5890 words

Entr'acte

Walking through the courthouse Newman felt like an alumnus on a campus visit. Both at home and out of place. A collision of past and present. Before and after. Passing a glass door, he paused to study his reflection. His ten year old Brooks Brothers suit, his only suit now, still looked crisp, almost new. For eight years it had hung in storage unworn and unneeded. Adjusting his lone remaining necktie, he looked no different than the attorneys passing behind him, except that he had no briefcase, no laptop, only a thin manila folder. And he had no real business here, only a simple errand, the routine submission of a required financial statement. His lawyer offered to handle it for him, but Newman decided to file the papers himself as an act of penance -- one of many, some self-imposed, that dictated his days and filled his hours.

At the clerk of courts window, he patiently waited in line, then slid his folder under the thick Plexiglas shield. The clerk, young but heavyset and already balding, flipped it open, time stamped the top page, issued a receipt, and quietly said "Next" without looking up.

Newman stepped aside, examined the receipt, carefully folded it in half, and slipped it into his pocket. Heading to the east stairwell, he saw an attorney sitting on a bench furiously

highlighting a court ruling in fast, angry yellow streaks. Newman looked on with distant knowing, like a middle-aged woman observing a young mother struggling with a toddler.

The hollow echo of his footsteps in the marble corridor was unsettling, and Newman was anxious to leave the building. Walking through a courthouse now he felt like a cancer-stricken doctor shuffling to chemotherapy in a once familiar hospital. Newman had conducted business here, made money here, drank coffee with judges here, argued cases here. And then eight years ago, he had been judged and sentenced here.

"Robo? Hey, it's you. Robo!"

Newman flinched, feeling a sudden uneasy flashback. He recalled the voice from countless fraternity parties, football games, and school plays. A lifetime ago. He swallowed hard and turned. College friends knew him as Bobby. Only Con Molloy called him Robo after they had watched *Robin and the Seven Hoods* on a booze-filled snow day their freshman year. With classes cancelled and the library closed, it was an unexpected respite given over to snowball fights, the construction of a bosomy snow woman, Jägermeister, and old movies on AMC. They had never been close friends, but Con was his only classmate from Madison who went to Marquette law with him. For seven years they had crossed paths in classes, exams, and parties. After graduation, Molloy, who grew up in Montclair, returned East. Wisconsin-born, Newman stayed in town and soon lost touch.

Molloy grabbed his hand, "Robo. Great to see you! How have you been?"

"OK. OK." Looking at Molloy's sustained smile, Newman realized *he doesn't know. He doesn't know.* For eight years Newman had watched the smile of instant recognition quickly soften into sympathy or harden with contempt. Old friends pretended not to see him or answered phantom cell phone calls if he caught their eye. At times he noted the sidelong glance, the

elbowed spouse, the head tilted to pass a whisper. Get used to being a cautionary tale, a therapist had warned. But Molloy had gone East, and Newman doubted he followed the local news, and it was hardly the kind of item anyone would put in the alumni bulletin. It was, after all, just a Milwaukee story. No reason for anyone beyond Kenosha to have heard of him. Except in Colorado. Just the mention of that state made his throat tighten.

Molloy softly punched Newman's shoulder with schoolboy enthusiasm. "Damn, Robo, glad to see you!"

Con was older but in great shape, still tight and muscular. He was wearing Armani and expensive cologne. There were a few lines around his eyes and touches of gray at the temples, giving him the seasoned look of a news anchor running for Senate. The leather briefcase hanging from his shoulder must have cost five hundred dollars.

"I thought you were in New York."

"I am. I am. But we've got meetings this week with a client in Chicago. They have holdings in Wisconsin and had to submit some papers. They were going to send up a paralegal, but I offered to go. I left early, so I could stop by Marquette. I caught Callaghan between classes. Remember his lectures on precedence? I told him I still use my notes."

"Those lectures were classics," Newman remembered. "I recorded all of them." Those small cassette tapes, once neatly labeled and boxed on his credenza for reference were long gone – along with his credenza, his office, his job.

"I was going to call Candy Ligoria if I had time. Have you seen her lately?"

"No," Newman said softly, shaking his head. He rarely met any of the Marquette crowd these days. He no longer traveled in their elite circles. And they were not likely to journey into his closed orb of halfway houses, food pantries, and GED classes.

"Remember Sara Patel?"

"Sure."

"I saw her on Facebook. My God. She must have put on sixty pounds. I know she had a kid, but really. I see you avoided the national epidemic."

"What?"

"You look in good shape."

"Oh. Well, I walk a lot."

"So do I." Molloy slapped his flat hard stomach. "In Manhattan you have to. I got into handball. I leave golf to the old timers. Plus I swim every day, year round. Pump iron. Read depositions on the treadmill. I have to burn off the stress, or I can't sleep."

Molloy looked at his Rolex. "Listen, do you have some time? Want to grab a drink?"

"I could use some coffee," Newman said quickly.

They walked down the hall and descended the wide marble steps. Skipping down the stairs like a schoolboy, Molloy paused on the landings to comment on the portraits of long-dead judges, the Roman busts, the ornate windows, the statue of Douglas MacArthur. He spoke expansively, evidently enjoying a flood of pleasant memories. The courthouse for him must have been full of fond recollections of watching his first trials and interviewing prosecutors for the law review. Marquette for him was all college parties and cheerleaders. Just seeing the word in print could make Newman tear up.

Crossing the square, Molloy steered them toward the Coffee Trader. Newman wanted to go to the Starbucks down the block. The Trader served alcohol, and he was still on parole.

"Hey, let's go . . ."

Molloy was not listening. Noticing a break in the traffic, he motioned Newman to follow as he sprinted across the street.

They entered the noisy, high-ceilinged restaurant. Fortunately, two stools near the door were vacant, and Molloy motioned him to sit. This end of the long L-shaped bar featured the brass espresso machine and was populated by coffee drinkers. The sports bar with its row of beer taps and shelves of imported liquor was in the rear. Turning his back to the barmen, Newman faced the street, despite the sunlight stabbing his eyes.

Molloy looked around. "This place hasn't changed. I used to come here for the Cobb salad between trials." He signaled the waitress for a Harp, then asked, "What would you like?"

Newman was thirsty and wanted a Diet Coke. But a soda in a tumbler looked like a cocktail, so he ordered coffee, which thankfully came in a white ceramic mug.

"New York treating you well?" he ventured.

"Worked to death, but then you can't complain about that in this economy," Molloy answered. "Billable hours. Billable hours. That's the mantra at Mahan, Klein, and Fitzgerald. 'Bill them for handball and don't forget your naps.' If they only knew. Based on my hour reports I ought to be eight-seven years old by now. I'm on my way to junior partner next year. Klein's daughter is leaving to teach at Columbia. But I'm taking some time off soon. I have to decompress. Head back to the Old Sod for a week. Some whiskey. Some polo. Walk the Liffey. See a few plays. Otherwise I feel like I'm trapped in *Groundhog Day*."

Newman relaxed. It had been a long time since he had enjoyed a conversation like this. He missed Molloy. He had always found him amusing. So typically Irish. Half-bragging, half-apologizing. Full of self-deprecating boasts. The year before, he told Newman, he had been the

lead attorney in a settlement netting his firm six million in fees, two of it pure profit. Only a full partner did better. With his bonus he and a girlfriend were designing a beach house in Surf City.

Molloy, he noticed, pushed his bottle aside after just a few sips. He could take it or leave it. He always could. Even in Madison, he was done after one or two shots while everyone else drank themselves comatose.

Molloy was describing skylights when he suddenly drew closer, lowering his voice, "You know, I have to be honest about something."

Newman bit his lip in anticipation.

"I have to confess, Robo, I'm no New York attorney."

Newman was puzzled, "What do you mean?"

"I only *work* in Manhattan. I never left New Jersey. I'm still a bridge and tunnel kid," he admitted. "The firm's successful. It's been around fifty years. But it's not exactly Jones Day. Klein went to CCNY. Night school law. Oh, I make good money. I can't complain, but in Manhattan anything under a rock a year is unacceptable."

Molloy pushed the Harp farther down the bar. "Two years ago we worked on a case with a team from Skadden. Now those guys are New York attorneys. Private clubs. Town cars. We were just a bunch of Bartlebys they bussed in to handle the mail. I went with them to a charity fundraiser the client had in the Hamptons. Just to show the flag. The place was like *The Great Gatsby*. Fountains, reflecting pools, parterres, Victorian gazebos, air-conditioned tents, Roman columns. Limos with chauffeurs. Waiters in tuxes. The bartenders had more gold braid than a gay admiral.

"I met a real estate broker there. I mentioned I was looking for a condo, and she called me a few days later. She takes me to a building in midtown. Twelve million. Twelve million!

And that's the bottom of her price list. Well, I got a condo. It's nice," he said defensively, as if trying to convince himself, "granite counter tops, hot tub, wine bar. Just under two mil. But it's on Maxwell Lane in Hoboken. In Hoboken," he repeated softly. "I can't afford Manhattan." He leaned even closer, like a spy exchanging a password, "You know, if I pick up a girl in the city, I have to get a hotel room. I can't take her across the river. They won't stand for it. No way. Besides," he whispered, "I drive a Corvette. So I let them think I'm married and get a suite at the Warwick. I know single guys who wear wedding rings when they go clubbing." He shrugged and sighed. "All the hot babes go for brokers. The real estate chick told me she sold four condos to this Iranian kid. Twenty-six years old. Mr. O'Hedgefund. He buys a row of townhouses for his family from Tehran. Four sixteen million dollar condos." Molloy raised and lowered his hand in a chopping motion. "One, two, three, four. Like we'd buy plane tickets or neckties."

Newman nodded with feigned sympathy. He had not flown in a plane or bought a tie in over eight years. Molloy chatted on, talking about girls and clubs. Newman sipped his coffee, his tension mounting. Invariably, the conversation would switch to him. Any moment Molloy would flush with embarrassment and apologetically punt to Newman. *Hey, enough about me. What are you up to? How's work? Seeing anyone? Still with the old firm?*

The Coffee Trader was crowded, and the clatter of dishware was loud. A ballgame had started, and a bartender had turned up the TV. This was not the time or place for what Newman had to share. What could he say anyway? Should he simply hint that he was going through something or dodge the whole subject? Chat about the Packers, bring up old girlfriends, share jokes, defer to gossip, and Molloy assume the rest? After all, Con met him in the courthouse wearing a good suit. He would just take it for granted that Newman was somewhere on the same

path after graduation, taking cases, billing clients, moving up. And Newman wondered how Molloy would react if he did tell him. How would his face change, his demeanor shift? Would he see pity or scorn in his eyes? Catholics, especially Irish ones, could go either way. Unpredictably cruel or compassionate. Embracing you with the love of Christ or coming down on you with the fury of Torquemada. But why tell him at all? Why confide, why confess? Why ruin a moment that made him feel whole, normal, and human?

Molloy was talking about a girl he took to the Plaza when he scowled, raising a finger. He pulled a smart phone from his pocket.

"Yes?" he answered, palming his other ear and squinting. "One moment, one moment. I can't hear." He turned to Newman, "Listen, I have to take this. It's Chicago. . . ." He glanced around the Coffee Trader, then ducked outside.

From the window, Newman could not hear what Con was saying, but he sensed what was going on. Molloy had been hit with a problem, a challenge, a disappointment, a defeat that had to be countered, answered, overcome, dealt with. Newman recalled the feeling. Litigation was chess and football. Strategy and scrimmage. Moves and countermoves. Check and mate. Months of hard research done or undone by a Hail Mary pass or a penalty. The partners, like so many coaches, fired instructions and cursed from the sidelines. The judges flagged one foul and ignored another. Newman wondered what it was. A piece of evidence lost or excluded, a key witness compromised, a surprise motion, an unexpected ruling? Molloy paced in the bus shelter, gesturing like a symphony conductor, wheeling his free arm as if to wind up his concentration. For a long time he stood wordlessly, nodding as he listened. No doubt someone was either reading something to him or delivering a rehearsed speech. Watching, Newman remembered when he had a cell phone, a computer, an office, a career, a life.

After graduation Newman was lucky to be one of three new hires at Corcoran and Cross, a growing firm with a solid client base and national aspirations. After a year of internship, he joined the litigation team headed by a junior partner. Newman rose up the ranks, moving from case to case. Working hard and studying harder. His losses were small and forgivable; his wins were big and profitable. His salary increased; his bonuses grew. He was rewarded with club memberships and granted access to the corporate timeshare in Bermuda.

His life was tempoed by important calls, important emails, important meetings, important trips. He flew business class, rode in town cars instead of cabs, and took girlfriends on expense paid trips (with partner approval). He rarely paid for a dinner or a golf game. Generous clients invited him to skyboxes and sailboats. By thirty he was making more money than his father did at sixty. He bought a lakefront condo and a Mercedes. He wore two hundred dollar shirts and a two thousand dollar suits. He lunched with CEO's and jogged with a former governor.

His girlfriend Chrissy, blonde and busty, was the international sales director for an aeronautics firm. She traveled extensively, and when their schedules allowed, they took fast fun trips to Rome and Rio. When Chrissy was out of town and sometimes when she was not, he hit The Landing Strip, a gentlemen's club near the airport, a taste of plush Vegas in the frigid Midwest. Newman loved the thick carpets, black velvet walls, mirrors, Vargas etchings, and pink vases of dried flowers as much as the dancers. Sipping Diet Coke to keep his head clear for a night behind the computer, he watched siliconed blondes twirl on silver poles. When dancers invited him for private shows in the champagne room, he politely declined, tipping them fifties on his way out.

He did not spend much time at The Landing Strip until he met Inez. Venezuelan, she stood out from the sea of blondes. Her silken hair, raven black, hung to her waist. She did not

spin on the pole but slid slowly, sensuously around it. Self-absorbed, indifferent to her audience, she moved more like a ballet dancer than an acrobat. Gently cupping her breasts, stroking her G string with closed eyes and parted lips, she moved in erotic slow motion as if pleasing only herself.

Sitting with Newman at the bar, she spoke about her home and family, declaring herself a Chavez refugee. Her assets frozen in a tax dispute, she came to America to get her MBA. Dancing was a means to an end. Her accent captivated him, as did her piercing dark eyes. Bianca Jagger. He bought her shots of Absolut, then began partying with her. In the soft lit mirrored champagne room, she sipped Mumm then slipped to her knees. Later, when she offered him coke on a compact mirror, he took polite Cole Porter sniffs and slid hundreds more into her G string.

Busy with work, busy with clients, putting in eighteen hour days, Newman looked forward to seeing Inez. He still loved Chrissy, but she was travelling more during the week and sleeping more on weekends. Swollen eyed from fourteen hour flights and often ill from airline food, she was less willing to go out and much less fun at home.

When he was made point attorney on the firm's biggest case, he had little time for either. The client, a software firm, had a solid infringement claim against a multi-national. The expected settlement would be large and the firm's fee substantial. But the expense of discovery, preparation, and negotiation would easily exceed a million. To bolster its hand, the firm would have to assemble evidence and prepare testimony, hiring forensic accountants, industry experts, and consultants. Staff attorneys would be flown across the country to depose witnesses and collect records. It would be a war of attrition, with defense attorneys insisting on meetings in London and Amsterdam. Corcoran hired two paralegals just to handle the paperwork. Reviewing

the estimated costs, senior partners drew their breath and ordered Newman to proceed. The case, they calculated, would last two years.

Newman worked like a prizefighter in training. He exercised harder, quit drinking, popped vitamins, and gave up late-night TV. He woke at four and went to bed by ten. Dinners made him sleepy, so he lived on energy bars and Diet Coke. Taking on a billion dollar corporation, he was a director mounting a Broadway play, a runner gearing up for a marathon, Eisenhower planning D-Day. Sketching his strategy on whiteboard for the partners, he felt like Lombardi envisioning the Green Bay Sweep.

Then, after just sixty days, it was over. The chief defense counsel, no doubt mourning lost fees, quietly announced a settlement. The company was being spun off, and the parent corporation wanted to clear its books to woo potential buyers. The offer, though not generous, was sufficient for the plaintiffs to accept after a single phone call.

The fee, less than anticipated, was the firm's most lucrative on record. Trips and hotel reservations were cancelled. Estimates from consultants were deleted and shredded. Newman dictated polite thanks-but-no-thanks letters to the list of expert witnesses. The senior partners, who feared the firm had taken on too much, were relieved. Cross immediately offered Newman an eighty thousand dollar bonus. "I thought I'd better give you a number while I'm sober," he joked. An impromptu party erupted in the break room. Wine and whiskey flowed. Newman arranged shots of Jack Daniels on a tray and passed them out like an usher serving communion. The senior partners were joyous. A middle-aged matron, chugged Chablis, marched over to Newman and gave him a wine wet kiss.

The celebration broke up at seven-thirty, far too early to go home. Newman joined a pair of staffers for shots on Water Street until they begged off to join their boyfriends. Chrissy was in Singapore until Monday. He did a final shot, then headed to The Landing Strip. *Why not?*

Newman had not been in the club for months and was delighted to see Inez. He called for a double, bought her a shot of Absolut, and suggested a party. He ordered a bottle of Krug and once in the mirrored room slipped a thin stack of hundreds into her G string. The champagne was good and the sex better. Newman did two burning lines of coke in celebration.

He left Inez with a kiss and a fifty, stopped at the bar for Diet Coke to clear his head, then went to the men's room to splash his face with cold water. Patting himself dry with paper towels, he carefully flicked the lint from his lapels. Walking through the lobby he passed a bouncer sharing an illicit smoke with a stripper holding her stilettoes over her shoulder like a little girl carrying ice skates. Newman got into his car, clicked his shoulder harness, adjusted the rear view mirror, turned on his lights, and carefully rolled out of the parking lot. He turned left onto Howell Avenue, then cresting the rise, hit the accelerator to catch the freeway, and slammed into a tan Fiesta.

The first messages – fragmentary and inaccurate – flashing through Corcoran and Cross that evening evoked shock, sympathy, and relief. Newman had survived a serious accident with minor injuries. Those who linked to the *Milwaukee Journal* website saw photos of a smashed compact that had crossed the center line into oncoming traffic. Newman appeared holding a bandage to his face, his shirt bloodied. Those who checked later read the update describing Newman's failed sobriety test and the deaths of two young women. The story that appeared in print the next day mentioned The Landing Strip and included the word "cocaine." Morning news

programs ran a security cam video showing the tan Fiesta making a wide, awkward U turn just as a black Mercedes, sleek and lethal as a torpedo, shot across the screen and punched into the small car, throwing the driver backward like a crash dummy. The girls, juniors from Colorado State, had flown in from Denver to see a friend in a rock concert. They rented a car at the airport, and evidently realizing they were heading south instead of north on Howell were attempting a U turn when hit broadside. The girls never had a chance.

There was no trial but a train of legal proceedings, criminal and civil, that began with Newman's immediate resignation from Corcoran and Cross, forfeiting all salaries, bonuses, benefits, and memberships. His driver's license was suspended, and he voluntarily surrendered his law license and passport. He agreed to drug and alcohol counseling and submitted himself to psychiatric review. In shock and shame, he hired a criminal defense attorney. At their initial meeting, he wept.

Home on bail, Newman sat on his balcony, staring at the empty blue expanse of Lake Michigan unable to process. At night he watched favorite movies over and over, seeking escape in the familiar and predictable. Students at Colorado State created a tribute website, and Newman could not resist looking at the images of the girls, cheerleader cute, skiing, hugging dates, mugging for cameras, running for charity. YouTube clips showed them in costume doing a scene from *Wicked* for a campus talent show. Their smooth young faces and prom queen smiles tore his conscience. He lost weight. He lost sleep. His internist prescribed sedatives. More than once he counted out his pills, pondering if could bring himself to swallow them all. But he could not do this sober, and he had already poured all his liquor down the drain. His phone rang for two weeks with calls from defense attorneys, reporters, bloggers, cranks, and preachers then went silent. Dreams tormented him. In one Inez lay on the street, her body ripped open. In

another he was drinking in The Landing Strip watching strippers when the dead girls began to twirl on silver poles, cupping their breasts, patting their G strings, and blowing bloody kisses. Sitting at his desk preparing financial records one afternoon, he heard tires squeal in the street and wet himself.

His attorney outlined defense strategies, all of them distasteful. Diminishing Newman's responsibility meant blaming two dead girls. Two dead girls from good families. The driver's father was a former state senator and Republican fundraiser. Her mother, a Boulder TV reporter, won an Emmy documenting her battle with breast cancer, appearing on air from intensive care, her bald head turbaned. Her victim impact statement would be deadly. To make matters worse The Landing Strip was featured on the local news, its liquor license under review because of allegations of drugs and prostitution.

Worse, much worse, came during discovery. A paramedic treating Newman for a broken nose at the scene reported that he had called the dead girls "damn bitches." A police officer claimed she heard him say "poor damn bitches." Newman had no memory of anything he said that night. It was a word he never used, but his only defense would be that he was too drunk to remember. The video established the girls' illegal U-turn, but the collision only made them look like helpless victims. Newman imagined the jury watching it in horror like people seeing the Zapruder film for the first time. The "bitch" comment was documented and bound to come in. His lawyer pointed out that the girls, though not drunk, were underage and had been drinking, presumably on the plane. Empty mini bottles were found in their carry-ons. Both had Ecstasy and condoms in their purses. There were ways, his lawyer explained, to get these details before a jury. Newman thought of their mothers sitting in the courtroom and shook his head.

He pled guilty to two counts of vehicular manslaughter and accepted his ten year sentence without protest. The girls' parents filed suits, and Newman directed his accountant to meet with their lawyers. There were limits to what plaintiffs could claim in a civil action, but he held nothing back. He sold his condo, auctioned its contents, handed over his boat, submitted bank and brokerage statements. There were additional valuables the court did not know about -- savings bonds and his grandfather's coin collection, now worth fifty thousand. He gave it all away. All, all, all he could do was pay as much as he could as fast as he could to limit the families' pain. To withhold a penny was unthinkable.

Prison was not as bad as he expected. Except for the towers and fenced berms, the institution in Plymouth had the look of a community college. His cinderblock room overlooking the soccer field reminded him of his freshman dorm. His life soon fell into a routine of roll calls, AA meetings, cleaning assignments, workouts, therapy sessions, and meals. He taught GED classes and volunteered in the library. Evenings he read books or played cards with a former judge and two doctors. More and more felt like an undergraduate liberated from the adult world of mortgages, bills, and taxes. In his housing pod he became an elder statesman, a guide, a guru. He helped inmates with their appeals, writing out questions to ask their attorneys and became the go-to person to provide advice about a father's disability claim, a wife's foreclosure, a girlfriend's pot bust. Even the staff became deferential, allowing him to settle arguments and counsel new arrivals. The celibacy of prison life did not frustrate him. Sexual thoughts and images only stimulated his imagination and brought back the dreams. He had no more desire for sex now than he had for Jack Daniels.

Days, weeks, months passed effortlessly. He played tennis in summer, basketball in winter. He stayed busy, reading books, watching movies, devouring magazines. Only at night or

jogging alone did memories trouble him. From time to time he felt haunted by the ghosts of the two girls, wondering about their last moments, speculating what they might have become. Their birthdays and holidays tormented him. The fact that two families would hate him for the rest of their lives was unbearable and inescapable. Nothing, nothing he could do in the next forty or fifty years would alter that. Jogging on the cindered path, walking down a corridor, lining up for dinner, teaching classes, attending mass, he sometimes felt like a ghost himself, detached from life, useless, hollow, and empty. Headpiece filled with straw.

After eight years he was granted parole. For the past six months he had been living in a half-way house on the East Side. Each morning he woke early, had coffee at George Webbs, then caught the bus to teach English at the Esperanza Center on the Southside. At noon he ate a McDonald's salad, then walked six blocks to Second Harvest to shelve food donations until it was time for his GED class. He worked thirty hours a week and volunteered another twenty to fill his time. Haircuts and dental appointments were hallmark events that broke his ordered routine. He had no car, no cell phone, no credit cards, no computer, no cable. He no longer carried keys, having nothing to lock up. His thin wallet contained only a state ID and his new library card, a prized possession. He was living a kind of post-life, invisible, and out of touch like an émigré pensioner without family, a survivor of no consequence. In his darker moments he thought of himself as Eichmann in Argentina. But the analogy was imprecise. Eichmann never killed anyone. He never had blood on his hands, only ink.

Molloy stormed back into the Coffee Trader. "That was Chicago. I've got to get back," he announced, waving southward. "Robo, I feel terrible about this. But I have to run. Listen, we have to get together." He opened a gold case and placed a card into Newman's breast pocket.

"Next time you're in New York, the Plaza is on me. We'll catch a Broadway show. Dinner at Sardi's. Drinks at Connolly's. Damn, Robo, I wish I could stay, but I gotta get back." He flexed into a boxer's stance and Newman stood, fists raised, to reenact their adolescent slow motion air punch farewell. Molloy feigned a knockout blow and fell back, waving good-bye.

Newman watched him dash out the door, finished his coffee, then left for the bus stop on State Street. In a few days Molloy would fly back to Newark or JFK despairing because he slept in a two million dollar condo instead of a twelve million condo and drove his girl to the Jersey Shore in a Corvette instead of the Hamptons in a Maserati. Newman's worldly possessions filled two suitcases. He was an exile in his home town, a refugee from his own past.

The encounter with Molloy had jolted him from the reassuring monotony of his routine. Molloy reminded him of his past and made him contemplate the future. For the past eight years Newman had found it bearable only to focus on small immediate choices, narrowing his options to decisions about which dessert to take or what book to read.

In eighteen months his parole would be over. He could leave Wisconsin and start a new life in a new place. He could open a bed and breakfast in Vermont, run a charter school in New Orleans, manage a car wash in Hawaii. He could leave America altogether and vanish into Syria or hide out in Afghanistan. *What next? What next*? The future loomed before him, open and unscripted. He had been uneasy about parole and welcomed the detailed list of restrictions on his movements and associations. Without supervision, he would face the terrible freedom of choice.

In prison and now on parole he had become something of a secular priest, serving soup to the homeless, teaching English to immigrants, washing dishes, and stuffing envelopes in poverty and self-denial. Should he spend the rest of his life in endless penitence, wearing sackcloth and

sambenito, living in halfway houses and volunteering at food pantries? Was that atonement or masochism? Nothing he did would bring the girls back. He had accepted his guilt and paid his debt. He could have hired Candy Ligoria. He had seen her defend far worse. Newman knew her tactics. Show the jury the video over and over until it lost its shock value, then present an computer simulation depicting the Fiesta crossing the white line, hammering on the U-turn. She would screen videos of normal traffic demonstrating no one obeyed the speed limit on Howell, proving that Newman was driving in his lane at a conventional speed. She would question the sobriety test, having experts raise doubts on the results. And she knew how to taint a jury pool. No doubt a web search would unearth less wholesome pictures of the girls -- flashing their tits on spring break or passed out after a beer bash. The local gossip blogs would have a field day. Candy would make sure everyone in Milwaukee heard about the Ecstasy and condoms. In court, through connotations and innuendo, she would turn the hapless victims into spoiled party girls who cut classes to party with a rocker at the Hyatt. And she would have fought the families over every nickel, protecting his condo and 401k's. Other lawyers in his situation would have had her on speed dial.

Newman had spared the families all that and lost a decade of his life, his fortune, his career, his home. But the girls had lost their lives at twenty. Did he deserve a new life? A second career, new home, family even? Or would that be a denial, a trivialization of what he had done? What kind of person could "move on" after ending two young lives? Could he ever take a vacation, sleep in a condo, or eat a steak in comfort? Could he ever allow himself a moment of joy? How could ever bring himself to make love again? How could he even start a new life? What would you say to a potential employer, investor, lover? When do you tell someone in this

new life that you had killed two people? For the first time in weeks the girls' faces came back to him, young and smiling.

Newman stood on the corner, nervously fondling the small column of coins in his pocket set aside for bus fare. He was too restless to stand still and paced back and forth like a man in a cell. With shortcuts the halfway house was less than two miles away. Hoping to settle his thoughts, Newman decided to walk. He had shirts to wash and needed the quarters for laundry.

The End