Travels in a Border State

a novel by Michael Morow
for Darlene, teacher and friend
Notes on the Novel

This is the first, unrevised draft of a novel completed as fulfillment of my senior honors thesis requirement at Ball State University. The thesis was done during spring quarter of 1974 under the sponsorship of Dr. Darlene Eddy, and completed on May 12th.

Though the entire novel was written during only about two months at the end of spring quarter (with the exception of chapter I and the first part of chapter II), the idea for it originated during the fall quarter of 1972. At this time, about twenty pages of nearly unintelligible manuscript were composed during a night ride on an Indiana Motor Bus from Gary to Muncie. The intention at the time was to write an extended, novella-length piece of fiction from start to finish. I wanted to do something in the opposite method from that I was using on an earlier novel, *Twin Lakes*, which was composed in kind of a patchwork fashion. I wasn't able to finally do that until this spring, by which time the story was no longer quite such a spontaneous idea. A final outline of the main line of the story's development, along with characters, themes, and motifs, was completed in about the middle of March 1974.

The idea of doing a novel about the character I call Gordon Talbot has been on my mind for a long time. I first used him in a short novel written during my freshman year in college, since intentionally destroyed by fire, that was presumptuously titled *Ghost Dancers of Suburbia*. The plot of that tired piece
had to do with idealistic young high schoolers who were aggressively combatting town baddies in an effort aimed at introducing sex education in public schools. Since then, I have used Gordon as a figure in about four short stories. In each one I seemed to learn a little more about his character, until he seemed the natural and most interesting protagonist worth exploring in Border State. I'm not sure that I've exhausted the character yet, and I still find Gordon interesting enough that I may use him again someday.

As stated at the beginning, though, Border State is only a first draft. I had hoped to spend a lot more time on it, but was unable to because of senior year exigencies. Some parts, as it stands, will remain pretty much unchanged though others will quite obviously have to be sifted out. I am sure, for instance, that in a couple places major metaphors stand apart and opposed to the narrative line of development. I also sense that parts of the dialogue are rather wooden. I only regret that I didn't have more time to work these things out.

Still, the thesis was a rewarding experience in a lot of ways. It gave me both the opportunity and the excuse to do something I had wanted to do for a long while. The "cover" of an honors thesis was really the only way to get undergraduate credit for doing something of this sort. It was fun in the writing, and I learned some things by doing it in the short time period. Finally, of course, was the chance to work with Dr. Eddy.

The photographs are an experimental idea that really stands
apart from the text itself. I don't believe the text depends
on their inclusion, though I do like them in there. My
mind has not been finally made up whether to keep them or not
in subsequent drafts of the novel. Perhaps when my attitude
becomes fixed about that, I will also be better able to
deal with some of those metaphors which seem to stand out
independently at times.

The series of introductory quotations to the novel also
does not imply that I intend to use all of them. They are
simply selections from the humanities and/or my random reading
at the time that reminded me in some way of what I was trying
to do. Each I find satisfactory in some way, and each is also
partly inappropriate. More thought and work, I think, will
correct this problem also.

Finally, and for obvious reasons in a work of this sort,
it is necessary to stress that all characters which follow
are purely fictional creations of my own, none of them bearing
any resemblance whatsoever to so-called "real" people, living,
dead, or otherwise.

Michael Morow
May 12, 1974

P.S. The photographs have been eliminated because
I do not find them completely satisfactory.

MM
Fall 1974
Everything is for a term remarkable in navies.

Herman Melville, *Billy Budd*.
What are the roots that clutch, what branches grow
Out of this stony rubbish? Son of man,
You cannot say, or guess, for you know only
A heap of broken images, where the sun beats.....

--T.S. Eliot, The Waste Land

For there is often a monstrous incongruity between the hopes,
however noble and tender, and the action which follows them.
It is as if ivied maidens and garlanded youths were to herald
the four horsemen of the apocalypse.

--Eric Hoffer, The True Believer

Could this compulsion to put invisibility down in black and
white be thus an urge to make music of invisibility? But I
am an orator, a rabble rouser--Am? I was, and perhaps shall
be again. Who knows? All sickness is not unto death, neither
is invisibility.

--Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man

Why seek ye the living among the dead?

--Luke, 24:5

Look out, the Saints are coming through!
And it's all over now, Baby Blue.

--Bob Dylan, It's All Over Now
Gordon Talbot was a photographer. He was out by himself taking pictures at the political rally. He liked his position. He felt comfortable in it. Through all parts of the crowd he could move freely. Out on the fringes with a lot of room he could change his film and survey the whole gathering out ahead of him. Right in the middle he could be lost, with the rest. He could even make his way up to the foot of the platform. He could go to the right of it, left of it, all around it, anything short of actually going on up there himself.

Gordon loved the anonymity of crowds. He wore blue jeans, a khaki jacket like everyone else. Here you could wander around and nobody knew your name. You could talk to people, get to know them, and if they asked you what your name was you could make one up on the spot. No one had to know what you were doing. This was complete freedom. Gordon found a certain exhilaration in it. Blending in totally to the
surroundings as he went about his business. Gordon knew that this was what, of all things, he really wanted to do.

How long would it last? Sooner or later there would be a familiar face. But before long, in this particular instance anyway, it would not matter anymore. He had already gotten quite a lot of the pictures he wanted.

It was out on the grass of the mall, late afternoon in the fall of the year. There were no clouds in the sky and the sun was very bright and the grass was very green and tall. All around, somewhat distant, the buildings of the campus spread out. They came in a strange combination in this place—the old brick buildings from the early part of the century, wide and spreading low to the ground, buried halfway up their structures in green vines. And from among them sprouting up the new buildings of the past seven years, tall and flat and all large glass windows, shining a dull blue—green. It was as if you were standing in the middle of a kind of time machine, past and present standing oddly and peacefully side by side yet still separate, not completely meshed together.

They were waiting out here now for the arrival of Senator Hayes. The Senator was to speak at five but everyone expected him to be a little late. He was coming on behalf of several of the local candidates campaigning for office. Most of the people had been drawn here, however, just to see him.

There was a festive atmosphere here. People seemed to be enjoying themselves. There was an excitement in the air. Like a mad parade, Gordon thought, but he felt it too. He had come
to see politics as a kind of mass recreation. A national pastime, like baseball. Where all the people, from the commonest to the highest, could know the names of the players. Know their batting averages and statistics, and exchange them like cards. Since Gordon had come to view politics in this way and stopped taking it seriously he had started enjoying it a lot more.

The band was playing music to get everybody in the spirit of the thing. They were a high school band from a small town a few miles down the road. They made a big sound, all brass, that filled the place up. As always with bands, Gordon thought they looked funny in their uniforms. Especially if you just looked at one of them by himself or herself, excluding from your attention the others all around wearing the same thing. When they stopped playing as they did, sporadically, they all looked so helpless and frightened sitting there stiffly. Were they at attention?

Girls of the band, in particular, looked that way. Gordon liked to look at all those pairs of bare white legs, held firmly together as they sat there in the rows of folding chairs. Invariably, if they were not playing, the girls hands at rest were set straight out ahead of them, one apiece on each leg, laid flat. The boys got to wear pants. The uniforms of the band were red and black. Those colors seemed to highlight the excessive amount of make-up that all the girls were wearing. They were like painted dolls, toy soldiers. Those big hats they were made to wear looking so incredibly cumbersome. And
with this make-up, those uniforms, and their clean perfect hair many of them gave the appearance of being so much older than they really were.

Gordon couldn't help thinking that the whole thing was, in a way, cruel toward the girls. Maybe they should let the girls have pants and make the boys go bare-legged. He said that aloud. It made the middle-aged woman in front of him turn around and give him an aroused and disgusted look. Her son was in the band.

In the time before the Senator arrived Gordon took a lot of pictures of this band and of the crowd from different angles. He was hungry, so he went over toward where the young Democrats were giving away free hot dogs and coke. They had long charcoal grills set up that were covered with orange, smoking hot dogs. At the moment it looked awful good to Gordon. He recognized a girl who was working at a table there, stuffing the dogs into buns which she was hurriedly taking out of half-opened boxes. She was dressed up in white and blue and her blouse was covered with buttons. She had a big red ribbon in her hair.

There was a line of people waiting—if you could pick out where the line went through the crowd—and they were giving one hot dog and one small paper cup, of coke to each person. Gordon was skipping his supper for this and he wanted more than just a skimpy ration. He went around the back of the grills. The girl, Jeanette, saw him. Gordon got two extra hot dogs and an extra coke, and lost his anonymity.
"Of course now you're going to vote for Bill Crawford for governor and Steve Davis and Jake Barnes for sheriff...."

"Come on," said Gordon, "come off it."

"Well listen," said Jeanette, "I shouldn't even be letting you do this. People might see."

"I thought this food was free. So who cares who eats it? Besides I'm working here too, just like you."

"At least you'll put on this button...."

"Yeah, sure, okay...."

Jeanette removed a round blue button with a name from her blouse and put it on Gordon's shirt. It had the colored picture of a man smiling on it. Gordon was looking at it.

"What you people have to go through just to eat," he said.

Jeanette stopped and looked sidelong at him, "Just what the Hell are you doing here, Gordon Talbot?"

"Taking pictures. Smile." He clicked it off. "That ought to be good. You were smiling and you were stuffing the food out."

"Send it to the Sentinel."

"I might. I'm covering this for them, at any rate."

"Favorably, I hope."

"Oh yes. I'm having a good time." Gordon took his food and wandered back into the crowd.

"Come back for more."

"Thanks."

Just exactly what he was up to here was a good enough question. Gordon wasn't even sure in his own mind. He had this
job for the Sentinel, the local newspaper. As a photographer primarily, and as a sometime staff writer. He would do a write-up of this rally and submit it with a couple photographs. But he was taking a lot more pictures than he needed for that. He had been covering all the grass roots campaigning this year in the area and had really become quite taken with it, taking pictures of it for its own sake. The good old fashioned stumping and flesh pressing, like this today. He had been looking for a new subject for some time now and this might be it. It would be natural for him, and fairly accessible. He could blend business with pleasure. But the whole concept had not yet taken a clear form in his mind and he was still not sure of exactly how or what he was going to do.

Time wore on and it was five o'clock. They had the band playing again. Now there were some clouds in the sky, grey and very distant along the western horizon. Where the sun was going to set, behind the platform. It seemed the wind had shifted a little; it was cooler. The girls in the band shivered. There was some activity on the platform. A young man in a suit was testing the microphone. Some of the candidates were up there now too, seated in one row behind the podium. The crowd moved closer and tighter. Homemade signs with their names, and the name of Senator Hayes, were distributed. The girl standing behind Gordon got one, a kind of a joke. It read Hayes/Davis: 76. There was a certain resignation that Gordon sensed, even here, about 72.

There was a man of about forty, balding and slight and
quite handsome, who was moved next to Gordon as the crowd closed around the platform. He had a small blue Crawford button on his lapel and he held it out to Gordon with his thumb and smiled.

"I'm a spy," he confessed, "I showed them this and they let me past the police."

The man was laughing, a good-natured fellow. Of course, it was a 'joke', this was a public rally. But when the man said that Gordon had still glanced instinctively, momentarily out beyond the distant fringe of the crowd where he saw a few of those blue uniforms, white helmets.

"You're a Republican?" Gordon asked.

"Oh...I'm a Democrat."

"How's that?"

"I'm the chairman in this county of Democrats for the President."

Gordon laughed, "Don't tell anybody. That makes you worse than a Republican around here."

"I know, I know."

"You ever seen Hayes before?"

"Twice. He's a good man. The same with Davis, Griffin, Jake Barnes, Okowski, all of them."

"Bill Crawford?"

"Ah...I'll take him over the other guy but I wouldn't talk about him."

"That button's got his name on it."

"Yes, the thing is that it's Crawford they're talking up
more than anyone else. The organization men, you know. And I'm part of the organization, at least I was. Look now--here comes the Senator---"

There was a movement back in the field behind the platform. A group of men were walking up together, two in the center, abreast. The one on the right, Gordon realized, was Senator Hayes. Everyone in the crowd was cheering. The band cranked up again; the Senator and his party took their seats on the platform.

The mayor climbed into the podium. At first there was a technical difficulty: his voice came on sharp and blaring. Someone was quickly dispatched and it was corrected. Both hands holding the wood of the podium, the mayor said how happy he was that everybody came out. Then he mentioned Senator Hayes, saying how happy he was that he could come out. This brought on the immediate, calculated applause. The youthful Senator sat smiling and waving, cross-legged. Then the mayor took back command as the cheers reached their crest and subsided.

All the politicians were introduced, one by one, in the order they sat in the back. There was Jake Barnes for sheriff, a young, engaging, law and order man. There was Stanley Okowski, the candidate for county coroner. And Douglas Griffin, a young lawyer running for a judgeship. George Pearson, an older established attorney downtown, was there too. And finally Steve Davis, the candidate for state senator. The biggest applause went to him.

Stephen Davis was a graduate student in government here at
the college, Gordon knew him; they had been together in a couple classes. Stephen, as he was called, never Steve, was an immediately likeable, friendly and open personality with a zest for politics. Gordon liked him too. He had even been persuaded to put a People for Davis sticker across the bumper of his car. This public identification with any person or idea was a rarity for Gordon. A peculiar American custom, he thought, this expression of your opinions on the rear of an automobile. Free expression was everywhere these days, he mused, on desktops, in restrooms, on walls of dark tunnels.

As the mayor continued, Stephen Davis was engaged in the back in a spirited conversation with a very old man. This man was a study in himself. Shaggy grey hair, a tall bony frame inside loose fitting brown clothes, a face seemingly ready to break out at any instant with some expression of dry corny humor, blind in one open, blank eye. That eye was like an old grey-blue marble. The kind Gordon remembered shooting on the playground long ago. The man had been introduced as "Will, over here" and drew some laughs as he waved airily back. Apparently he was a local favorite. He drew slowly on a long, Danish pipe as his head cocked slightly to one side, he listened intently to Davis. What in the world, Gordon wondered, could a person like Davis be saying to so interest this old codge? Gordon zoomed in on both of them, together, and caught some pictures.

Stephen was being introduced as the next speaker, his age, twenty-six years old, mentioned right after his name. "Yeah," Gordon could hear him laughing toward the old man as he got up
and took the platform. There was the applause and cheering, and the mayor standing aside clapping, and the signs going up. He made a couple of one liners about his youth and then waved it all down.

"This is going to be short," he said "I just want to say..." And then he thanked all his campaign workers, who had been largely responsible for organizing this. He named all of them, including Jeanette. "And now," he said, "without further adieu, let me introduce to you a man in his fourteenth year of distinguished service to the people of this state, a man who courageously and often by himself has stood up to the...inanity of the present administration. The man we all came to hear...Mister Carl Hayes, United States Senat------"

The cheering drowned the rest out. Stephen and Hayes were shaking hands. Gordon was shooting a lot of pictures. These were the ones the paper would want.

The Senator abandoned the podium, pulling the microphone out and walking in front with it. As it quieted down again he fastened the microphone to his coat and sat down on a table that was up front of the platform. He was silent there for a few seconds, smiling slightly and glassy-eyed, attached to the podium by a thin grey cord.

"Never did like being stuck behind them things. Now I can see you. And you can see me."

Everyone was silent. They had moved even closer together, filling in all the empty space. Gordon was right in front now. It seemed to him immediately that these actions of the Senator
were all a gimmick. Sitting down, the loosened tie. Trying to show he was just one of us, after all. Bring it down on our level, establish an easy rapprochement with the college students. Gordon waited and listened. The Senator was speaking slowly, his low voice amplified all around. This was not a prepared speech. Well, Gordon thought, this might be an act all right, but anyway it's a good one. He was pulling it off. Good show, Mr. Senator. Gordon eased back and enjoyed it.

So this was Senator Hayes. The boy wonder of politics; they still called him that. But this person up in front of the crowd was not a boy. From what he had read and the pictures he had seem Gordon had expected a different person. A different version of the same face, because he was recognizable. The man here was shrewder, more seasoned than the image that preceded him. It seemed credit to his shrewdness that the image of the child prodigy, undoubtedly long since passed, could still circulate.

On more real terms he had a reputation as a hard worker, which was valuable tender to people of this state. Along with that went a reputation as a scrapper and a fighter. He had engineered a great quantity of governmental reform legislation. Nothing radical, but the kind of thing that represented steady, creative, progress. Even when he occasionally (and reservedly) stepped outside of this role to take a more controversial stance, he was careful to put it within the context of his past accomplishment. Always, on all important issues, he maintained visibility.

Recently he had made a mistake. He thought that his name,
which was good commodity to be sure in his home state, was marketable outside. He had announced in the early part of the year that he was a candidate for president, and discovered that a lot of people had never heard of him. And when they had, for the most part, they took him for a raw boy. There were frequent complaints in the national press that he was too regional, too inexperienced, too lacking in national stature to be taken seriously. He was caught in his own trap. In all these years he had never bothered to update the image of himself that he had been launched on years ago. At home he didn't have to; he had his record to show. He had been more interested in hard work than, in self-propagation. This work was often behind the scenes, except to the people back home to whom he was careful that everything he did got proper exposure. In all his skepticism about politics, which was considerable, Gordon felt that this was a man to be reckoned with, who took his work seriously. Only on a national scale had this same man discovered, to his surprise found that these same qualities were not necessarily considered presidential. Senator Hayes had failed severely in the only two primaries he could afford to enter.

To be sure, no one at home and especially not his staff and workers had been surprised at the revelation of Senator Hayes' national ambitions. He was the star that many of the brightest, most ambitious young politicos of the state had attached themselves to in hopes of rising. Now there were rumors of disaffection and ambivalence among these people. Where were they going? There were not too many other bright stars
around. And they weren't getting any younger. Senator Hayes himself was silent about his future. Some of those closest to him reported that he was puzzled by the failure, the inability to catch on at all: hard work and diligence were supposed to have their rewards. He would have expected, in the least, to have had some consideration for the vice-presidency. One of the more perceptive Washington commentators held that this was Hayes' aim all along. But when the national convention came along he was not mentioned once among the multitude of names up in the air for that post. Of course Hayes did not fit neatly into the ideological camp that had seized control this year. There was that streak of conservatism in the things he believed most strongly in. He did not, for that matter, fit neatly into the ideological stance of the people that had organized this rally.

They did, however, need him. He was the person here that you came to. And the speech he was giving was carefully tailored to be useful to them. He concentrated on the record of the present administration. After an analysis of that, roughly the first two-thirds of his talk he could move into the basic philosophies evident from that record. Needless to say those philosophies, to this crowd, were laughable. He ended with some pointed remarks about the War, the Supreme Court, and the environment. Almost as an afterthought he added some comments about taxation. Stephen Davis was going to campaign rather heavily on the issue of high taxes.

The Senator's talk ended as it had begun. He paused, looked out into the crowd. He had strange eyes, the kind most
photographs could not catch. They were very light blue, like water. They looked at you, taking in the light, and then seemed to reflect it right back, like a mirror. But then he would smile, and that look would go away, and he thanked his audience. It was very neat. As if on cue the applause and cheers broke out and all the signs went up.

The Senator was waving and he was moving away. The men on the stand were all shaking hands. Gordon realized that it had been a fairly long speech. It seemed to have been successful, useful to the Senator as well as the locals. After all, his future plans were still unstated. He was a good politician.

People were spreading away in all directions. A good many, though, lingered and moved behind the platform where the Senator and others were shaking hands. The band had started up again. The feeling was anti-climax, as it usually was at this point in such a rally, except that Gordon could not pinpoint exactly what might have been the climax itself. There had been some laughs and some applause in the course of the talk, but as a whole it gave the effect of a kind of quiet explosion.

Well, Gordon thought, maybe this hand shaking business is what it's all about, the high point. He got back to his camera, adjusting it and wiping off the lens, and then moved on to get some close-ups of the handshaking, swept towards the back with the rest.

Right away he was confronted with the person of Stephen Davis. He made a gallant figure in his suit, all smiles, going around to introduce himself to people. He made a good
campaigner, with no reluctance of getting close to people, physically close, relishing the personal contact.

"Howdy Stephen."

"Why Gordon, I'll bet I know what you're doing. Working on your scrapbook again, eh?"

"Yeah. Famous people I have known."

"Well," said Stephen, dropping his voice to a tone of intimacy, stuffing his hands in his pockets, peering across Gordon, over the top of his ear, all of which Gordon noticed, "I wish you'd work on one famous person we both know....."

"Being Jacob Markey."

"Yes. You know that editorial he ran the other day wasn't exactly in our best interests."

"I'll see what I can do."

"I'd appreciate it."

"But don't count on anything. You know how he is. He doesn't like to be pushed. He thinks a lot of other people are trying to push him already. But I can say something. Maybe if he would just tone it down a little. You realize I don't have much influence. I just take pictures and write a few anonymous paragraphs."

"He respects your opinion."

"Maybe."

Gordon was walking over toward where Senator Hayes was shaking hands. There were about ten people near him, kind of standing in line. The sun now, half-obscured over those grey clouds in the west, was coming on in long, hard shafts of light. Everything
seemed to have a bright orange tint to it. Those clouds made long streaks, hanging across at angles to one another. Jeanette Reynolds was walking over, hovering near to Stephen. Stephen looked up and called to Gordon before he moved out of range.

"Hey Gordon."

"Yeah."

"Come back here a second, okay?"

Gordon had thought for a second of walking on as if he had not heard him. It seemed for an instant that freedom lay in that direction. He dismissed it, and walked on back to where Stephen and Jeanette now stood.

"Hey Gordon," Stephen dropped his voice again, put his hand on Gordon's shoulder. This is the one thing that Gordon could not get used to in politicians, the compulsion to touch. Stephen looked at the long cylindrical lens of his camera, and then looked him in the eyes, "What are you really doing, anyway?"

"Taking pictures." Gordon looked him back in the eyes. No more than that, he thought, say no more. He held a slight, suppressed satirical grin on his face, though still good-natured. Your move, Stephen.

"You know, I've noticed you've been taking quite a lot of them. Old man Markey must be getting pretty--loose--with his money."

"And all those pictures last week," Jeanette chimed in playfully, "at the O'Keefe rally. And three days before that, when Jake Barnes took his walk through the town....."

Gordon was about to wander off again. He didn't like it,
the politicians taking his new pastime as a joke.

"Wait," Stephen intervened, "I'm not trying to pry into your business. Nothing like that at all. I don't care if you're taking pictures for the F.B.I. Listen Gordon, I want to ask you a---favor: My assistant campaign manager resigned yesterday. Too much school work, it's starting to burden him down. I can understand that, I don't hold it against him at all...."

"So you want me to go to work for you?"

"Right." Stephen Davis straightened up, his face brightening into a wide grin, "You know, Gordon, it's not as easy getting people as you think. I mean people who will work, people you can trust. And I can't wait too long. We were just starting to get headquarters established in different parts of the district, the door to door campaigns, all that----"

"Isn't there anybody who's working for you now?"

"Well yeah but," Stephen's face took a strained expression, he threw down his hands. This told Gordon that it might not be that he himself who was in so much demand, except that Stephen seemed singularly unimpressed with some of those around him.

"Gordon, you've been around awhile. You know a lot about what goes on, about politics---"

"Not from the inside. I have no experience there at all."

"Oh come on, it's nothing at all. You've got the background. You'll catch on---fast. What I need most--is--someone with the--capacity-to-learn."

Gordon was momentarily silent.

"Gordon's uncommitted," Jeanette said.
Stephen gave her a look.

"No, that's okay," Gordon said, "She's right on that, I guess. I'm not cut out for politics."

"But Gordon," Jeanette broke out again, "If people like you don't want to get involved, who will? Don't you care about who represents you in the statehouse? You're opinionated. This is a crucial election. How can it go anywhere when the people who should be caring just stand on the sidelines and watch?"

It reminded Gordon of the columns back in his high school paper. Nobody cared. Nobody was out rooting for the team. Apathy was everywhere. There was no place in the world as apathetic as our high school. Gordon remembered that he had written a couple columns like that.

"We need you, Gordon," Stephen said.

Gordon looked at him. "You want me to be assistant campaign manager. So who's the campaign manager?"

"Jeanette here is!"

They all exchanged looks. Stephen discerned something in Gordon. "Now you realize," he said, "that I just can't pay anybody to do this. I have to rely on volunteers. There's simply no other way."

"Oh money," said Jeanette.

"Yeah, I know that," said Gordon, "that's not the thing. The thing is I have to give up my job on the Sentinel to do this. You just can't do both. Mr. Markey isn't going to have a campaign reporter who is working actively for one of the candidates. Any of them, either side. I can't say I blame him. And... there
might be some other things I'd have to give up too...."

"You'd be working both days of the weekend," Stephen said, "and a couple of week nights. Maybe other times, on occasion. There's never enough help."

Gordon didn't know what to say. He was very uncomfortable. He thought he'd better not make a decision right away. But Jeanette and Stephen were both looking at him. Silence again. Gordon fought against breaking it. Then Stephen came to life; he had something.

"Look Gordon, I know that you'd be---giving up money to do this. I know that's a lot to ask. I've no right to ask you really, I guess. You're absolutely free to say no, and no hard feelings either. I can't make up for any money you lose working for the Sentinel, I can't pay you. But I'll promise you this. If you have to travel around the district, and you would---a lot---I'd promise you help with getting meals, and board if it's advantageous to stay overnight--and all traveling costs. Call it operating expenses." He looked right at Gordon again. "And it goes without saying that you can just keep on taking all the pictures you want to. Everything, all the time. Hell, I don't care if you want to take pictures of me getting out of bed in the morning.......

"Listen," Gordon said, "I don't want to say yes or no yet. I have to have time to think about it. How soon do you have to know?"

"Two days at the latest. We have to get moving again this weekend. There's no more time for putting these things off. I'm
"Sorry to come at you like this with it but....."

"That's okay, I understand. I'd like to get over now and say hello to the Senator, if you don't mind."

"Gordon, thanks. For not saying 'no' yet, anyway. I expected you to."

Gordon looked back at him, "I'll call you."

"See you later."

"See you, Gordon."

Gordon walked again towards Senator Hayes, who was almost done shaking hands and about to leave. Hell, he thought, why didn't I just come out and say no. Gordon was immediately very angry with himself about that. He knew Stephen was fighting an uphill battle but he never imagined he was that desperate. He needs me, he says. So who would he have got if I didn't happen along?

Gordon shook hands with Senator Hayes and congratulated him on his speech. The Senator thanked him. He seemed as if he had all the time in the world. He was not, after all, running for election this year. Gordon would not see Senator Hayes again during these campaigns, but he would think now and again during the coming weeks of his enigma, his performance here. He was an example, a model of a kind, all in all a survivor. Before he left Gordon asked the Senator for a couple close-up pictures. The Senator obliged.
He had a whole day. He didn't know what to do. It angered him that a decision like this—over a job that was probably relatively insignificant in a beginner's political campaign—could cause so much frustration. He had gone over it all in the day since the previous evening. Now it was clear in his mind what was to be gained or lost by taking either route. It didn't help any.

Of all these reasons for or against, curiously absent were any motivations toward making a political commitment. Gordon recognized this. He was simply indifferent. He believed easy enough in the things Stephen Davis was concerned about, sure, they were easy enough to believe in. But he would feel no kind of personal loss at all if Stephen Davis were not to gain a seat in the State Senate. And on the other hand he would feel no sense of victory if he won. Except that it might be interesting to know somebody in public office.

So it didn't seem to make any difference at all, whoever
won the election. Davis' opponent, in fact, seemed to be a rather personable fellow himself. Gordon didn't have any illusions about politicians being able to accomplish anything significant, once elected. Especially at this level. What of all the fine things that Stephen was saying, who would listen to him, a freshman Senator, a college student? Gordon did not see college students as being held very high, as a group, in the eyes of the general public he knew. And Gordon realized more each day that he himself shared that feeling.

These people involved in the Davis campaign, he thought, all seemed to be trying so hard to embody a certain style. As if they all thought of themselves as embattled young liberals. It was a political stance that had been rather popular in recent years, in many parts of the country. And the Davis people bought it whole. Gordon thought about them, and of the kinds of things they used to say in the press about such people. Young, concerned, idealistic, energetic—all those words. And charismatic. Charming, personally appealing. Except it seemed to Gordon that this ground had been so overworked.

Today, at least a decade on, these types seemed slightly unreal. Of course, these campus people were just kids in the early sixties, in grade school or high school. But they were the true inheritors of the style. And, Gordon thought, all that was left was the style.

And they believed in it so much—they believed in all those press releases about people like themselves. Children's crusades. And then they compounded their foolery by writing
things like that about themselves in their own campaign literature. Gordon had seen one of those Stephen Davis pamphlets. It had a red, white and blue cover with a picture of Stephen in one of his broad, toothy smiles staring out and away at nothing, at you. When you opened it up the first thing that came across was that strange introductory paragraph starting off, "Students have always been one of the most deeply sensitive and caring groups in society...," and then explaining why. Oddly, it was because of their freedom, their lack of family ties and responsibility—they thus had time to care. It went on to say that activism had been unsuccessful in the sixties because "we were misunderstood." And efforts were interrupted, it was added, because of such things as "classes and papers, exams, and vacations."

It was a rather awkward sentence, and Gordon thought it served as a rather careless disclaimer to all those fine ideas which had built up to it.

But by the time the pamphlet ended, it came to the promise that things were changing now, that things could change. There was a New Wave, in big capital letters. And this was represented, of course, in the person of Stephen Davis. Through Stephen Davis, "we would control." Stephen Davis was one of us! Yes, it concluded, through people like him there would be some direct power for each one of us—"we will control, you will control."

So there it was. But it was all, Gordon concluded, finally kind of sad. Gordon wondered who had been persuaded to write that drivel, but then he knew and he knew that person didn't really have to be persuaded that hard. Jeanette Reynolds had done it,
for her man Stephen. Gordon had been in a couple classes with her, and he knew that she really wasn't such a bad writer. She was pretty good in fact; she could do things nicely and with a certain grace. Why, he wondered, does she prostitute herself so readily for this kind of thing?

The Davis literature led Gordon to think of some other pamphlets he had seen recently, for the national campaigns. For some of the old charisma people were still around, the Great Originals. In fact, they ran the show this year. Of course, they no longer seemed concerned with those great issues of yesteryear---civil rights and opposition with the War---but were more these days, it seemed, concerned with themselves. If the blacks could be liberated, (and especially since that particular work seemed harder than originally thought), then why not liberate ourselves? And maybe, Gordon thought, the reason you didn't hear so much about the War anymore was that these same people realized that their own crusading mentality was partly responsible for it. For the second part of the national ticket they had come up with a man who claimed some obscure lineage to one of the Originals. But he came on as a crude imitation, a brash obnoxious salesman, over the hill. His promises reminded Gordon almost directly of Davis'. He said that, if elected, they would invite the poor people to dinner at the White House. Only a few hundred could be invited of course but, as the campaign literature pointed out, you might be one of them.

Gordon did not want to be any part of this crowd. But what kept him from making too hasty a decision was that it seemed, at
times, that Stephen Davis stood somewhat apart from them. As if he was only using them, as if he adopted only the style but did not really make it too much of a secret that he was only in it for himself. At least he was an honest liar. Still the charisma people seemed to be too close for comfort. But then they were harmless in a way, kind of pathetic. Didn't they know that their style, that ideological stand, was bankrupt? Or hadn't that information filtered down to this part of the country yet? Didn't they see what was happening to their forerunners? Didn't they realize that nobody really cared? Hell, Gordon thought, I don't really care either. These people liked to think that they were ahead of their time, the harbingers of a new day in politics. In reality they were the last spasm of a dying line.

So all of this was Gordon's analysis of politics. And it was no wonder then to himself that whenever he was in the company of these people he was uncomfortable. He rarely spoke freely when he was face to face with them. He usually shunned personal contact with them altogether. But then again why was this, as when he felt embarrassed when confronted by Stephen and Jeanette the evening before, especially if he felt that they were all so pathetic and useless?

Gordon really knew why. It was because, whatever the futility of their pronouncements and expressed concerns, he felt that they had touched a realm of experience that was totally alien to him. They had been out on campaigns, gone door to door, worked. Believe as he might that politics was all a game, a recreation, Gordon realized underneath that
these were the feelings of an outsider.

He had been through almost the whole program of government study at the university, finally to remain somewhat disappointed and vaguely restless. A compilation of research studies was what the course was, a social study. An attempt to place objective measurements on an intangible—human behavior. Gordon knew that a lot of the studies he had been through were really good ones, but finally there was a fixed sameness to so much of it. A sameness that was inherent in the process of study itself, really—the accepted pattern of methodology. Gordon thought that the social sciences had really gotten carried into an obsession with methodology, along with a strange corollary obsession with the quantity of it. The limitations of this kind of thinking really made for a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy: you ask objective questions, you get objective answers. But the assumption was that a kind of improvement was going on—that each study following the collective body of research before it should be a better study, with better and more proven methods. A kind of natural selection of ideas.

What you ended up with, though, was to Gordon a kind of guarded cliche. Human behavior as a set of dots on a graph, as lines and curves, often bell-shaped. Conclusions so general and qualified as to come out sounding like common knowledge. You might as well have gone out and talked to one person, the archetypal "man on the street." Gordon wondered if the conclusions of the social scientists differed fundamentally
from those of a popular television hero, the friendly, likeable bigot. Except of course in the social sciences you have all the charts and graphs to paint to. Methodology was also, finally, a defense and a shield.

So Gordon wanted to see an election, instead of just studying one in the classroom. It was not that you couldn’t learn something about them that way, even quite a bit. But there was still something else that you wanted to know, somewhere you wanted to go where everything in your books stopped short. Gordon wasn’t even sure what it was, but it had something to do with the thrill, the excitement of it all. To be taken up, like yesterday, and carried away in that mad parade. He could get some of that from the reporting angle, but a distance remained. And more than anything else, Gordon was getting tired of the attitude of the ordinary journalist, as he saw it, toward the political process. He could sense a certain mild condensation among the reporters he knew for the politicos. And traces of that same attitude in himself also bothered him. As if the whole thing was a kind of extended joke, of which the journalist was, of course, helpless to stop but could nevertheless have the final word. Gordon even saw this in his boss, Jacob Markey, a man he had some respect for as a thoughtful, better than average man in his field. Yet in him too, especially as evinced in his regular pronouncements which were falling hard upon such people as Stephen Davis, was the recurring picture of a man who saw himself as somehow above it all.
At the same time, Gordon realized it was a comfortable position that he himself had shared and liked. And he would have to give it up if he was going to work for Davis. Markey would not have an at-large reporter who was involved in a partisan campaign, for either side. But Gordon was also fairly sure of getting his job back easily after the election, if he decided to give it up. And still if he joined, the part that was especially appealing was the fact that he would not be directly and personally involved—something like a detached observer undercover.

For of all the arguments that Gordon could conjure up, pro and con, not the least of them would be his opportunity for photographic study. Earlier in the year he had done an exhibition of his earlier work at the school's art gallery through the photography department. Most of those pictures had to do with Gordon's going back to the worlds of his late childhood, all the places they had used to go fishing and swimming—the wide slough and the swampland, the old muddy ditches and big deep rivers in the north, and the dark woods that surrounded the banks of those rivers. All those pictures had stood there before Gordon at the exhibition, each separate and distinct but all together making a kind of unity, and in standing there looking back at them Gordon had experienced something both wonderful and eerie, strange.

It was hard even to go back to those places now. When Gordon had gone back in the spring, to fish again as always, he had felt a disturbing kind of deja'vu or double vision, as if the scenes before him had been transformed and he was not
sure if he was looking at them as they were or through the coloring of a private vision he had set apart. For the process of observing and of recording those observations also served to put him away at a distance from those things, a distance that seemed forever uncrossable now that it was established, as if he was burning bridges that led back into his own past. But still the pictures were there, and Gordon realized that they possessed a certain magic and attraction that he himself had not really been in control of. There was the wide flat surface of the water between the banks of the river, those big oaks and cottonwoods in the foreground throwing shadows and standing against it all in their own patterns. And there was the old wooden shed connected to the old abandoned house trailer, surrounded now by a deep pool of water from when the river overran its banks in the storm, and all those crazy old things that they had found inside that place the day they waded across—the water-rotted old beds and the wood panelling, the white china cups and saucers with the light blue tracings on them and all the odd silver utensils, spoons and can-openers and mousetraps and empty cans and boxes, and the windows, some broken and half-boarded up. There were all these things and they all had a certain intricacy and delicacy to them, in shadow and texture and form, and it was the intricacy and delicacy of a world. So there was again the water, with the small split red and white bobbers in them making their own subtle movements, and there was the big willow tree next to the bank by the old rusty Dodge, torn apart and partly buried in the mud, and the big grey logs that came up and ran down some of the way along the bank,
some of them at the inlet loosened away to float out some way into the river. And there was finally out of all of this the old steel girder bridge that made a gentle arc across the river to the other side—the other side a wall of big thick trees that hid from view and from the picture, what was beyond it in the distance, except that Gordon knew in his mind what was there: it was the great muddy bayou that stretched out for miles to the south with all its meandering and winding streams, each with their own wild and erratic currents, the streams that ran along the wet clay banks that they had gone back on foot to fish in, losing so much tackle, bobbers and hooks and even the largest and heaviest lead weights in that crazy water and in the jagged sticks that floated down it and underneath it, until they finally went back to the car left behind in the quiet part of the swamps where it was still barely navigable, except for the big muddy potholes across the ditches that made the road like some battered wartime landscape—and it was in those big holes that Gordon's old car had gotten stuck in that day and they had taken the whole long afternoon to get it out, barefoot and wild and shirtless, laughing and covered with the rich black mud that was there.

So it was all there in the pictures and Gordon could still look at them all sometimes and wonder. But he knew that really he was somewhere beyond that now, for better or for worse, and in one sense at least he knew he had to be. For when you have been to that river once, and done it and had it turn out the way you had, what was the point to keep returning? To
repeat and repeat and finally exhaust it and yourself in what would turn into exploitation? Gordon was looking for a new kind of subject now, something that would convey the new sense of movement and activity that he had felt taking off all around him in recent months. It was not that he couldn't go back and fish there on occasion, and it wasn't even, he knew, that you couldn't make a lifetime out of such places if you wanted to, because you could. Gordon knew of several photographers, painters, writers and even ordinary people who did just that, and he knew some of them personally. It was just that Gordon thought that they, the ones he knew, had missed something there the first time around. And they always would.

The Davis thing might be just what he was looking for. It would be fun in a kind of strange way. Tongue in cheek, dark comedy. If you were not sure where to go next, why not travel in the company of this enigma for awhile? It would be a way of getting somewhere, from point A to point B as it were. Gordon would be able to get around to some places near here he hadn't seen yet, listen to conversations, meet people, see what was happening. And of course, there would be Jeanette. But after playing with the idea all day, Gordon still didn't know what to do. He would be seeing his old friend Gary, though, at the university pool early the next morning. Gary always knew what to do. He would ask him about it.

Morning came, and about eight o'clock Gordon made his way across the campus with a towel. Gary was on the swimming team and had been doing quite well for himself recently.
No one but members of the team were supposed to be using the pool at these hours, but Gary insisted to his coach that Gordon be allowed to come out and help pace him. Gordon had been a pretty good swimmer at one time. So they came out together and did this often, at least twice a week.

Gary was waiting for him in the locker room. He was a rather reticent fellow lately, even more than usual, and Gordon looked to him as a person who had found a certain sense of balance in these unsettled days. Of course, Gary was settled. He was Gordon's age, about twenty-two, but two years behind in school. They had been in high school together and then Gary had gone off and gotten a job, married within about a year. And then, in his normal roundabout and somewhat careless way, decided that he wanted to go back to school. In his second year now, Gary had worked himself into a partial scholarship for his swimming.

"Hope the damned fools haven't been in there yet dumping their chlorine," Gordon said, "Do you know if they have?"

Gary shrugged, "Uh-ah-uhum. But if the chlorine bothers you, close your eyes. You don't really need them anyway."

"Maybe you don't, brother."

"Well, when you've been back and forth across this thing as many times as I have you know where the course is. You can feel it."

They showered and headed on in. The pool was one of the newest buildings on campus, a large circular structure. The big domed roof overhead shone down with a myriad of bright
lights on the stone patio below, which held two square blue pools. One was larger, wider, and shallower, divided into a series of straight numbered courses for competition and general recreation; the smaller one was for diving, and went about twice as deep. The two of them emerged onto the tile floor and walked over to the larger pool. A glance showed Gordon a slight opaque cast to the water; the custodian had been here, as usual, with the chlorine.

"I'll lead off," Gordon said, and took a racing dive out. Gary followed close behind and to the right.

They went on for the better part of an hour, both getting pretty well warmed up. Gordon really enjoyed it, these hours in the pool when there was nobody around or up in the bleachers. Before too long Gary really took off on his own; he no longer really needed a pacer. He had that extra capacity athletes called "second wind", and then he had a third. Meanwhile Gordon continued doing different variations of the same thing, at about the same speed. Gordon would think back to high school, where things had been different. There Gordon was the swimmer, and Gary just a runner-up on second string. They had gotten acquainted late in the junior year, Gary coming along once in awhile with Gordon and his friends out to the river and slough on weekends. Through Gordon, Gary had taken a developing interest in swimming. Now he was really good, strong and controlled and disciplined. He took it seriously. Meanwhile Gordon had let it go and ignored it, except as an idle pastime.

"You're lookin' a lot better," Gordon said after they got
out, "I don't know why you still even bother to have me around. You're doing things now I was never even able to do myself."

"Hell," Gary said, "I don't know what I'd do if you didn't come around in the morning, I'm so used to it. You help keeping me from getting too lazy. I'm just used to havin' you around, I guess."

"Just as long as you don't need me to run down the sides during the meet," Gordon said, and they both laughed.

"Yeah," said Gary, "That'd be pretty funny."

They were going back in, Gary rubbing down his thick brown hair and his start of a beard. He became more serious again for a moment, "I just wish I hadn't forgotten the clock."

"Well, we'll use it next time."

"Right. I just wanna see how I'm doing. The time's important. It felt real good this morning but you can't always trust that. The clock's important. I remember seeing it this morning just before I left, sitting there on the dresser...."

Gordon was going to tell Gary about the Davis business but he hesitated a little now. It had occurred a little surprising to him when Gary had admitted that he needed Gordon around on these mornings, that Gary thought about him the way he had been thinking about Gary all this time. It was kind of laughingly funny almost, Gary being so damn good on his own. But then, why should it be so strange, they had been pretty close for a long time. Besides, Gordon thought, he realizes something I wish I did more often—that he needs other people.

They were dressed now and waiting to regain their breaths,
sitting there on the wood benches in the locker room when Gordon said, "I want to ask you about something."

"Yeah, sure."

And Gordon went on to tell the whole story of his ambivalence, everything that had gone through his mind in the last couple days. And then he just sat there. Gary didn’t say anything right away, just kind of sat there blankly and gave an embarrassed smile. But he had listened closely.

"Huh," he finally said, "Well, I don’t really know. How do you feel about it? What do you really want to do?"

"I mean... I don’t know. That’s what I’ve been trying to say...."

Gordon was kind of disappointed. And rather surprised that Gary didn’t have any instant opinions about this, any witty little anecdote. Gary was changing. But then what the devil do I expect, Gordon was forced to ask himself, for my friend to figure my way out of something that I can’t myself? And sure, Gary might be changing, but who wasn’t? Gordon was starting to feel foolish for bringing it up, thinking that it might be time to start getting more realistic.

"I don’t know," Gary spoke up again then, "I’ve never really thought of anything quite like this. Just think about what you really want, I guess. Do what you think is right."
The Sentinel office was downtown, lodged between two massive old brick structures. Gordon walked in and made his way down the long corridor to the back, passing a couple of his co-workers and greeting them. The plain black and white clock on the wall said it was about twelve-thirty. Markey and many of the others seemed to be out to lunch.

Gordon wandered around for awhile, going to the photography room where some of his pictures from the Hayes rally were tacked up on the bulletin board. They didn't look like anything special there—just large and glossy, black and white abstractions in the typical newspaper style. Other pictures from some of the other photographers were here too—pictures of smashed cars, prominent local characters, and pictures that the newspaper people took of each other when there was nothing else to do. These were probably the most interesting, though they too quickly went stale with their air of a somewhat sad, tarnished, provincial
humor. I wonder who's the funny one this week, Gordon thought, when he noticed the captions that had been placed under the pictures. There was one of Markey at his desk, sleeves rolled up and looking right at the viewer. The caption said, "a man of integrity." Was this supposed to make you laugh? Gordon even found an obscure image of himself, looking out of the background shadows in a picture of this same room, at night. The caption read, "our free-lance sports reporter proves camera shy."

Why does everything here, Gordon wondered, fall so readily into cliche'? He looked around these rooms; the place seemed to be almost a conscious cliche' of what people would believe to be the cliche' of a typical small-town newspaper office. As if time had stopped, frozen, the clocks turned back not to a time that had even once been, here or anywhere else, but to a time that had never really existed anyway. The wood desks, the pieces of tomorrow's half-finished newspaper pasted up here and there on the walls, the cut shreds of yesterday's paper critiqued in red and laying atop the desks or under them on the floor. The old typewriters in good repair sitting side by side with newer ones, as if they were too incongruously perfect to be real and were only modern imitations designed to look like antiques.

The air here seemed stagnant, closed in on itself. It smelled a little bit like varnish, and Gordon thought of that slightly polished, preserved look to the wood-grained pieces here. He looked up to the ceiling to see that old black four-bladed fan turning slowly. Hell, he thought, that's not doing
any good. He wondered why someone didn't open the windows, the
day being warm and sunny as it was, the middle of September
and the trees still green. So he went over to the windows, and
discovered that they had been open all along.

Restless, Gordon went down to Markey's office to wait for
him. He had spent many hours there and knew the place well.
It was just like every place else around here, only more so. The
thing that always intrigued Gordon most, though, was the calendar
hung up on the wall to the side of Markey's desk. It was just
a typical promotional calendar from a local paint supplies store,
with black numbered weekdays and red for Sundays and holidays.
But for all the twelve months, it only had three pictures. The
first was a picture of a boy with a giant straw hat and a cane
fishing pole standing next to a secluded green pond. There was
a sign by the bank that read plainly, "old fishin' hole." The
second picture was of a big home in southern plantation style,
one of those stately Greco-Roman conglomerations with tall
white pillars, standing alone on a hill. The last picture
showed two big white birds, like cranes or herons and seemingly
just taken off, their long legs and wings all stretched out,
silhouetted bare against a blue sky. This calendar was, in
effect, the cliché of clichés... It made a strange trilogy
here, though, and Gordon found himself paging through it about
every time he came in.

Markey finally returned from lunch, striding across the
wood floor in his brisk manner, shouting something outside the
door just before he entered and closed it, and apologizing to
Gordon for making him wait. He thrives on it, Gordon thought, this world of the clichés of journalism come to life. Gordon wished he could stop thinking in that vein today, as if his vision was somehow poisoned, coloring everything he saw. It especially bothered him now as Jacob Markey sat down in his black swivel chair across from him, not only his editor but also a friend. But Gordon couldn't help it. Markey was a busy, pleasant fellow, black thinning hair and glasses, short and in his mid-fifties. He was at once open and direct and stubbornly independent, and with his tie loosened and sleeves rolled up characteristically, he was thanking Gordon for his recent campaign stories.

"Haven't seen you for a few days, Gordon, but I've got all your stuff. It's first-rate, too."

"Yeah, I've been running around a lot, leaving the stuff off here either real early or real late. Guess that's why I've missed you."

"What're ya doin' next?"

"Well, that's what I came in about...."

"You know we're runnin' this thing thing on the Barnes-Andrews race tomorrow, and we're gonna need something pretty soon on the Hansen-Davis business, too. Interviews, you know, or something like that...."

Markey was making a not too subtle suggestion, and any other time Gordon wouldn't have been bothered at all, would've probably picked up on it. He could see now that this wasn't going to be easy. He didn't say anything right away, just
slowly took a camera off that he had slung over his arm and took out his wallet.

"The thing I came in for," Gordon said finally, thinking that directness was the best way to deal with Markey, "is to tell you I'm quitting, for awhile at least."

"For awhile?"

"Yeah. I'm going to work, for Steve Davis."

"You're crazy."

"I figured you wouldn't want someone working both sides, so that's why I brought this stuff in....."

"You're right on that."

"So here's the camera, I've got one of my own anyhow, and here's my press pass, and here's something I worked on last night. About some of the new building plans at the college. You might be able to use it....."

Gordon was running through everything he had planned to do or say, laying these items out on Markey's desk. Markey didn't say anything right away, seeming to sense something about Gordon. But Gordon was relieved that his editor didn't really seem too upset or surprised at all at what he was doing.

"Well," Markey finally said, "I guess you're mind's pretty well made up. I'm not gonna try to talk you out of it. But I will tell you this. You're friend Davis is a punk, just a cocky young turk who doesn't know anything about this town or this district, just goes to school and comes in here. You know more than he does. And the only reason he's got the nomination is that they've already written this year off as a throwaway. Don't
you know that?"

"Well, maybe, but I think it's too early to say......"

"Oh Hell, Gordon, they're all saying it, all of them. Talk to the pros. Anybody that knows his ass from a hole in the ground knows what's gonna happen this fall, and especially in this state, all across the board. People are fed up, especially with people like your friend. And another thing--Davis is being used. He's such a sap, doesn't even suspect it himself. Hell, I was talking to the Democratic chairman, just the other day, and you know why they gave it to Davis? Well, I'll tell you. They see it coming but they also see a good opportunity to bury him and his kind for good. Blame it all on them afterwards and then rebuild. It's happening everywhere. The campus vote, hah! The campus is even lucky to be voting at all. And you should have heard this guy, the way he described it at their little convention, when Davis walked in there....."

"Maybe what you're saying is right, about Davis being set-up. I wouldn't know about that. But I think if you are right, that's all the more reason I feel like working for him...."

"It's just a waste of time, Gordon. I'm not gonna try to stop you, do what you will. But you're wasting time. If it's campaign work you want, at least get into one that's going someplace. I can get on the phone and have you working for Hansen in five minutes if you want it."

"No thanks."

"Hansen's a good man. He's lived here awhile, been an attorney. People know him. I'm not gonna tell you that he's
some kind of political genius, but neither is Davis. That's one thing that's obvious."

"And Hansen isn't gonna stir things up, either."

"Don't count on it, Gordon."

There was a silence. Gordon had expected Markey to say all that, and probably would have been disappointed if he hadn't. But it still seemed that Markey knew more than he was saying. Well, the hell with it. And Gordon felt it would be presumptuous to bring up the subject Stephen had suggested, those "unfavorable" editorials. That would be a waste of time anyhow, and Gordon didn't want to break certain kinds of understandings he had with Markey. But Markey was just sitting there now, easing back into his chair a little, and it seemed he had been reflecting on something.

"So," Markey finally said, "You want to quit for awhile, but you've still got a camera of your own anyhow..."

"Oh yeah," Gordon said, and then let that drop, realizing what Markey had just said and remembering his almost perfect memory for certain key words and phrases. "What I mean is," Gordon began again, "if you don't want to take me back afterwards, I understand. I would like to come back, but that's your business. I don't mean to impose."

"There are a lot of young guys like you who'd like to work part time for the paper," Markey said. "But don't you worry about it...."

"You mean I can come back afterwards?"

"Well, I don't want to say yes or no right now. You never
know what can happen around here, running a paper. But don't let it worry you too much. And another thing... "Markey trailed off, playing around a little with the items Gordon had set before him and finally picking up the yellow triangular press-pass tag. "You might wanna keep this."

"Well, I don't know...."

"Here take it," Markey said, handing it across to him, "You never know when you might need this."

"Thanks a lot."

"Anytime."

Gordon looked at him. There he sits, Gordon thought, in the middle of all this a conscious stereotype, a living cliche'. Why does he choose to live out his life like that? Gordon still couldn't think of an answer, except to remember again how much Markey obviously enjoyed his role. And still some part of the man remained an enigma, and that was the part of him that was responsible for these last few gestures. It is almost disturbing, Gordon thought, that extra sense that Markey had— that sense that gave him little insights into the characters of others, as the business about the press pass had revealed Markey's awareness of Gordon's duplicity. But Gordon figured to let it go. Maybe Markey didn't really realize the implication of what he was doing, only did it as a friendly token of thanks, another kind of stereotype. Gordon preferred to think of it like that. But still, in the least, it would remain the basis of a sort of silent understanding that he felt he had had the skill to leave intact today, an understanding that he, Gordon, could
pick up again later if it suited his purposes. Gordon thanked him once more before he left, and they shook hands. As Gordon left the office, he could hear the editor picking up his phone and beginning to dial.

He decided to walk right over to Davis' office and present himself, instead of even calling. Yes, Gordon thought, it certainly is a beautiful day. He felt light as he went along, with his confrontation with Markey behind and the open-ended experience with the Davis people ahead. He crossed through town and the residential neighborhood on the periphery of the campus. Davis' office was on the other side of the campus among a small cluster of business establishments, so he would have to pass through the center on the way.

The most notable scenery along this route was a monument at the front of the campus. There were two major sculptural landmarks in this city, the other being a life-size local reincarnation of the "Appeal to the Great Spirit" down by the river, the Indian with arms outstretched atop a horse. The campus piece was an allegorical representation of the spirit of charitable giving, an elevated bronze statue in a circular architectural plaza. Gordon had always found the place pleasing, and had spent some time in his earlier years here trying to photograph it from different angles. He paused for a moment, struck again now by the harmonious kind of balance that it all achieved, something unusual for memorials of this sort.

The statue had purportedly been erected to commemorate a family of businessmen that had established this city during its
boom years, earlier in the century. Their names, to be sure, were carved there in granite, and the five limestone pillars lining the arc of the circle were supposed to be a symbolic representation for each of them. But still the commemorative function of the monument seemed secondary to something else here. The names were in the back and out of the way; it was the figure itself that seemed to come forward to the onlooker. It had an air of restrained classicism, the surrounding white pillars tending to recede towards the tall green trees immediately behind rather than jumping forward to close the sculpture in. The figure seemed to modestly suggest the features of a woman but the face was more ambiguous, more at times like a youth with its crown of short, flowing hair. A long robe clasped at the shoulder came down gracefully across the figure and floated off a little behind, cut to just above the feet. One arm was left bare and was held outwards, gently bent at the elbow, the hand coming free and open. But it was the face itself that made the statue interesting and always worth returning to--retaining a somewhat sad expression as it did with the lips slightly parted and the bronze of the surface itself already gone into streaks of green and black below, but the eyes nevertheless large and open, giving and asking.

It was all nicely done, and simply. Neither the small water fountain at the base with its squinting bronze dolphins nor the abundant variety of colored flowers on the walkway leading up could detract from it. These things, again, only seemed to add to a carefully realized sense of proportion. It
was too easy, Gordon figured, to vulgarize or ridicule the sentiment expressed here. Maybe what set this little plaza apart was the fact that it was intended more as a monument to an idea rather than as a glorification of a group of men. Or maybe it was the particular idea that it embodied.

He went on, through the grove of trees beyond the monument and into the center of the campus. Now that sense of harmony he had carried with him awhile was immediately gone, lost in the crazy business of people moving about in all directions, all on their own separate paths. But it was exhilarating again and exciting, to feel carried with these crowds. Especially when, as Gordon did now, one felt a certain degree of detachment from it all. Everything that had happened to him this morning reaffirmed his belief that he had done the right thing, that he had, in fact, been lucky. He felt a new tinge of freedom and energy, a happy nonchalance. So he continued, with that, all the way past the university and into its adjoining village of business shops, and up a flight of stairs to the one-room office that Stephen Davis had rented as his headquarters.

Stephen was not in, but Jeanette was. She saw him right away.

"To what do we owe this visit?" she laughed as she stood up to face him.

"Well, you asked me if I wanted to help."

"I don't believe it! We were starting to give up on you! You should have heard Stephen. He said, 'What it takes to get that guy to care about something besides his damn pictures...'"
"Nice thing to say. Anyway, I don't want to hear about it. When do I start?"

"Right now!" she said, and began scurrying around animatedly in her way. Gordon found her amusing.

"What exactly are you doing?" he said.

"Organizing." It sounded serious.

"Do you mean it?"

"Of course I do. What do you think we're running here?"

The place was a shambles. Big red, white, and blue posters covering the walls. Boxes of campaign literature on the floors, seemingly important lists of names and places on the grey desk in the middle. Overflowing ashtrays. Gordon turned around and found himself facing a larger than life black and white blow-up of Stephen Davis' smiling face with a forgettable slogan underneath.

"I didn't know you had ones like that."

"Come on, Gordon, get with it. This is our man!"

There was something about the way she said that, and Gordon made a mental note that this would be a point of further inquiry later. But on the other hand she seemed perfectly elated that he had come. And despite the rather abrupt quickness of her talk and her movements, she certainly presented a much more charming figure than she had the other night. No longer bedecked with the silly ribbons and buttons, today she was just running around in jeans. Her long blonde hair hung loose and she was doing without all that make-up. Now she was over at the desk, and called Gordon over to help her.
"What do you want me to do?"

"Put stamps on these." She was addressing a stack of envelopes.

"Really?"
She looked at him quizically.

"What I mean is," Gordon said, "Is this something an assistant campaign manager should be doing? I thought we were going to be doing something important."

"In due time. Stamp the envelopes, please."

Gordon went to work, and most of the afternoon passed in a series of banal tasks. Typing and retyping lists of names, making packets of pamphlets for door to door drives. They sat and talked back and forth about trivial subjects, no one else coming into this "headquarters" all afternoon. Gordon wondered seriously about what he was getting into. He tired, after awhile, of Jeanette's teasing manner and her refusal to pursue any topic of conversation other than the mundane. But he figured it was still worth playing it out a little farther.

"What I want to know," Gordon asked after it had gone on for about two hours, "is whether or not anybody else other than us is in on this."

"Oh sure. There are others. You'll see them before long, when we start getting out. But during the day there's still a lot to be done sometimes—especially since we're behind now, and we're about the only ones Stephen can depend on."

"Stephen can depend on you, huh?"

"Uh-huh."
The Man himself sailed into the office about three-thirty, accompanied by a rather rakish looking fellow who was apparently a subordinate. Gordon had to try hard to keep from laughing. Davis was wearing a blue suit about two sizes too small, so that his pants bunched up at the knees leaving about two inches of bare leg above his socks. He talked almost continously to his companion, who remained nameless during the entire stay, and gave him purfumctory little commands and specifications which the hapless alter-ego jotted down quickly in a pad. Gordon was offended for awhile that Davis didn't seem to notice his presence, but this oversight was all too soon much over-compensated for.

"Gordon!" he exclaimed, "I was so busy I didn't notice you! I knew you wouldn't let us down," patting Gordon on the back as he said this and dropping the voice down to the usual tone of familiarity.

"Who's he?" Gordon asked.

"Well," Davis laughed a little embarrassedly, "You won't have to worry about him. He's kind of a jack-ass anyway. Let's just say that he was your predecessor."

"If he's a jack-ass, why do you keep him?"

"He believes in the things we do. He's for us."

Davis exchanged a few words with Jeanette, and before long it appeared that he had finished whatever unnamed business he had stopped by for.

"Have to get moving," he said, "Time to run."

But before he left, Gordon noticed him pull a small, flat
pink disk out of his pocket and open it up. It was a compact, complete with face powder, and Davis was peering into it at his own reflection, adjusting his hair.

"What the Hell's that for?"

"I am going to speak," said Davis, "Appearance is important."

"And another thing," the predecessor spoke up in a stern tone, looking at Gordon, "You never know when you're going to run into people on the street. They might be voters...."

"I guess that would be about all of them then," Gordon laughed. But the predecessor turned and left with Davis, apparently not amused. Gordon shrugged, figuring he'd have to learn to think of them all as voters, rather than just as ordinary people about their business.

Then Davis popped back momentarily into the doorway before he disappeared for good, "Great to have you aboard, Gordon!" he said, throwing a theatrical wave.

"You won't have to worry about him," Jeanette said.

"Which one?"

Jeanette laughed and looked back at him, betraying for the first time a sense of something other than business-as-usual, "the predecessor," she said, mocking Davis' tone.

So Gordon was left to muse on the idea of a strange, interesting little triangle that sprang into his mind then for the first time: Davis, Jeanette, and himself. He wondered where it all might be going. But the day had provided enough to keep him on awhile longer, along with some of that black humor he was looking for. All in all, at the time, the situation seemed wonderfully ambiguous.
Gordon was sitting back at his desk in the Davis headquarters, his feet propped up on the table, and smoking a Stephen Davis cigar. This would be all right, he was thinking, if at least the cigars could be halfway decent. But they weren't. They were probably some cheap American brand and pretty old, though you couldn't tell exactly because the labels had been removed to make way for a little red, white, and blue perversion of an American flag with Davis' name on it. They were altogether too dry, for one thing, so they burned down very quickly. They were also too long and thin and they got clogged up easily, in their condition, making it difficult to keep them going. Finally, if you could manage to smoke them, all you got was an unrewarding taste of stale ash. Gordon wondered why Davis bothered to give them out at all. It could very easily be taken as an insult, and it might even lose votes.

No one else was up in the office at the present, though Jeanette was expected shortly. Gordon had a few minutes, then,
to just sit there and think about things. He had been doing this for the better part of the week now and the work had been pretty much unchanged since the first day. Just a string of boring tasks in unbroken succession. What the Hell am I doing here, he thought as he sat there, can any of this be real?

For the moment he had nothing at all to do. There was plenty of paper all around him in the room, but none of it worth reading. Most of it, of course, had to do with the propagation of Steven Davis' candidacy. How can he stand it, Gordon wondered. This proliferation of information about himself? To look around and see his name and face everywhere he looks, along with these silly little sugar-coated campaign biographies? His name on posters big and small, on bumper stickers, on match covers, on cigars, pamphlets, in newspaper ads. Sure, Davis enjoyed it to some extent, but wouldn't it just make him sick after awhile? There was finally such a tawdriness to publicity, as if the smallest quirk of your appearance or personality was made somehow important by the simple process of magnifying it and blowing it up to a gross proportion.

And it went without saying that the grotesque distortion of minutiae had a total effect of turning factual things around to lies. The best example of this was the standard Davis campaign pamphlet, a bland, harmless tale which seemed to transform the haphazard trivialities of Davis' life into some kind of Testament. Gordon had looked through it several times, unable to really absorb it wholly or believe it—that this was the same person he knew. He opened it again now, to the second
FROM FARM BOY TO CANDIDATE

Stephen Corey Davis was born in Yorktown, Indiana, in June, 1946. The son of a poor soybean farmer, he often worked from his earliest boyhood doing chores. An industrious youth, he quickly applied for and received a job as a clerk at a general store. Though plagued in high school by a serious illness which, for a time, dropped his weight down to ninety-eight pounds, the young Stephen fought valiantly for the quarterback position on the Yorktown High football team. Facing competitors more than forty pounds heavier than himself, Stephen won the position and held it for three years......

It was incredible. The two following paragraphs went on identically in tone, cataloguing Stephen's "career" in terms of high school and college class presidencies, scholarships, debate victories, Demolay, church membership, and the like. About the only thing that related to the office Davis was seeking was two months he had spent down at the state capitol studying the legislative process. The pamphlet hit that experience pretty hard. Yet even this was done under the auspices of the University. So, if taking realistic assessment, Gordon figured that it would have to be concluded that Stephen Davis had done nothing at all with his life. Farm boy to candidate. How much of a stellar leap, after all, was that?
Jeanette came in now, briskly as usual. She was painted again this day, having been out to a dinner engagement with Stephen and some of the other candidates.

"Where's he?" Gordon said.

"Home," she said, slinging off her purse, "sleeping."

"Hell, you work more than he does. Go right from a banquet with him and then here, while he goes off and snores away. Tell me, Jeanette, what does he ever do besides sleep and eat and campaign?"

"What the devil's with you, Gordon? I just walk in here and you're jumping all over me! He works hard, gets tired, has to sleep. Anyway, that 'banquet' as you call it---which wasn't a 'banquet' at all, nothing but fried chicken and a bunch of old men and young men on the make---it was over more than an hour ago. And he'll be here pretty soon anyway, he's just taking a little nap."

Gordon figured it best to leave her alone since it seemed that something was bothering her. She sat down at the desk, stared away in the opposite direction from him, doing nothing. Gordon wondered if he could cheer her up, and he pulled his camera out of a drawer and began adjusting it. He had brought this thing along a couple times now and, having suddenly realized that there was nothing memorable worth photographing, started to think himself a colossal fool. The whole ridiculously stupid idea of recording the "inside story" of a campaign, how could he have entertained such a conceit? What did he expect?

"Hey Jeanette," he said "Smile."
"Wha....?" She turned around. He clicked off a picture.
"Stephen told me I could take pictures of anything I want.
You remember, you were there. It was part of the deal."
"Gordon you're....."
"Smile."
He clicked off another one. She didn't say anything right away. But it was obvious before long that she had cooled down somewhat. Still, Gordon was wary of her now. He was starting to see that her business-like veneer, as when she had walked in a moment ago, was really quite thin at times. Most of the time, in fact. There were some things Gordon wanted to ask her about, eventually, though he thought he'd better wait for another time. They sat there doing nothing and saying little.
What are we doing, Gordon asked himself. Waiting for Stephen, he answered. Then he noticed Jeanette; she was picking up those pamphlets from the table. Not even reading them, just picking them up. There was something about the way she looked at them. Maybe now was the time to ask, after all.
"Are you the one that writes those things?"
She looked across to him, her head resting between her hands, "Of course. Who else would have?"
"Oh, I don't know....."
"He helps me of course, supplies the information. And then I write them."
Gordon just shrugged, looked at her, "Why?"
She said nothing, just shook her head.
"Stephen?"
She only smiled, not too successfully.

"See this paper around here, Jeanette? I've been thinking about it. It's thin and cheap, and glossy."

"So what makes it that different from what you've been writing for?"

"Just a hunch I've got that nobody really reads this stuff. And maybe that's a good thing, because what it they did! I don't mean that personally, Jeanette, it's...."

"I know! I know what it is!"

"Please. All I mean to say is sure, there's nothing wrong with doing this kind of thing. But so much of it! And you're better than that, Jeanette. All the time you spend on doing this stuff, and working around here... There's everybody else?"

Again, Jeanette didn't answer. But she didn't have to. For Gordon was beginning to see the picture of about the strangest political campaign he could have ever imagined. There was no one in it. Just Davis and his one loyal lieutenant, Jeanette. And now Gordon. Maybe one or two peripheral loonies, such as the predecessor, but that was absolutely it. The names on all the typed sheets here were a fantasy. There was virtually no organization, and no support. This bare room was the reality. No wonder he was so desperate for help, Gordon thought. He thought back to that day at the rally; that hysteria and applause seemed rather superficially ridiculous now, another thin veneer. Those strange orchestrated demonstrations of popular support. How the devil did he ever cop the nomination, Gordon wondered. No one from the party seemed to be keeping
close check on this operation at all. Maybe he was running for a rather minor office, but not that minor. Maybe Markey was right about this.

Stephen came in now, appearing loose and bedraggled. Jeanette jumped up, went over to him, held him by the arms and leaned her head against his chest.

"I'm sorry," she repeated over and over again, "I'm sorry."

"It's okay," he said softly, "okay."

And they walked back out of the room, their arms around each other and talking in low voices. Gordon stood there, hands in pockets. Well, here I am again, he thought, odd man out. He wondered what was up. But it was all left out of his range of hearing and comprehension, as it was meant to be. How close were those two? There were rumors. Always seen together in public, at all the rallies and everywhere else, people couldn't help but notice. Was it sexual? Gordon wondered. Before long Davis came back in, without Jeanette.

"She's gone on home," Davis said, "She's tired."

"That makes three of us."

"Yeah, ha-ha."

"I've been wondering," Gordon said, "then we're going to start doing something around here."

"Soon."

Davis went over to a desk drawer, pulled out a map and spread it open, "Here, I'll show you. You gonna be free Saturday?"

"Yeah, I guess so."