a word," he said to his two witnesses. And with that, he turned and headed down the walk in the direction of the Shattuck. He stepped as quickly as he was able, heart pounding, and did not look behind him.

He had gotten a good twenty yards down the walk when he heard footsteps behind him. The new aide came up alongside of him. "Excuse me, please. Where are you going?"

Elwin stopped and regarded her. Her smooth cheeks were pinking in the cool air. "That's my business," he said.

"You have to go back."

Though he felt embarrassed and disappointed, he allowed himself to be turned about and lead back up the walk. He wanted to blurt something in anger, but he couldn't find the exact words. Up ahead, a cab was laboriously discharging an old woman. A well-dressed man was aiming her towards a wheelchair. Elwin stopped suddenly.

"I'm not taking another step until I speak with Mr. Dunning," he said.

"Well, we can do that inside..."

"Not another step!" he cried, sharply, his heart beating.

The aide walked away, then turned back to him, then trotted off with a sigh. When she was nearly to the front doors, Elwin headed towards the cab. Without looking at anyone, he slipped through the open door as easily as he could manage. "I need to get to the airport," he announced.

The cab driver, a dark-skinned man with a braided cap, nodded and drove off immediately. With effort, Elwin pulled his wallet from his pocket and looked through the few bills. "I'm going to use the subway," he said. "Just bring me to the nearest one." The driver nodded again, but snuck a look at him in the rearview mirror.

The numbers on the meter began to rise quickly. Too quickly. "This is fine!" said Elwin, showing some bills at the driver.

The cab driver looked outside. "This is no place."

"It's fine. Stop. Stop now."

He found himself on a street aimed in the general direction of Franklin Park. Before he set off, he pulled his felt hat of twenty-odd years harder down on his head. Its familiar fit comforted him, which was just as well because as he walked he grew colder by the minute and his hip began to hurt. "Better get used to it," he muttered to himself.

At the Shattuck, a long, ragged line of men had already formed. Those nearest him stared at him with curiosity. The two bags he carried seemed to be the average number. Others had none, but others had as many as four. One surprisingly young guy stood with a pack frame balanced against his leg. Elwin snuck peeks into several of the open bags. Some of the contents made sense: a can of Sterno, an old greasy parka. Other items made little sense, if any: a life jacket, a paperback copy of *The Joy of Cooking*.

The line eventually began to move forward. After a few moments, Elwin could see ahead through the doorway to where a man of about thirty-five sat at a table in his hooded sweatshirt. The table fronted row upon row of simple steel beds. He discovered that people

were signing in for the night. The guy directly in front of him tried to sign in for a friend, but the attendant snapped at him.

"Bob, we're not going to talk about this again."

"Roger, I'm telling you. He's at the clinic."

"Fine. Then have him get down here as soon as he can."

The man began muttering curses while rattling a sack of his belongings as if to move on. But he did not move on. The attendant, Roger, looked around to Elwin and waved him forward. When Elwin hesitated, the attendant said to the angry man, "Would you like me to cross off your name? I've done it before."

"And you'll probably do it again, you bastard."

Roger turned around and called back to a heavy-set woman in her late twenties who was stacking flat bags of bedsheets on crude wooden shelves. "Heidi, will you come up here and help Bob to leave?"

Heidi dropped what she was doing with a pronounced sigh and walked quickly forward. At the same time, the troublemaker turned around and walked right into Elwin, then dropped back and shook his bags as if he'd run into him. "Watch yourself," he sneered at him.

"Leave it alone, buddy," called a man farther back.

Elwin found the two attendants staring at him. Roger said to him, "Are you looking for someone?"

He was surprised by the question. "No," he said, and took off his hat. "I'm looking for a place to stay."

"Look out, he's Undercover," said a raspy voice behind him. An asthmatic laugh welled up and ended in a cough.

Heidi folded her arms and exchanged a glance with Roger through her no-nonsense black plastic eyeglasses. Roger's eyes came back to Elwin. "You've never been here before, have you?"

"No, never."

"What about any of the other shelters?"

"No."

"Could you just have a seat over there with Heidi and fill out a few papers? You can leave your bags behind the table here."

Heidi kept her arms folded and turned slightly, bowing towards the back of the room. "Let's go back there to the desk."

Elwin stared down at the black-and-white linoleum squares, waiting for her to move ahead of him. But she stood in place, and finally gestured stiffly for him to go first. He felt compelled to obey, feeling strange every foot of the way to be leading a lady. He willed his limp to a minimum. They arrived beside the desk, where he found a gray metal side chair. He wanted badly to sit, his legs weakened by all the walking, but he waited until Heidi moved around him and seated herself before he took the chair. She looked over at him and smiled.

"Can I have your name?"

"Elwin Conway, Miss."

"Mr. Conway, may I ask how you came to be applying to this agency for shelter?"

Elwin thought for a moment, then replied: "Does a person have to state a reason?" In his lap, his fingers worked around the brim of his hat.

Heidi's eyebrows raised. "We have a very tight budget here. We have to make certain that we are serving only the truly homeless."

"Well, that's me. I have no home."

"We also have to be certain that we protect people from this place as well. Any man walks in here smelling of soap and with less than a day's growth of beard usually turns out to be an easy mark for some of our tougher clients, if you get my meaning."

Elwin laughed out loud. "Don't you worry, I can take care of myself. I was in a war, you know." He paused for a moment. "It looks crazy, I know, but I really don't have any place to stay."

The woman stared at him closely. Elwin turned about in the metal chair, partly to stall a bit and get his thoughts together. He could see back to where Roger was sitting before the line of homeless men. The front-runners were pressing loosely up to the table. Some of the men in line stood hunched and listless, their clothes gray and stained, missing buttons, sprung zippers pinned over. One man wore a parka with a long rip in the shoulder. A fat wad of insulation material leaked from it. More than a few, however, looked pretty spry and kempt and several were surprisingly young.

"Where did you...live last?" Heidi asked him.

Elwin brought his head around. "At a rest home. But my benefits wouldn't cover it, so I got turned out."

"Were those Social Security benefits?"

"Yes, I think so."

The woman leaned forward and pressed her forearms forcefully down upon the top of the desk. "What happened? Did the home raise their rates or did SSA revise your allotment levels?"

"Yes."

"Which?"

"The first thing, I think."

Heidi snickered knowingly. "That's illegal, Mr. Conway. The contract you signed with them guarantees you a specific rate, usually for the rest of your life." She shook her head.

"We should get somebody from Legal Services to look into this."

"It wasn't anything official," said Elwin hurriedly. "I mean, it wasn't an official rest home." He gripped his hat harder to keep his hands from flipping about.

Heidi's eyes opened wider. "You mean they aren't licensed?" She shook her head. "I'm so sick of these fly-by-night operations. They're a bunch of vultures."

"Well, it was a sort of private arrangement..."

"Were there nurses there? Did anyone administer medication to you, or to anyone else?"

Elwin had rolled his hat into a tight tube. "I just need a place to spend the night. Can't we finish this some other time?"

Heidi peered at him for a moment. "Okay. I'll hash this out with Roger later. Can you read?"

When Elwin answered yes, firmly, she gave him a chewed pen and a clipboard with a two-sided form affixed to it. He searched his coat for his reading glasses, which had mysteriously made their way into an unfamiliar pocket. The form asked about earlier addresses, sources of income, criminal record, if any, and medical history. It asked questions that had never been posed to him before: Did he suffer from skin irritations, open sores, chronic cough? Had he been tested for HIV? Did he use drugs or alcohol and was he receiving or had he ever received treatment for substance abuse? Were there other names he was known by? Twice Heidi left him to continue her other chores, returning briefly to ask if he needed help. When he was finished, he held his breath as she sat at the desk and reviewed the form. Presently she looked up and smiled at him and said, "Great!" Then they rose together and the same impasse occurred as earlier over who would go first.

"Please," he said, motioning to her. Then, with a dull shock he realized that she was operating according to a procedure; staff did not turn their backs on shelter-seekers.

At the front table, Roger wrote out a slip and held it out to Elwin. "Here's your pass, Mr. Conway, your numbered bed is in the corner there. Be sure to read the rules printed on the back."

"Thank you!" He looked around in vain for numbers on the beds. It would be wonderful to lie down for a while. "There's no sheets..."

Roger replied without looking up at him. "The night people will direct you to your bed when you come back at five." Roger spoke without looking up at him.

"Come back?"

"Yes. Read the rules, Mr. Conway."

Elwin walked slowly over to a bench beneath one of the white-washed windows and sat down to read. The light was so pale that he could barely see the print. He was surprised to learn that he could not stay at the shelter except between the hours of 5:30 P.M. and 8:30 A.M. It couldn't be much past 2:30, he had three hours to kill! It seemed that he'd arrived at the sign-up time by pure luck; he might not have gotten a bed. He read on. The rules also listed taboos such as drugs, alcohol, and weapons, and stipulated that he'd be awakened at 6:00 A.M., then showered and fed and out of the place by 8:30.

There was no escape from rules, it seemed. Where would he go for three hours? Outside, the sun was still shining but its place in the sky seemed precarious. He ached suddenly to be back at the Applewood, to surrender to its familiar routines, but he suppressed this desire by striking off for the area around the Forest Hills subway station where he knew there were a few small restaurants.

On the journey there he had to make do with a series of service roads. The station itself was undergoing renovations. Hardhatted men with flags were herding enormous machines through the auto traffic. Most of the operators were kind to Elwin and waited patiently as he shuffled through. Under one of the overpasses, Elwin spied a ragged old woman rolling up a long piece of cardboard, packing up to go.

The restaurant that he chose was an efficient sandwich shop with Formica-top tables and molded plastic chairs. The atmosphere was cheery enough. The kids who ran the place kept a radio going and laughed a lot about trifles. In fact, their carefree mindless chatter was oddly comforting to the old man. It made him consider that his growing fears were exaggerated. He settled back to read a newspaper he'd found on one of the tables and, later,

munched a grilled cheese sandwich and drank too much coffee. With the caffeine singing in his nerves, his reading pace sped up and ultimately tired him. He took breaks, rubbing his eyes carefully. The tinny radio music and, worse, the incessant hype of the announcers, began to wear him down. Time passed with increasing slowness.

By the end of the second hour, the kids who ran the restaurant appeared not to know what to do with him. They kept asking if he wanted anything else. The check stayed before him. Finally, he said to one of them, "Sonny, is it okay if I just sit here for a while? I've got an appointment at five."

"Oh sure, sure," the kid blurted, recoiling a little. He left Elwin's cold, discretely unemptied coffee cup before him. That cup, Elwin reflected, and, later, the neatly piled tip, were the temporary stakes he had on this small area of comfortable territory.

By the time he left the restaurant, it had grown dark, and much colder. In fact, by the half-way point the wind had him shivering. With another few blasts, he felt deeper stirrings of fear. The people who depended on such shelters, how *did* they endure? The cold kept up brutally. It came at him from the sidewalk, rushed at him from the streets; it was waiting for him among the trees of Franklin Park as he limped along. Cold air sifted under his collar, slipped up his sleeves and cuffs.

When he looked up, he had finally reached the Shattuck, but he was shocked to find a crowd of silent people waiting outside the closed entrance. All of them, perhaps thirty in number, ranged across an area of trodden lawn under the light of the security lamps. A man spoke to Elwin immediately.

"They might open early. Sometimes they open early if everything's ready inside."

"Ah, I see."

The man was fairly young, possibly in his thirties. He stood calmly in the cold, hands pushed down into his pants pockets and a yarn cap pulled tightly over his round head.

"You don't look like you've been on the streets long."

"No, first day," Elwin admitted.

"You get used to it. You kind of get the lay of the land, if you know what I mean.

Moving around to the shelters. You just gotta keep an eye peeled with some of the people you run into. Lots of them have been dumped out of the asylums when they closed them all down. Some are druggies. Christ on a bike, they're the worst."

"Why do you move around? What's wrong with this shelter?"

"Oh, you can't stay at any one of them three nights in a row. Didn't you know that? I got a schedule for myself--certain days at Pine Street, certain days at Saint Ambrose. It's okay. I get here early, chum it up with some people to make the time pass. I might head for Miami or New York someday. In New York you can stay at the Armory Shelter day and night, long as you want."

Elwin looked around. They seemed to be the only two people talking. All the rest of the shelter-seekers were mostly bent and quiet, like refugees awaiting the trains that would take them to safety.

At last the door burst open and an attendant hooked it in place. Everyone gathered his things. Elwin looked to the door, looked into the depths of its cold, institutional light. He could see ahead to where a couple of staff members were searching through bags and pockets--probably for the substances and items the rules forbade. Willingly, almost as if trusting in the

personal hand of God, he let himself be drawn forward. The shoulders and elbows of the tightening crowd joined to him and guided him in. The staff within were new strangers, neither Roger nor Heidi were in sight. They went through his shopping bags quickly. They asked to look through the pockets of his coat and he surrendered to their touch as if in a dream.

At his bed, he slid his bags beneath the sagging springs and sat down wearily. His heart, submerged in a thick oil of gloom, lurched spasmodically within his chest. Within a few moments, several of the other shelter-seekers were vying to be his orienteer. An old man with several thick hairs sprouting from his nose and his sweatpants wrapped at the ankles with duct tape advised him to keep an eye on his bags. He had a kind smile. He confided, as if divulging the darkest secret, that he kept her belongings with him at all times, and, true to his word, later on he could be seen coming and going with his bags bouncing against his legs.

A younger fellow, very short and thin with a large canvas hat that came down over his ears, took Elwin by the elbow and escorted him to dinner. The man stank, there was no other word for it. Elwin found himself captured by the fellow, who jabbered at him all through the meal of stew and day-old French bread. The man's inescapable stench quickly displaced the small appetite that Elwin had brought to the table with him. Across from the two of them sat a young man with terrible staring blue eyes.

The stinking man was saying, "My wife was a smart one. When we first got our house, we had to choose between gas and oil. You know, for heat. Well, you know what she did? She called up the gas man and the oil man then she tells me we'll go with whoever gets here first. Now that was a smart woman."

Elwin nodded. "My wife died a few years ago."

His new companion suddenly bent towards him. "They sort of time you in the bathrooms. If you need a butt, do what I do. Get in three or four real deep drags, then stub it out and slip it up on the window sill. Ten, fifteen minutes, you go back and finish it off. Get it?"

"I don't smoke," said Elwin.

The resident second to his right leaned forward and pointed with his spoon. "You gonna finish that stew?"

The lights went out at nine, shocking Elwin despite the half-a-dozen shouted warnings from the staff. It did not become completely dark. In fact, quite a few small lights were left on, probably to facilitate the trips to the bathroom that were to go on all night. But the new dimness sent an unstated command through the room that all in attendance should at least try to fall into unconsciousness. Elwin felt this, and lay back on his bed, exhausted with eyes wide open and staring at the ceiling.

Above him, smuggled cigarette smoke paled the air. It was noisy still. The noises were disquieting because they floated free, their sources invisible. Elwin's senses were left to skitter across a kind of auditory braille. What did some of these sounds mean? Why were pots softly clanking in a corner far from the kitchen and among the beds? He heard shuffling somewhere that almost sounded like dancing. The man in the bed to his right began snoring. Someone coughed, and then someone else, then the second one hacked and spat viciously, once, twice, and again. A quick pattern of hard footsteps started up from a distant corner, clicked past Elwin's bed, and veered in the direction of the spitting man. There were quick sharp words.

When Elwin raised his head, he discovered that the man to his left was kneeling on the floor. The man's joined hands, wrung closed, were thrust out straight before him on his bed and his head was face down between his arms. If he was praying, he was certainly praying hard.

Elwin slipped at last into sleep, but not much later he was awakened by sounds to his left. Someone had drawn his bags from beneath his bed and was quietly going through them. Elwin was not frightened by this realization. Instead, as he listened to the slow, methodical examination of his clothing, he was visited by a saturating sadness. It seemed to him that he, his body and soul, had been opened and his tired old parts were being picked through and strewn about. He was coming apart, dissolving like a corrupting corpse, dead before actually dying. All of him, his memories and meanings and beliefs, were unfastened and drifting off. What was a man after all but a small constellation of relationships--to things and ideas, but even more to other human beings? And where were the beings to which he was affixed, to whose own natures he added a small but surely significant measure of nourishment? Not to his dead wife, or his dead parents and sister, who moved about him like pockets of space filled with aching.

"Find what you need?" Elwin said. The rummager froze and then scampered off.

Sleep in a solid form did not come until the waning hours of the night. When Heidi herself woke him, he had a time of it remembering his whereabouts. She said something to him which he did not understand. She had to repeat it.

"There's someone here to see you, Mr. Conway."

"No."

He fumbled in his pocket for something poking his side. He found his glasses there, without their leather case.

"Mr. Dunning's here from the Applewood to claim you."

"Oh my."

"I'm afraid so. It seems you haven't been telling us the truth."

"I sort of did."

She stood over him, shaking her head. "He's parked out front right now."

"Well, then." Elwin struggled to sit. With his head up, he felt his face go pale and clammy in a way that it hadn't in years. He tried to pull his shoes out from the very bottom of a bag. "I'm afraid I can't...bend," he whispered.

"Here, hold on," said Heidi, and then Roger appeared. The young man knelt and slipped on Elwin's shoes. Then he rose and he and Heidi each took Elwin by an arm. They got him to his feet and turned him towards an unfamiliar door. While he leaned against Roger, Heidi helped him into his coat. Then the door opened before him and he discovered that the world had been covered with a dusting of new-fallen snow. It was bluish from the gray dawn. At the far end of an uncleared walk, Applewood's mini-van waited, chugging exhaust.

The two attendants began to walk him forward, but each held one of his shopping bags as well. Elwin felt his own weight dragging him down. His arms, limp as hoses, began to shift and he veered helplessly towards the lawn. "I'm sorry," he whispered.

He looked up to gauge the distance and there was Dunning himself, charging up the walk with his coat held closed. He came up huffing and stopped before the three of them.

"I'm so glad we found you, Elwin." He took Elwin's arm from Heidi.

"I was going to call." Elwin tried to laugh but made a little choking sound instead. His leg was now useless.

"Let's try this," said Dunning, and Elwin felt himself lifted into the air and slung across Dunning's arms. His head, heavy with sleeplessness, fell against Dunning's shoulder and his thin legs dangled in space. He could hear the younger man's breathing and feel the strength in his legs propelling them towards the van.

A few moments later, someone opened a door and several hands slid him into the passenger seat. They strapped the seatbelt across his chest. The interior of the car was warm, and the heater made a confident chirring sound. The door closed with convincing solidity and Dunning entered, settled himself, and threw the car into gear.

Elwin sighed as the car moved smoothly forward. He looked out the window at the new snow. "Seems I've caused a problem."

"Well, I'm just glad we found you."

They drove for a few moments in silence. Dunning swung the car into the park to cut through it.

Elwin rubbed his eyes. "It never ends, does it?"

"What do you mean, Elwin?"

"You have to keep figuring things, right up to the grave."

He heard a sigh from the younger man. "I'm afraid that might be true, Elwin."

The car swung along the park's winding road, among whitened trees and under blue-gray clouds. The force of the turns pulled Elwin's head from side to side, pulled the thoughts from his mind, pulled him into sleep.

