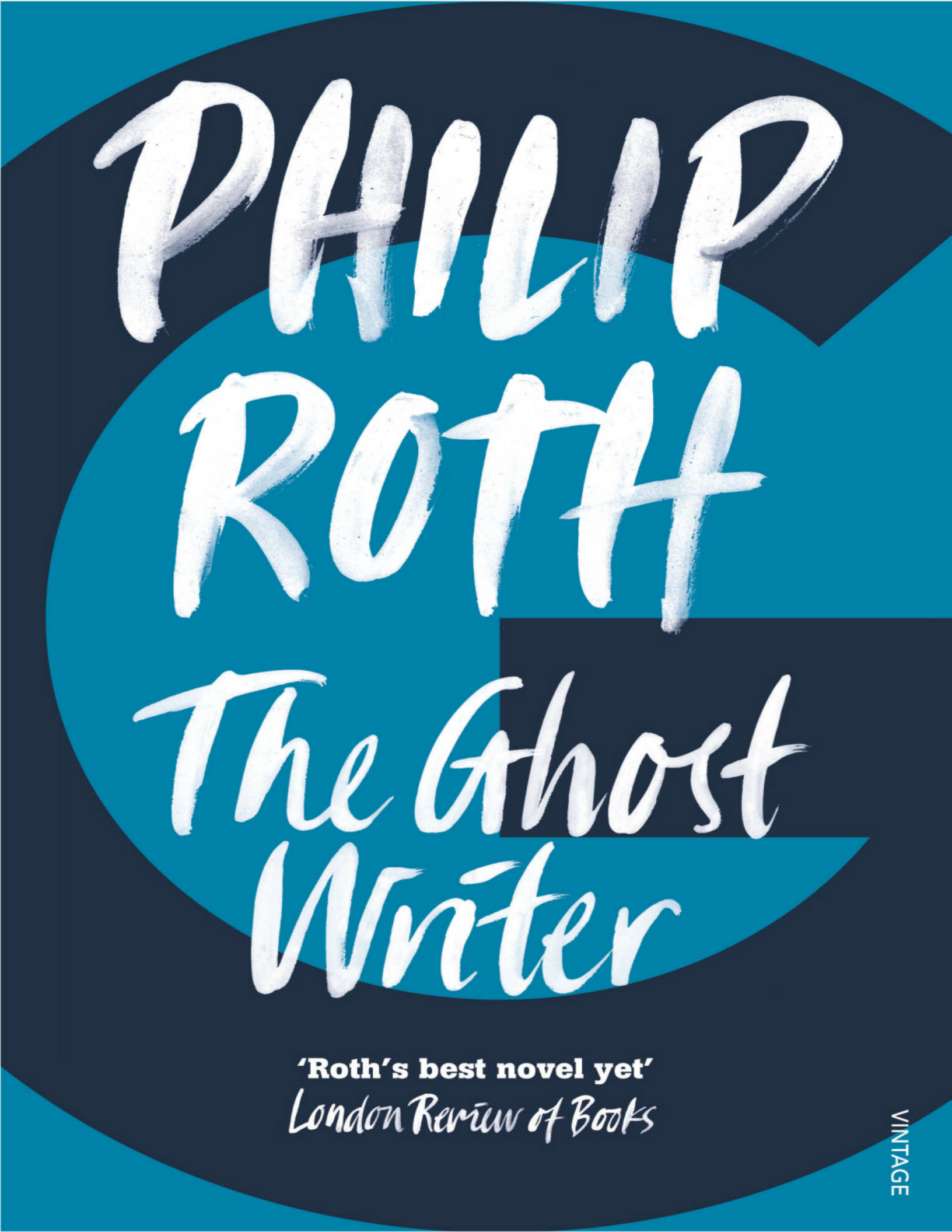
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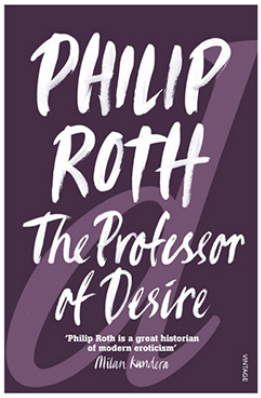
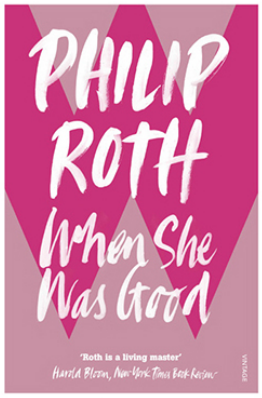
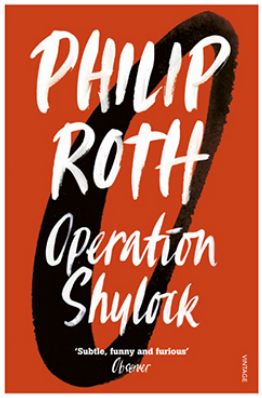
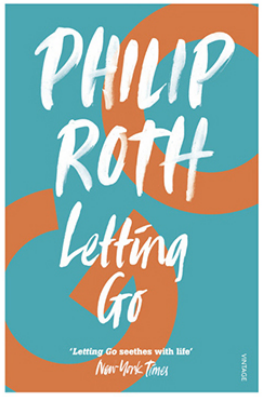
ROTH
The Ghost Writer
'Roth's best novel yet'
London Review of Books
VINTAGE

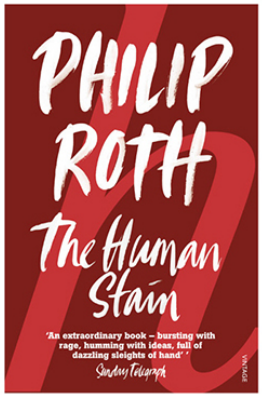

PHILIP ROTH
The Professor of Desire
'Philip Roth is a great historian of modern eroticism'
Milan Kundera
VINTAGE


PHILIP ROTH
When She Was Good
'Roth is a living master'
Harold Bloom, New York Times Book Review
VINTAGE

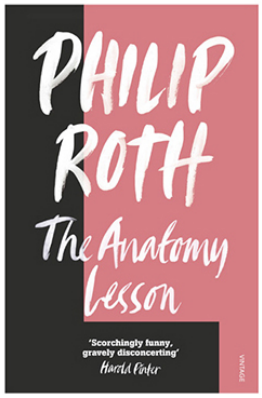

PHILIP ROTH
Operation Shylock
'Subtle, funny and furious'
Observer
VINTAGE

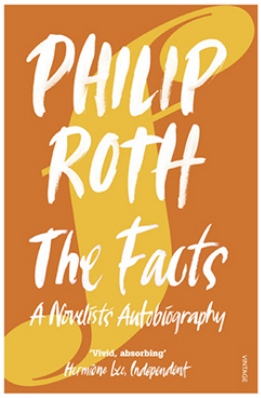

PHILIP ROTH
Letting Go
'Letting Go seethes with life'
New York Times
VINTAGE

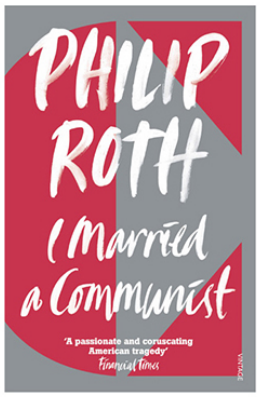

PHILIP ROTH
Our Gang
'The uncontested master of comic irony'
Time
VINTAGE


PHILIP ROTH
The Human Stain
'An extraordinary book – bursting with rage, humming with ideas, full of dazzling sleights of hand'
Sunday Telegraph
VINTAGE

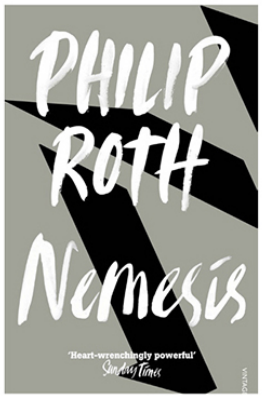

PHILIP ROTH
Portnoy's Complaint
'The most outrageously funny book about sex yet written'
Guardian
VINTAGE

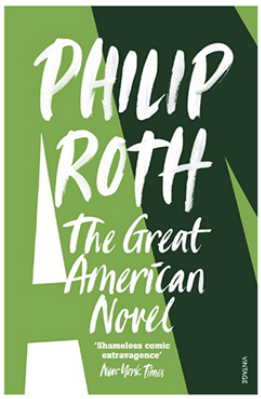

PHILIP ROTH
The Anatomy Lesson
'Scorchingly funny, gravely disconcerting'
Harold Pinter
VINTAGE

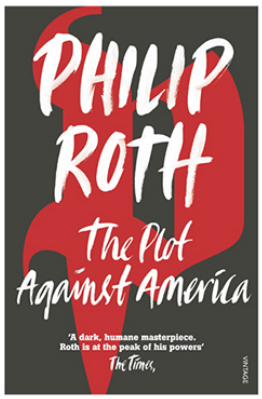

PHILIP ROTH
The Facts
A Novelist's Autobiography
'Vivid, absorbing'
Hermione Lee, Independent
VINTAGE

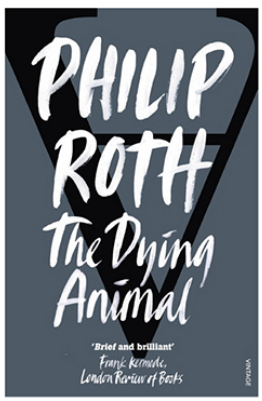

PHILIP ROTH
I Married a Communist
'A passionate and coruscating American tragedy'
Financial Times
VINTAGE

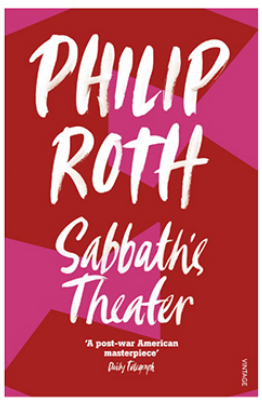

PHILIP ROTH
Shop Talk
'Riveting'
Sunday Times
VINTAGE


PHILIP ROTH
Nemesis
'Heart-wrenchingly powerful'
Sunday Times
VINTAGE


PHILIP ROTH
The Great American Novel
'Shameless comic extravagance'
New York Times
VINTAGE


PHILIP ROTH
The Plot Against America
'A dark, humane masterpiece. Roth is at the peak of his powers'
The Times
VINTAGE


PHILIP ROTH
The Dying Animal
'Brief and brilliant'
Frank Kermode, London Review of Books
VINTAGE


PHILIP ROTH
Sabbath's Theater
'A post-war American masterpiece'
Daily Telegraph
VINTAGE

Contents

ABOUT THE BOOK

When talented young writer Nathan Zuckerman makes his pilgrimage to sit at the feet of his hero, the reclusive master of American literature E. I. Lonoff, he soon finds himself enmeshed in the great Jewish writer's domestic life, with all its complexity, artifice and drive for artistic truth.

As Nathan sits in breathlessly awkward conversation with his idol, a glimpse of a dark-haired beauty through a closing doorway leaves him reeling. He soon learns that the entrancing vision is Amy Bellette, but her position in the Lonoff household – student? mistress? – remains tantalisingly unclear. Over a disturbed and confusing dinner with Lonoff and his bitter, depressed wife, Nathan gleans snippets of Amy's haunting Jewish background, and begins to draw his own fantastical conclusions …

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

In 1997 Philip Roth won the Pulitzer Prize for *American Pastoral*. In 1998 he received the National Medal of Arts at the White House, and in 2002 the highest award of the American Academy of Arts and Letters, the Gold Medal in Fiction, previously awarded to John Dos Passos, William Faulkner and Saul Bellow, among others. He has twice won the National Book Award and the National Book Critics Circle Award. He has won the PEN/Faulkner Award three times. In 2005 *The Plot Against America* received the Society of American Historians' Prize for 'the outstanding historical novel on an American theme for 2003–2004'.

Recently Roth received PEN's two most prestigious prizes: in 2006 the PEN/Nabokov Award 'for a body of work … of enduring originality and consummate craftsmanship' and in 2007 the PEN/Saul Bellow Award for Achievement in American Fiction, given to a writer whose 'scale of achievement over a sustained career … places him or her in the highest rank of American literature'. In 2011 Roth won the International Man Booker Prize.

Roth is the only living American writer to have his work published in a comprehensive, definitive edition by the Library of America.

ALSO BY PHILIP ROTH

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The Ghost Writer
Zuckerman Unbound
The Anatomy Lesson

The Prague Orgy

The Counterlife
American Pastoral
I Married a Communist

The Human Stain

Roth Books
The Facts
Deception
Patrimony
Operation Shylock

The Plot Against America

Kepesh Books
The Breast
The Professor of Desire

The Dying Animal

Nemeses: Short Novels
Everyman
Indignation
The Humbling

Nemesis

Miscellany
Reading Myself and Others

Shop Talk

Other Books
Goodbye, Columbus
Letting Go
When She Was Good
Portnoy's Complaint
Our Gang
The Great American Novel
My Life as a Man
Sabbath's Theater

FOR MILAN KUNDERA

Philip Roth

THE GHOST WRITER

VINTAGE BOOKS
London

1 Maestro

IT WAS THE last daylight hour of a December afternoon more than twenty years ago—I was twenty-three, writing and publishing my first short stories, and like many a *Bildungsroman* hero before me, already contemplating my own massive *Bildungsroman*—when I arrived at his hideaway to meet the great man. The clapboard farmhouse was at the end of an unpaved road twelve hundred feet up in the Berkshires, yet the figure who emerged from the study to bestow a ceremonious greeting wore a gabardine suit, a knitted blue tie clipped to a white shirt by an unadorned silver clasp, and well-brushed ministerial black shoes that made me think of him stepping down from a shoeshine stand rather than from the high altar of art. Before I had composure enough to notice the commanding, autocratic angle at which he held his chin, or the regal, meticulous, rather dainty care he took to arrange his clothes before sitting—to notice anything, really, other than that I had miraculously made it from my unliterary origins to here, to him—my impression was that E. I. Lonoff looked more like the local superintendent of schools than the region's most original storyteller since Melville and Hawthorne.

Not that the New York gossip about him should have led me to expect anything more grand. When I had recently

raised his name before the jury at my first Manhattan publishing party—I'd arrived, excited as a starlet, on the arm of an elderly editor—Lonoff was almost immediately disposed of by the wits on hand as though it were comical that a Jew of his generation, an immigrant child to begin with, should have married the scion of an old New England family and lived all these years "in the country"—that is to say, in the *goyish* wilderness of birds and trees where America began and long ago had ended. However, since everybody else of renown I mentioned at the party also seemed slightly amusing to those in the know, I had been skeptical about their satiric description of the famous rural recluse. In fact, from what I saw at that party, I could begin to understand why hiding out twelve hundred feet up in the mountains with just the birds and the trees might not be a bad idea for a writer, Jewish or not.

The living room he took me into was neat, cozy, and plain: a large circular hooked rug, some slipcovered easy chairs, a worn sofa, a long wall of books, a piano, a phonograph, an oak library table systematically stacked with journals and magazines. Above the white wainscoting, the pale-yellow walls were bare but for half a dozen amateur watercolors of the old farmhouse in different seasons. Beyond the cushioned windowseats and the colorless cotton curtains tied primly back I could see the bare limbs of big dark maple trees and fields of driven snow. Purity. Serenity. Simplicity. Seclusion. All one's concentration and flamboyance and originality reserved for the grueling, exalted, transcendent calling. I looked around and I thought, This is how I will live.

After directing me to one of a pair of easy chairs beside the fireplace, Lonoff removed the fire screen and peered in to be sure the draft was open. With a wooden match he lighted the kindling that apparently had been laid there in anticipation of our meeting. Then he placed the fire screen back into position as precisely as though it were being

fitted into a groove in the hearth. Certain that the logs had caught—satisfied that he had successfully ignited a fire without endangering the two-hundred-year-old house or its inhabitants—he was ready at last to join me. With hands that were almost ladylike in the swiftness and delicacy of their movements, he hiked the crease in each trouser leg and took his seat. He moved with a notable lightness for such a large, heavyset man.

"How would you prefer to be addressed?" asked Emanuel Isidore Lonoff. "As Nathan, Nate, or Nat? Or have you another preference entirely?" Friends and acquaintances called him Manny, he informed me, and I should do the same. "That will make conversation easier."

I doubted that, but I smiled to indicate that no matter how light-headed it was bound to leave me, I would obey. The master then proceeded to undo me further by asking to hear something from me about my life. Needless to say, there wasn't much to report about my life in 1956—certainly not, as I saw it, to someone so knowing and deep. I had been raised by doting parents in a Newark neighborhood neither rich nor poor; I had a younger brother who was said to idolize me; at a good local high school and an excellent college I had performed as generations of my forebears had expected me to; subsequently I had served in the Army, stationed just an hour from home, writing public-information handouts for a Fort Dix major, even while the massacre for which my carcass had been drafted was being bloodily concluded in Korea. Since my discharge I had been living and writing in a five-flight walk-up off lower Broadway, characterized by my girl friend, when she came to share the place and fix it up a little, as the home of an unchaste monk.

To support myself I crossed the river to New Jersey three days a week to a job I'd held on and off since my first summer in college, when I'd answered an ad promising high commissions to aggressive salesmen. At eight each

morning our crew was driven to some New Jersey mill town to sell magazine subscriptions door-to-door, and at six we were picked up outside a designated saloon and driven back to downtown Newark by the overseer, McElroy. He was a spiffy rummy with a hairline mustache who never tired of warning us—two high-minded boys who were putting away their earnings for an education, and three listless old-timers, pale, puffy men wrecked by every conceivable misfortune—not to fool with the housewives we found alone at home in their curlers: you could get your neck broken by an irate husband, you could be set up for walloping blackmail, you could catch any one of fifty leprous varieties of clap, and what was more, there were only so many hours in the day. “Either get laid,” he coldly advised us, “or sell *Silver Screen*. Take your pick.” “Mammon’s Moses” we two college boys called him. Since no housewife ever indicated a desire to invite me into the hallway to so much as rest my feet—and I was vigilantly on the lookout for lasciviousness flaring up in any woman of any age who seemed even half willing to listen to me from behind her screen door—I of necessity chose perfection in the work rather than the life, and by the end of each long day of canvassing had ten to twenty dollars in commissions to my credit and an unblemished future still before me. It was only a matter of weeks since I had relinquished this unhallowed life—and the girl friend in the five-flight walkup, whom I no longer loved—and, with the help of the distinguished New York editor, had been welcomed for the winter months as a communicant at the Quahsay Colony, the rural artists’ retreat across the state line from Lonoff’s mountain.

From Quahsay I had sent Lonoff the literary quarterlies that had published my stories—four so far—along with a letter telling him how much he had meant to me when I came upon his work “some years ago” in college. In the same breath I mentioned coming upon his “kinsmen”

Chekhov and Gogol, and went on to reveal in other unmistakable ways just how serious a literary fellow I was—and, hand in hand with that, how young. But then nothing I had ever written put me in such a sweat as that letter. Everything undeniably true struck me as transparently false as soon as I wrote it down, and the greater the effort to be sincere, the worse it went. I finally sent him the tenth draft and then tried to stick my arm down the throat of the mailbox to extract it.

I wasn't doing any better in the plain and cozy living room with my autobiography. Because I could not bring myself to utter even the mildest obscenity in front of Lonoff's early American mantelpiece, my imitation of Mr. McElroy—a great favorite among my friends—didn't really have much to recommend it. Nor could I speak easily of all McElroy had warned us against, or begin to mention how tempted I would have been to yield, if opportunity had only knocked. You would have thought, listening to my bowdlerized version of what was a tepid enough little life history, that rather than having received a warm and gracious letter from the famous writer inviting me to come and spend a pleasant evening in his house, I had made this journey to plead a matter of utmost personal urgency before the most stringent of inquisitors, and that if I made one wrong move, something of immeasurable value to me would be lost forever.

Which was pretty much the case, even if I didn't completely understand as yet how desperate I was for his recognition, and why. Far from being nonplused by my bashful, breathless delivery—out of character though it was for me in those confident years—I should have been surprised to find that I wasn't down on the hooked rug, supplicating at his feet. For I had come, you see, to submit myself for candidacy as nothing less than E. I. Lonoff's spiritual son, to petition for his moral sponsorship and to win, if I could, the magical protection of his advocacy and