

graduation — an air of something other than failure about Schacht's not caring enough, something you can't quite define, the way you can't quite remember a word that you know you know, inside — Hal can't quite feel the contempt for Teddy Schacht's competitive slide that would be a pretty much natural contempt in one who cared so dreadfully secretly much, and so the two of them tend to settle for not talking about it, just as Schacht cheerfully wordlessly drives the tow truck on occasions when the rest of the crew are so incapacitated they'd have to hold one eye closed even to see an undoubted road, and consents w/o protest to pay retail for clean quarterly urine, and doesn't say a word about Hal's devolution from occasional tourist to subterranean compulsive, substance-wise, with his Pump Room visits and Visine, even though Schacht deep down believes that the substance-compulsion's strange apparent contribution to Hal's eruptive explosion up the rankings has got to be a temporary thing, that there's like a psychic credit-card bill for Hal in the mail, somewhere, coming, and is sad for him in advance about whatever's surely got to give, eventually. Though it won't be the Boards, Hal'll murder his Boards, and Schacht may well be among those jockeying to sit near him, he'd be the first to admit. On 2 Hal now kicks a second serve to the ad court with so much left-handed top on it that it almost kicks up over Port Washington's #2 guy's head. It's clearly carnage up there on Show Courts 1 and 2. Dr. Tavis will be irrepressible. The gallery is barely even applauding Wayne and Incandenza anymore; at a certain point it becomes like Romans applauding lions. All the coaches and staff and P.W.T.A. parents and civilians in the overhead gallery wear tennis outfits, the high white socks and tucked-in shirts of people who do not really play.

Schacht and his man play.

Both Pat Montesian and Gately's AA sponsor like to remind Gately how this new resident Geoffrey Day could end up being an invaluable teacher of patience and tolerance for him, Gately, as Ennet House Staff.

'So then at forty-six years of age I came here to learn to live by clichés,' is what Day says to Charlotte Treat right after Randy Lenz asked what time it was, again, at 0825. 'To turn my will and life over to the care of clichés. One day at a time. Easy does it. First things first. Courage is fear that has said its prayers. Ask for help. Thy will not mine be done. It works if you work it. Grow or go. Keep coming back.'

Poor old Charlotte Treat, needlepointing primly beside him on the old vinyl couch that just came from Goodwill, purses her lips. 'You need to ask for some gratitude.'

'Oh no but the point is I've already been fortunate enough to *receive*

gratitude.' Day crosses one leg over the other in a way that inclines his whole little soft body toward her. 'For which, believe you me, I'm grateful. I cultivate gratitude. That's part of the system of clichés I'm here to live by. An attitude of gratitude. A grateful drunk will never drink. I know the actual cliché is "A grateful *heart* will never drink," but since organs can't properly be said to imbibe and I'm still afflicted with just enough self-will to decline to live by utter non sequiturs, as opposed to just good old clichés, I'm taking the liberty of light amendment.' He gives with this a look like butter wouldn't melt. 'Albeit grateful amendment, of course.'

Charlotte Treat looks over to Gately for some sort of help or Staff enforcement of dogma. The poor bitch is clueless. All of them are clueless, still. Gately reminds himself that he too is probably mostly still clueless, still, even after all these hundreds of days. 'I Didn't Know That I Didn't Know' is another of the slogans that looks so shallow for a while and then all of a sudden drops off and deepens like the lobster-waters off the North Shore. As Gately fidgets his way through daily A.M. meditation he always tries to remind himself daily that this is all an Ennet House residency is supposed to do: buy these poor yutzes some time, some thin pie-slice of abstinent time, till they can start to get a whiff of what's true and deep, almost magic, under the shallow surface of what they're trying to do.

'I cultivate it assiduously. I do special gratitude exercises at night up there in the room. Gratitude-Ups, you could call them. Ask Randy over there if I don't do them like clockwork. Diligently. Sedulously.'

'Well it's true is all,' Treat sniffs. 'About gratitude.'

Everybody else except Gately, lying on the old other couch opposite them, is ignoring this exchange, watching an old InterLace cartridge whose tracking is a little messed up so that staticky stripes eat at the screen's picture's bottom and top. Day is not done talking. Pat M. encourages newer Staff to think of residents they'd like to bludgeon to death as valuable teachers of patience, tolerance, self-discipline, restraint.

Day is not done talking. 'One of the exercises is being grateful that life is so much *easier* now. I used sometimes to think. I used to think in long compound sentences with subordinate clauses and even the odd polysyllable. Now I find I needn't. Now I live by the dictates of macramé samplers ordered from the back-page ad of an old *Reader's Digest* or *Saturday Evening Post*. Easy does it. Remember to remember. But for the grace of capital-g God. Turn it over. Terse, hard-boiled. Monosyllabic. Good old Norman Rockwell—Paul Harvey wisdom. I walk around with my arms out straight in front of me and recite these clichés. In a monotone. No inflection necessary. Could that be one? Could that be added to the cliché-pool? "No *inflection necessary*"? Too many syllables, probably.'

Randy Lenz says 'I ain't got time for this shit.'

Poor old Charlotte Treat, all of nine weeks clean, is trying to look prim-

mer and primmer. She looks again over to Gately, lying on his back, taking up the living room's whole other sofa, one sneaker up on the sofa's square frayed fabric arm-thing, his eyes almost closed. Only Staff get to lie on the couches.

'Denial,' Charlotte finally says, 'is not a river in Egypt.'

'How's about the both of you shut the fuck up,' says Emil Minty.

Geoffrey (not Geoff, Geoffrey) Day has been at Ennet House six days. He came from Roxbury's infamous Dimock Detox, where he was the only white person, which Gately bets must have been broadening for him. Day has a squished blank smeared flat face, one requiring like great self-effort to like, and eyes that are just starting to lose the nictitated glaze of early sobriety. Day is a newcomer and a wreck. A red-wine-and-Quaalude man who finally nodded out in late October and put his Saab through the window of a Malden sporting goods store and then got out and proceeded to browse until the Finest came and got him. Who taught something horseshit-sounding like social historicity or historical sociality at some jr. college up the Expressway in Medford and came in saying on his Intake he also manned the helm of a Scholarly Quarterly. Word for word, the House Manager had said: '*manned the helm*' and '*Scholarly*.' His Intake estimated that Day's been in and out of a blackout for most of the last several years, and his wiring is still as they say a bit frayed. His detox at Dimock, where they barely have the resources to give you a Librium if you start to D.T., must have been just real grim, because Geoffrey D. alleges it never happened: now his story is he just strolled into Ennet House on a lark one day from his home 10+ clicks away in Malden and found the place too hilariously egregulous to want to ever leave. It's the newcomers with some education that are the worst, according to Gene M. They identify their whole selves with their head, and the Disease makes its command headquarters in the head.⁹⁰ Day wears chinos of indeterminate hue, brown socks with black shoes, and shirts that Pat Montesian had described in the Intake as 'Eastern-European-type Hawaiian shirts.' Day's now on the vinyl couch with Charlotte Treat after breakfast in the Ennet House living room with a few of the other residents that either aren't working or don't have to be at work early, and with Gately, who'd pulled an all-night Dream Duty shift out in the front office till 0400, then got temp-relieved by Johnette Foltz so he could go to work janitoring down at the Shattuck Shelter till 0700, then came and hauled ass back up here and took back over so's that Johnette could go off to her NA thing with a bunch of NA people in what looked like a dune buggy if the dunes in question were in Hell, and is now, Gately, trying to unclench and center himself inside by tracing the cracks in the paint of the living room ceiling with his eyes. Gately often feels a terrible sense of loss, narcotics-wise, in the A.M., still, even after this long clean. His sponsor over at the White Flag Group says some people never get over the loss of what

they'd thought was their one true best friend and lover; they just have to pray daily for acceptance and the brass danglers to move forward through the grief and loss, to wait for time to harden the scab. The sponsor, Ferocious Francis G., doesn't give Gately one iota of shit for feeling some negative feelings about it: on the contrary, he commends Gately for his candor in breaking down and crying like a baby and telling him about it early one A.M. over the pay phone, the sense of loss. It's a myth no one misses it. Their particular Substance. Shit, you wouldn't need help if you didn't miss it. You just have to Ask For Help and like Turn It Over, the loss and pain, to Keep Coming, show up, pray, Ask For Help. Gately rubs his eye. Simple advice like this does seem like a lot of clichés — Day's right about how it seems. Yes, and if Geoffrey Day keeps on steering by the way things seem to him then he's a dead man for sure. Gately's already watched dozens come through here and leave early and go back Out There and then go to jail or die. If Day ever gets lucky and breaks down, finally, and comes to the front office at night to scream that he can't take it anymore and clutch at Gately's pantcuff and blubber and beg for help at any cost, Gately'll get to tell Day the thing is that the clichéd directives are a lot more deep and hard to actually *do*. To try and live by instead of just say. But he'll only get to say it if Day comes and asks. Personally, Gately gives Geoffrey D. like a month at the outside before he's back tipping his hat to parking meters. Except who is Gately to judge who'll end up getting the Gift of the program v. who won't, he needs to remember. He tries to feel like Day is teaching him patience and tolerance. It takes great patience and tolerance not to want to punt the soft little guy out into the Comm. Ave. ravine and open up his bunk to somebody that really desperately wants it, the Gift. Except who is Gately to think he can know who wants it and who doesn't, deep down. Gately's arm is behind his head, up against the sofa's other arm. The old D.E.C. viewer is on to something violent and color-enhanced Gately neither sees nor hears. It was part of his gifts as a burglar: he can sort of turn his attention on and off like a light. Even when he was a resident here he'd had this prescient housebreaker's ability to screen input, to do sensory triage. It was one reason he'd even been able to stick out his nine residential months here with twenty-one other newly detoxed housebreakers, hoods, whores, fired execs, Avon ladies, subway musicians, beer-bloated construction workers, vagrants, indignant car salesmen, bulimic trauma-mamas, bunko artists, mincing pillow-biters, North End hard guys, pimply kids with electric nose-rings, denial-ridden housewives and etc., all jonesing and head-gaming and mokus and grieving and basically whacked out and producing nonstopping output 24-7-365.

At some point in here Day's saying 'So bring on the lobotomist, bring him on I say!'

Except Gately's own counselor when he was a resident here, Eugenio Martinez, one of the volunteer alumni counselors, a one-eared former

boiler-room bunko man and now a cellular-phone retailer who'd hooked up with the House under the original founder Guy That Didn't Even Use His First Name, and had about ten years clean, Gene M. did — Eugenio'd lovingly confronted Gately early on about his special burglar's selective attention and about how it could be dangerous because how can you be sure it's you doing the screening and not The Spider. Gene called the Disease The Spider and talked about Feeding The Spider versus Starving The Spider and so on and so forth. Eugenio M. had called Gately into the House Manager's back office and said what if Don's screening input turned out to be Feeding The Old Spider and what about an experimental unscreening of input for a while. Gately had said he'd do his best to try and'd come back out and tried to watch a Spont-Dissem of the Celtics while two resident pillow-biters from the Fenway were having this involved conversation about some third fag having to go in and get the skeleton of some kind of fucking rodent removed from inside their butthole.⁹¹ The unscreening experiment had lasted half an hour. This was right before Gately got his 90-day chip and wasn't exactly wrapped real tight or real tolerant, still. Ennet House this year is nothing like the freakshow it was when Gately went through.

Gately has been completely Substance-free for 421 days today.

Ms. Charlotte Treat, with a carefully made-up, ruined face, is watching the viewer's stripe-shot cartridge while she needlepoints something. Conversation between her and Geoffrey D. has mercifully petered out. Day is scanning the room for somebody else to engage and piss off so he can prove to himself he doesn't fit in here and stay separated off isolated inside himself and maybe get them so pissed off there's a beef and he gets bounced out, Day, and it won't be his fault. You can almost hear his Disease chewing away inside his head, feeding. Emil Minty, Randy Lenz, and Bruce Green are also in the room, sprawled in spring-shot chairs, lighting one gasper off the end of the last, their postures the don't-fuck-with-me slouch of the streets that here makes their bodies' texture somehow hard to distinguish from that of the chairs. Nell Gunther is sitting at the long table in the doorless dining room that opens out right off the old D.E.C. fold-out TP's pine stand, whitening under her nails with a manicure pencil amid the remains of something she's eaten that involved serious syrup. Burt F. Smith is also in there, way down by himself at the table's far end, trying to saw at a waffle with a knife and fork attached to the stumps of his wrists with Velcro bands. A long-time-ago former DMV Driver's License Examiner, Burt F. Smith is forty-five and looks seventy, has almost all-white hair that's waxy and yellow from close-order smoke, and finally got into Ennet House last month after nine months stuck in the Cambridge City Shelter. Burt F. Smith's story is he's making his like fiftieth-odd stab at sobriety in AA. Once devoutly R.C., Burt F.S. has potentially lethal trouble with Faith In A Loving God ever since the R.C. Church apparently granted his wife an annulment in like B.S.

'99 after fifteen years of marriage. Then for several years a rooming-house drunk, which on Gately's view is about like one step up from a homeless-person-type drunk. Burt F.S. got mugged and beaten half to death in Cambridge on Xmas Eve of last year, and left there to like freeze there, in an alley, in a storm, and ended up losing his hands and feet. Doony Glynn's been observed telling Burt F.S. things like that there's some new guy coming into the Disabled Room off Pat's office with Burt F.S. who's without not only hands and feet but arms and legs and even a head and who communicates by farting in Morris Code. This sally earned Glynn three days Full-House Restriction and a week's extra Chore for what Johnette Foltz described in the Log as 'XSive Cruetly.' There is a vague intestinal moaning in Gately's right side. Watching Burt F. Smith smoke a Benson & Hedges by holding it between his stumps with his elbows out like a guy with pruning shears is an adventure in fucking pathos as far as Gately's concerned. And Geoffrey Day cracks wise about There But for Grace. And forget about what it's like trying to watch Burt F. Smith try and light a match.

Gately, who's been on live-in Staff here four months now, believes Charlotte Treat's devotion to needlepoint is suspect. All those needles. In and out of all that thin sterile-white cotton stretched drum-tight in its round frame. The needle makes a kind of thud and squeak when it goes in the cloth. It's not much like the soundless pop and slide of a real cook-and-shoot. But still. She takes such great care.

Gately wonders what color he'd call the ceiling if forced to call it a color. It's not white and it's not gray. The brown-yellow tones are from high-tar gaspers; a pall hangs up near the ceiling even this early in the new sober day. Some of the drunks and tranq-jockeys stay up most of the night, joggling their feet and chain-smoking, even though there's no cartridges or music allowed after 0000h. He has that odd House Staffer's knack, Gately, already, after four months, of seeing everything in both living and dining rooms without really looking. Emil Minty, a hard-core smack-addict punk here for reasons nobody can quite yet pin down, is in an old mustard-colored easy chair with his combat boots up on one of the standing ashtrays, which is tilting not quite enough for Gately to tell him to watch out, please. Minty's orange mohawk and the shaved skull around it are starting to grow out brown, which is just not a pleasant sight in the morning at all. The other ashtray on the floor by his chair is full of the ragged little new moons of bitten nails, which has got to mean that the Hester T. that he'd ordered to bed at 0230 was right back down here in the chair going at her nails again the second Gately left to mop shit at the Shelter. When he's up all night Gately's stomach gets all tight and acidy, from either all the coffee maybe or just staying up. Minty's been on the streets since he was like sixteen, Gately can tell: he's got that sooty complexion homeless guys get where the soot has insinuated itself into the dermal layer and thickened, making Minty

look somehow upholstered. And the big-armed driver for Leisure Time Ice, the quiet kid, Green, a garbage-head all-Substance-type kid, maybe twenty-one, face very slightly smunched in on one side, wears sleeveless khaki shirts and had lived in a trailer in that apocalyptic Enfield trailer park out near the Allston Spur; Gately likes Green because he seems to have got sense enough to keep his map shut when he's got nothing important to say, which is basically all the time. The tattoo on the kid's right tricep is a spear-pierced heart over the hideous name *MILDRED BONK*, who Bruce G. told him was a ray of living light and a dead ringer for the late lead singer of The Fiends in Human Shape and his dead heart's one love ever, and who took their daughter and left him this summer for some guy that told her he ranched fucking longhorn cows east of Atlantic City NJ. He's got, even by Ennet House standards, major-league sleep trouble, Green, and he and Gately play cribbage sometimes in the wee dead hours, a game Gately picked up in jail. Burt F.S. is now hunched in a meaty coughing fit, his elbows out and his forehead purple. No sign of Hester Thrane, nailbiter and something Pat calls Borderline. Gately can see everything without moving or moving his head or either eye. Also in here is Randy Lenz, who Lenz is a small-time organic-coke dealer who wears sportcoats rolled up over his parlor-tanned forearms and is always checking his pulse on the inside of his wrists. It's come out that Lenz is of keen interest to both sides of the law because this past May he'd apparently all of a sudden lost all control and holed up all of a sudden in a Charlestown motel and free-based most of a whole 100 grams he'd been fronted by a suspiciously trusting Brazilian in what Lenz didn't know was supposed to have been a D.E.A. sting operation in the South End. Having screwed both sides in what Gately secretly views as a delicious fuck-up, Randy Lenz has, since May, been the most wanted he's probably ever been. He is seedily handsome in the way of pimps and low-level coke dealers, muscular in the MP-ish way that certain guys' muscles look muscular but can't really lift anything, with complexly gelled hair and the little birdlike head-movements of the deeply vain. One forearm's hair has a little hairless patch, which Gately knows well spells knife-owner, and if there's one thing Gately's never been able to stomach it's a knife-owner, little swaggery guys that always queer a square beef and come up off the ground with a knife where you have to get cut to take it away from them. Lenz is teaching Gately reserved politeness to people you pretty much want to beat up on sight. It's pretty obvious to everybody except Pat Montesian — whose odd gullibility in the presence of human sludge, though, Gately needs to try to remember had been one of the reasons why he himself had got into Ennet House, originally — obvious that Lenz is here mostly just to hide out: he rarely leaves the House except under compulsion, avoids windows, and travels to the nightly required AA/NA meetings in a disguise that makes him look like Cesar Romero after a terrible accident;

and then he always wants to walk back to the House solo afterward, which is not encouraged. Lenz is seated low in the northeasternmost corner of an old fake-velour love seat he's jammed in the northeasternmost corner of the living room. Randy Lenz has a strange compulsive need to be north of everything, and possibly even northeast of everything, and Gately has no clue what it's about but observes Lenz's position routinely for his own interest and files. Lenz's leg, like Kent Erdedy's leg, never stops joggling; Day claims it joggles even worse in sleep. Another gurgle and abdominal chug for Don G., lying there. Charlotte Treat has violently red hair. As in hair the color of like a red crayon. The reason she doesn't have to work an outside menial job is she's got some strain of the Virus or like H.I.V. Former prostitute, reformed. Why do prostitutes when they get straight always try and get so prim? It's like long-repressed librarian-ambitions come flooding out. Charlotte T. has a cut-rate whore's hard half-pretty face, her eyes lassooed with shadow around all four lids. Her also with a case of the dermal-layer sooty complexion. The riveting thing about Treat is how her cheeks are deeply pitted in these deep trenches that she packs with foundation and tries to cover over with blush, which along with the hair gives her the look of a mean clown. The ghastly wounds in her cheeks look for all the world like somebody got at her with a woodburning kit at some point in her career path. Gately would rather not know.

Don Gately is almost twenty-nine and sober and just huge. Lying there gurgling and inert with a flutter-eyed smile. One shoulder blade and buttock pooch out over the side of a sofa that sags like a hammock. Gately looks less built than poured, the smooth immovability of an Easter Island statue. It would be nice if intimidating size wasn't one of the major factors in a male alumni getting offered the male live-in Staff job here, but there you go. Don G. has a massive square head made squarer-looking by the Prince Valiantish haircut he tries to maintain himself in the mirror, to save \$: room and board aside — plus the opportunity for Service — he makes very little as an Ennet House Staffer, and is paying off restitution schedules in three different district courts. He has the fluttery white-eyed smile now of someone who's holding himself just over the level of doze. Pat Montesian is due in at 0900 and Don G. can't go to bed until she arrives because the House Manager has driven Jennifer Belbin to a court appearance downtown and he's the only Staffer here. Foltz, the female live-in Staffer, is at a Narcotics Anonymous convention in Hartford for the long Interdependence Day weekend. Gately personally is not hot on NA: so many relapses and un-humble returns, so many war stories told with nondisguised bullshit pride, so little emphasis on Service or serious Message; all these people in leather and metal, preening. Rooms full of Randy Lenzes, all hugging each other, pretending they don't miss the Substance. Rampant newcomer-fucking. There's a difference between abstinence v. recovery, Gately knows. Except of course

who's Gately to judge what works for who. He just knows what seems like it works for him today: AA's tough Enfield-Brighton love, the White Flag Group, old guys with suspended bellies and white crew cuts and geologic amounts of sober time, the Crocodiles, that'll take your big square head off if they sense you're getting complacent or chasing tail or forgetting that your life still hangs in the balance every fucking day. White Flag newcomers so crazed and sick they can't sit and have to pace at the meeting's rear, like Gately when he first came. Retired old kindergarten teachers in polyresin slacks and a pince-nez who bake cookies for the weekly meeting and relate from behind the podium how they used to blow bartenders at closing for just two more fingers in a paper cup to take home against the morning's needled light. Gately, albeit an oral narcotics man from way back, has committed himself to AA. He drank his fair share, too, he figures, after all.

Exec. Director Pat M. is due in at 0900 and has application interviews with three people, 2F and 1M, who better be showing up soon, and Gately will answer the door when they don't know enough to just come in and will say Welcome and get them a cup of coffee if he judges them able to hold it. He'll get them aside and tip them off to be sure to pet Pat M.'s dogs during the interview. They'll be sprawled all over the front office, sides heaving, writhing and biting at themselves. He'll tell them it's a proved fact that if Pat's dogs like you, you're in. Pat M. has directed Gately to tell appliers this, and then if the appliers do actually pet the dogs — two hideous white golden retrievers with suppurating scabs and skin afflictions, plus one has Grand Mall epilepsy — it'll betray a level of desperate willingness that Pat says is just about all she goes by, deciding.

A nameless cat oozes by on the broad windowsill above the back of the fabric couch. Animals here come and go. Alumni adopt them or they just disappear. Their fleas tend to remain. Gately's intestines moan. Boston's dawn coming back on the Green Line this morning was chemically pink, trails of industrial exhaust blowing due north. The nail-parings in the ash-tray on the floor are, he realizes now, too big to be from fingernails. These bitten arcs are broad and thick and a deep autumnal yellow. He swallows hard. He'd tell Geoffrey Day how, even if they are just clichés, clichés are (a) soothing, and (b) remind you of common sense, and (c) license the universal assent that drowns out silence; and (4) silence is deadly, pure Spider-food, if you've got the Disease. Gene M. says you can spell the Disease *DIS-EASE*, which sums the basic situation up nicely. Pat has a meeting at the Division of Substance Abuse Services in Government Center at noon she needs to be reminded about. She can't read her own handwriting, which the stroke affected her handwriting. Gately envisions going around having to find out who's biting their fucking toenails in the living room and putting the disgusting toenail-bits in the ashtray at like 0500. Plus House regs prohibit bare feet anyplace downstairs. There's a pale-brown water stain on the ceil-

ing over Day and Treat the almost exact shape of Florida. Randy Lenz has issues with Geoffrey Day because Day is glib and a teacher at a Scholarly Journal's helm. This threatens the self-concept of a Randy Lenz that thinks of himself as a kind of hiply sexy artist-intellectual. Small-time dealers never conceptualize themselves as just small-time dealers, kind of like whores never do. For *Occupation* on his Intake form Lenz had put *free lance script writer*. And he makes a show of that he reads. For the first week here in July he'd held the books upside-down in the northeast corner of whatever room. He had a gigantic Medical Dictionary he'd haul down and smoke and read until Annie Parrot the Asst. Manager had to tell him not to bring it down anymore because it was fucking with Morris Hanley's mind. At which juncture he quit reading and started talking, making everybody nostalgic for when he just sat there and read. Geoffrey D. has issues with Randy L., also, you can tell: there's a certain way they don't quite look at each other. And so now of course they're mashed together in the 3-Man together, since three guys in one night missed curfew and came in without one normal-sized pupil between them and refused Urines and got bounced on the spot, and so Day gets moved up in his first week from the 5-Man room to the 3-Man. Seniority comes quick around here. Past Minty, down at the dining-room table's end, Burt F.S.'s still coughing, still hunched over, his face a dusky purple, and Nell G. is behind him pounding him on the back so that it keeps sending him forward over his ashtray, and he's waving one stump vaguely over his shoulder to try and signal her to quit. Lenz and Day: a beef may be brewing; Day'll try to goad Lenz into a beef that'll be public enough so he doesn't get hurt but does get bounced, and then he can leave treatment and go back to Chianti and 'Ludes and getting assaulted by sidewalks and make out like the relapse is Ennet House's fault and never have to confront himself or his Disease. To Gately, Day is like a wide-open interactive textbook on the Disease. One of Gately's jobs is to keep an eye on what's possibly brewing among residents and let Pat or the Manager know and try to smooth things down in advance if possible. The ceiling's color could be called dun, if forced. Someone has farted; no one knows just who, but this isn't like a normal adult place where everybody coolly pretends a fart didn't happen; here everybody has to make their little comment.

Time is passing. Ennet House reeks of passing time. It is the humidity of early sobriety, hanging and palpable. You can hear ticking in clockless rooms here. Gately changes the angle of one sneaker, puts the other arm behind his head. His head has real weight and pressure. Randy Lenz's obsessive compulsions include the need to be north, a fear of disks, a tendency to constantly take his own pulse, a fear of all forms of timepieces, and a need to always know the time with great precision.

'Day man you got the time maybe real quick?' Lenz. For the third time in half an hour. Patience, tolerance, compassion, self-discipline, restraint.

Gately remembers his first six months here straight: he'd felt the sharp edge of every second that went by. And the freakshow dreams. Nightmares beyond the worst D.T.s you'd ever heard about. A reason for a night-shift Staffer in the front office is so somebody's there for the residents to talk at when — not if, when — when the freakshow dreams ratchet them out of bed at like 0300. Nightmares about relapsing and getting high, not getting high but having everybody think you're high, getting high with your alcoholic mom and then killing her with a baseball bat. Whipping the old Unit out for a spot-Urine and starting up and flames coming shooting out. Getting high and bursting into flames. Having a waterspout shaped like an enormous Talwin suck you up inside. A vehicle explodes in an enhanced bloom of sooty flame on the D.E.C. viewer, its hood up like an old pop-tab.

Day's making a broad gesture out of checking his watch. 'Right around 0830, fella.'

Randy L.'s fine nostrils flare and whiten. He stares straight ahead, eyes narrowed, fingers on his wrist. Day purses his lips, leg joggling. Gately hangs his head over the arm of the sofa and regards Lenz upside-down.

'That look on your map there mean something there, Randy? Are you like communicating something with that look?'

'Does anybody maybe know the time a little more *exactly* is what I'm wondering, Don, since Day doesn't.'

Gately checks his own cheap digital, head still hung over the sofa's arm. 'I got 0832:14, 15, 16, Randy.'

'ks a lot, D.G. man.'

So and now Day has that same flared narrow look for Lenz. 'We've been over this, friend. Amigo. Sport. You do this all the time with me. Again I'll say it — I don't have a digital watch. This is a fine old antique watch. It points. A memento of far better days. It's not a digital watch. It's not a cesium-based atomic clock. It points, with hands. See, Spiro Agnew here has two little arms: they point, they suggest. It's not a sodding stopwatch for life. Lenz, get a watch. Am I right? Why don't you just get a watch, Lenz. Three people I happen to know of for a fact have offered to get you a watch and you can pay them back whenever you feel comfortable about poking your nose out and investigating the work-a-world. Get a watch. Obtain a watch. A fine, digital, incredibly *wide* watch, about five times the width of your wrist, so you have to hold it like a falconer, and it treats time like pi.'

'Easy does it,' Charlotte Treat half-sings, not looking up from her needle and frame.

Day looks around at her. 'I don't believe I was speaking to you in any way shape or form.'

Lenz stares at him. 'If you're trying to fuck with me, brother.' He shakes his fine shiny head. 'Big mistake.'

'Oo I'm all atremble. I can barely hold my arm steady to read my watch.'