

Eine Kleine Nachtmusik
(In collaboration with Carl Onspaugh)

His NAME was Dooley Hanks and he was One of Us, by which I mean that he was partly a paranoiac, partly a schizophrenic, and mostly a nut with a strong *idée fixe*, an obsession. His obsession was that someday he'd find The Sound that he'd been looking for all his life, or at least all of his life since twenty years ago, in his teens, when he had acquired a clarinet and learned how to play it. Truth to tell, he was only an average musician, but the clarinet was his rod and staff, and it was the broomstick that enabled him to travel over the face of Earth, on all the continents, seeking The Sound. Playing a gig here and a gig there, and then, when he was ahead by a few dollars or pounds or drachmas or rubles he'd take a walking tour until his money started to run out, then start for the nearest city big enough to let him find another gig.

He didn't know what The Sound would sound like, but he knew that he'd know it when he heard it. Three times he'd *thought* he'd found it. Once, in Australia, the first time he'd heard a bull-roarer. Once, in Calcutta, in the sound of a musette played by a fakir to charm a cobra. And once, west of Nairobi, in the blending of a hyena's laughter with the voice of a lion. But the bull-roarer, on second hearing, was just a noise; the musette, when he'd bought it from the fakir for twenty rupees and had taken it home, had turned out to be only a crude and raucous type of reed instrument with little range and not even a chromatic scale; the jungle sounds had resolved themselves finally into simple lion roars and hyena laughs, not at all The Sound.

Actually Dooley Hanks had a great and rare talent that could have meant much more to him than his clarinet, a gift of tongues. He knew dozens of languages and spoke them all fluently, idiomatically and without accent. A few weeks in any country was enough for him to pick up the language and speak it like a native. But he had never tried to cash in on this talent, and never would. Mediocre player though he was, the clarinet was his love.

Currently, the language he had just mastered was German, picked up in three weeks of playing with a combo in a *beer-stube* in Hannover, West Germany. And the money in his pocket, such as it was, was in marks. And at the end of a day of hiking, augmented by one fairly long lift in a Volkswagen, he stood in moonlight on the banks of the Weser River. Wearing his hiking clothes and with his working clothes, his good suit, in a haversack on his back. His clarinet case in his hand; he always carried it so, never trusting it to suitcase, when he used one, or to haversack when he was hiking.

Driven by a demon, and feeling suddenly an excitement that must be, that could only be, a hunch, a feeling that at long last he was really about to find The Sound. He was trembling a little; he'd never had the hunch this strongly before, not even with the lions and the hyenas, and that had been the closest.

But where? Here, in the water? Or in the next town? Surely not farther than the next town. The hunch was that strong. That tremblingly strong. Like the verge of madness, and suddenly he knew that he *would* go mad if he did not find it soon. Maybe he was a little mad already.

Staring over moonlit water. And suddenly something disrupted its surface, flashed silently white in the moonlight and was gone again. Dooley stared at the spot. A fish? There had been no sound, no splash. A hand? The hand of a mermaid swum upstream from the North Sea beckoning him? Come in, the water's fine. (But it wouldn't be; it was *cold*.) Some super-natural water sprite? A displaced Rhine Maiden in the Weser?

But was it really a sign? Dooley, shivering now at the thought of what he was thinking, stood at the Weser's edge and imagined how it would be . . . wading out slowly from the bank, letting his emotions create the tune for the clarinet, tilting his head back as the water became deeper so that the instrument would stick out of the water after he, Dooley, was under it, the bell of the clarinet last to submerge. And the sound, whatever sound there was, being made by the bubbling water closing over them. Over him first and then the clarinet. He recalled the clichéd allegation, which he had previously viewed with iconoclastic contempt but now felt almost ready to accept, that a drowning person was treated to a swift viewing of his entire life as it flashed before his eyes in a grand finale to living. What a mad montage that would be! What an inspiration for the final gurglings of the clarinet. What a frantic blending of the whole of his wild, sweetly sad, tortured existence, just as his straining lungs expelled their final gasp into a final note and inhaled the cold, dark water. A shudder of breathless anticipation coursed through Dooley Hanks's body as his fingers trembled with the catch on the battered clarinet case.

But *no*, he told himself. Who would hear? Who would know? It was important that someone hear. Otherwise his quest, his discovery, his entire life would be in vain. Immortality cannot be derived from one's solitary knowledge of one's greatness. And what good was The Sound if it brought him death and not immortality?

A blind alley. Another blind alley. Perhaps the next town. Yes, the next town. His hunch was coming back now. How had he been so foolish as to think of drowning? To find The Sound, he'd kill if he had to—but not himself. That would make the whole gig meaningless.

Feeling as one who had had a narrow escape, he turned and walked *away* from the river, back to the road that paralleled it, and started walking toward the lights of the next town. Although Dooley Hanks had no Indian blood that he knew of, he walked like an Indian, one foot directly in front of the other, as though on a tightrope. And silently, or as nearly silently as was possible in hiking boots, the ball of his foot coming down first to cushion each step before his heel touched the roadway. And he walked rapidly because it was still early evening and he'd have plenty of time, after checking in at a hotel and getting rid of his haversack, to explore the town awhile before they rolled up the sidewalks. A fog was starting to roll in now.

The narrowness of his escape from the suicidal impulse on the Weser's bank still worried him. He'd had it before, but never quite so strongly. The last time had been in New York, on top of the Empire State Building, over a hundred stories above the street. It had been a bright, clear day, and the magic of the view had enthralled him. And suddenly he had been seized by the same mad exultation, certain that a flash of inspiration had ended his quest, placed the goal at his fingertips. All he need do was

take his clarinet from the case, assemble it. The magic view would be revealed in the first clear notes of the instrument and the heads of the other sightseers would turn in wonder. Then the contrasting gasp as he leaped into space, and the wailing, sighing, screaming notes, as he hurled pavementward, the weird melody inspired by the whirling color scene of the street and sidewalk and people watching in horrified fascination, watching him, Dooley Hanks, and hearing The Sound, his sound, as it built into a superb fortissimo, the grand finale of his greatest solo—the harsh final note as his body slammed into the sidewalk and fused flesh, blood and splintered bone with concrete, forcing a final, glorious expulsion of breath through the clarinet just before it left his lifeless fingers. But he'd saved himself by turning back and running for the exit and the elevator.

He didn't want to die. He'd have to keep reminding himself of that. No other price would be too great to pay.

He was well into town now. In an old section with dark, narrow streets and ancient buildings. The fog curled in from the river like a giant serpent hugging the street at first, then swelling and rising slowly to blot and blur his vision. But through it, across the cobbled street, he saw a lighted hotel sign, *Linter den Linden*. A pretentious name for so small a hotel, but it looked inexpensive and that was what he wanted. It was inexpensive all right and he took a room and carried his haversack up to it. He hesitated whether to change from his walking clothes to his good suit, and decided not to. He wouldn't be looking for an engagement tonight; tomorrow would be time for that. But he'd carry his clarinet, of course; he always did. He hoped he'd find a place to meet other musicians, maybe be asked to sit in with them. And of course he'd ask them about the best way to obtain a gig here. The carrying of an instrument case is an automatic introduction among musicians. In Germany, or anywhere.

Passing the desk on his way out he asked the clerk—a man who looked fully as old as the hostelry itself—for directions toward the center of town, the lively spots. Outside, he started in the direction the old man had indicated, but the streets were so crooked, the fog so thick, that he was lost within a few blocks and no longer knew even the direction from which he had come. So he wandered on aimlessly and in another few blocks found himself in an eerie neighborhood. This eeriness, without observable cause, unnerved him and for a panicked moment he started to run to get through the district as fast as he could, but then he stopped short as he suddenly became aware of music in the air—a weird, haunting whisper of music that, after he had listened to it a long moment, drew him along the dark street in search of its source. It seemed to be a single instrument playing, a reed instrument that didn't sound exactly like a clarinet or exactly like an oboe. It grew louder, then faded again. He looked in vain for a light, a movement, some clue to its birthplace. He turned to retrace his steps, walking on tiptoe now, and the music grew louder again. A few more steps and again it faded and Dooley retraced those few steps and paused to scan the somber, brooding building. There was no light behind any window. But the music was all around him now and—could it be coming up from below? Up from under the sidewalk?

He took a step toward the building, and saw what he had not seen before. Parallel to the building front, open and unprotected by a railing, a flight of worn stone steps

led downward. And at the bottom of them, a yellow crack of light outlined three sides of a door. From behind that door came the music. And, he could now hear, voices in conversation.

He descended the steps cautiously and hesitated before the door, wondering whether he should knock or simply open it and walk in. Was it, despite the fact that he had not seen a sign anywhere, a public place? One so well-known to its habitués that no sign was needed? Or perhaps a private party where he would be an intruder?

He decided to let the question of whether the door would or would not turn out to be locked against him answer that question. He put his hand on the latch and it opened to his touch and he stepped inside.

The music reached out and embraced him tenderly. The place *looked* like a public place, a wine cellar. At the far end of a large room there were three huge wine tuns with spigots. There were tables and people, men and women both, seated at them. All with wineglasses in front of them. No steins; apparently only wine was served. A few people glanced at him, but disinterestedly and not with the look one gave an intruder, so obviously it was not a private party.

The musician—there was just one—was in a far corner of the room, sitting on a high stool. The room was almost as thick with smoke as the street had been thick with fog and Dooley's eyes weren't any too good anyway; from that distance he couldn't tell if the musician's instrument was a clarinet or an oboe or neither. Any more than his ears could answer that same question, even now, in the same room.

He closed the door behind him, and weaved his way through the tables, looking for an empty one as close to the musician as possible. He found one not too far away and sat down at it. He began to study the instrument with his eyes as well as his ears. It looked familiar. He'd seen one like it or almost like it somewhere, but where?

"*Ja, mein Herr?*" It was whispered close to his ear, and he turned. A fat little waiter in lederhosen stood at his elbow. "Zin-fandel? Burgundy? Riesling?"

Dooley knew nothing about wines and cared less, but he named one of the three. And as the waiter tiptoed away, he put a little pile of marks on the table so he wouldn't have to interrupt himself again when the wine came.

Then he studied the instrument again, trying for the moment *not* to listen to it, so he could concentrate on where he'd once seen something like it. It was about the length of his clarinet, with a slightly larger, more flaring bell. It was made—all in one piece, as far as he could tell—of some dark rich wood somewhere in color between dark walnut and mahogany, highly polished. It had finger holes and only three keys, two at the bottom to extend the range downward by two semitones, and a thumb operated one at the top that would be an octave key.

He closed his eyes, and would have closed his ears had they operated that way, to concentrate on remembering where he'd seen something very like it. Where?

It came to him gradually. A museum, somewhere. Probably in New York, because he'd been born and raised there, hadn't left there until he was twenty-four, and this was longer ago than that, like when he was still in his teens. Museum of Natural Science? That part didn't matter. There had been a room or several rooms of glass cases displaying ancient and medieval musical instruments: viola da gambas and viola d'amores, sackbuts and panpipes and recorders, lutes and

tambours and fifes. And one glass case had held only shawms and hautboys, both precursors of the modern oboe. And this instrument, the one to which he was listening now in thrall, was a hautboy. You could distinguish the shawms because they had globular mouthpieces with the reeds down inside; the hautboy was a step between the shawm and the oboe. And the hautboy had come in various stages of development from no keys at all, just finger holes, to half a dozen or so keys. And yes, there'd been a three-keyed version, identical to this one except that it had been light wood instead of dark. Yes, it had been in his teens, in his early teens, that he'd seen it, while he was a freshman in high school. Because he was just getting interested in music and hadn't yet got his first clarinet; he'd still been trying to decide which instrument he wanted to play. That's why the ancient instruments and their history had fascinated him for a brief while. There'd been a book about them in the high-school library and he'd read it. It had said— Good God, it had said that the hautboy had a coarse tone in the lower register and was shrill on the high notes! A flat lie, if this instrument was typical. It was smooth as honey throughout its range; it had a rich full-bodied tone infinitely more pleasing than the thin reediness of an oboe. Better even than a clarinet; only in its lower, or chalumeau, register could a clarinet even approach it.

And Dooley Hanks knew with certainty that he had to have an instrument like that, and that he *would* have one, no matter what he had to pay or do to get it.

And with that decision irrevocably made, and with the music still caressing him like a woman and exciting him as no woman had ever excited him, Dooley opened his eyes. And since his head had tilted forward while he had concentrated, the first thing he saw was the very large goblet of red wine that had been placed in front of him. He picked it up and, looking over it, managed to catch the musician's eye; Dooley raised the glass in a silent toast and downed the wine in a single draught.

When he lowered his head after drinking—the wine had tasted unexpectedly good—the musician had turned slightly on the stool and was facing another direction. Well, that gave him a chance to study the man. The musician was tall but thin and frail looking. His age was indeterminate; it could have been anywhere from forty to sixty. He was somewhat seedy in appearance; his threadbare coat did not match his baggy trousers and a garish red and yellow striped muffler hung loosely around his scrawny neck, which had a prominent Adam's apple that bobbed every time he took a breath to play. His tousled hair needed cutting, his face was thin and pinched, and his eyes so light a blue that they looked faded. Only his fingers bore the mark of a master musician, long and slim and gracefully tapered. They danced nimbly in time with the wondrous music they shaped.

Then with a final skirl of high notes that startled Dooley because they went at least half an octave above what he'd thought was the instrument's top range and still had the rich resonance of the lower register, the music stopped.

There were a few seconds of what seemed almost stunned silence, and then applause started and grew. Dooley went with it, and his palms started to smart with pain. The musician, staring straight ahead, didn't seem to notice. And after less than thirty seconds he again raised the instrument to his mouth and the applause died suddenly to silence with the first note he played.

Dooley felt a gentle touch on his shoulder and looked around. The fat little waiter

was back. This time he didn't even whisper, just raised his eyebrows interrogatorily. When he'd left with the empty wineglass, Dooley closed his eyes again and gave full attention to the music.

Music? Yes, it was music, but not any *kind* of music he'd ever heard before. Or it was a blend of *all* kinds of music, ancient and modern, jazz and classical, a masterful blend of paradoxes or maybe he meant opposites, sweet and bitter, ice and fire, soft breezes and raging hurricanes, love and hate.

Again when he opened his eyes a filled glass was in front of him. This time he sipped slowly at it. How on Earth had he missed wine all his life? Oh, he'd drunk an occasional glass, but it had never tasted like this wine. Or was it the music that made it taste this way?

The music stopped and again he joined in the hearty applause. This time the musician got down from the stool and acknowledged the applause briefly with a jerky little bow, and then, tucking his instrument under his arm, he walked rapidly across the room—unfortunately not passing near Dooley's table—with an awkward forward-leaning gait. Dooley turned his head to follow with his eyes. The musician sat down at a very small table, a table for one, since it had only one chair, against the opposite wall. Dooley considered taking his own chair over, but decided against it. Apparently the guy wanted to sit alone or he wouldn't have taken that particular table.

Dooley looked around till he caught the little waiter's eye and signaled to him. When he came, Dooley asked him to take a glass of wine to the musician, and also to ask the man if he would care to join him at Dooley's table, to tell him that Dooley too was a musician and would like to get to know him.

"I don't think he will," the waiter told him. "People have tried before and he always politely refused. As for the wine, it is not necessary; several times an evening we pass a hat for him. Someone is starting to do so now, and you may contribute that way if you wish."

"I wish," Dooley told him. "But take him the wine and give him my message anyway, please."

"Ja, mein Herr."

The waiter collected a mark in advance and then went to one of the three tuns and drew a glass of wine and took it to the musician. Dooley, watching, saw the waiter put the glass on the musician's table and, talking, point toward Dooley. So there would be no mistake, Dooley stood up and made a slight bow in their direction.

The musician stood also and bowed back, slightly more deeply and from the waist. But then he turned back to his table and sat down again and Dooley knew his first advance had been declined. Well, there'd be other chances, and other evenings. So, only slightly discomfited, he sat back down again and took another sip of his wine. Yes, even without the music, or at any rate with only the aftereffects of the music, it still tasted wonderful.

The hat came, "For the musician," passed by a stolid red-faced burgher, and Dooley, seeing no large bills in it and not wishing to make himself conspicuous, added two marks from his little pile on the table.

Then he saw a couple getting up to leave from a table for two directly in front of the stool upon which the musician sat to play. Ah, just what he wanted. Quickly

finishing his drink and gathering up his change and his clarinet, he moved over to the ringside table as the couple walked away. Not only could he see and hear better, but he was in the ideal spot to intercept the musician with a personal invitation after the next set. And instead of putting it on the floor he put his clarinet case on the table in plain sight, to let the man know that he was not only a fellow musician, which could mean almost anything, but a fellow woodwind player.

A few minutes later he got a chance to signal for another glass of wine and when it was brought he held the little waiter in conversation. "I gather our friend turned down my invitation," he said. "May I ask what his name is?"

"Otto, *mein Herr*."

"Otto what? Doesn't he have a last name?"

The waiter's eyes twinkled. "I asked him once. Niemand, he told me. Otto Niemand."

Dooley chuckled. *Niemand*, he knew, meant "nobody" in German. "How long has he been playing here?" he asked.

"Oh, just tonight. He travels around. Tonight is the first we've seen him in almost a year. When he comes, it's just for one night and we let him play and pass the hat for him. Ordinarily we don't have music here, it's just a wine cellar."

Dooley frowned. He'd have to make *sure*, then, to make contact tonight.

"Just a wine cellar," the little waiter repeated. "But we also serve sandwiches if you are hungry. Ham, knackwurst, or beer cheese ."

Dooley hadn't been listening and interrupted. "How soon will he play again? Does he take long between sets?"

"Oh, he plays no more tonight. A minute ago, just as I was bringing your wine, I saw him leave. We may not see him again for a long ..."

But Dooley had grabbed his clarinet case and was running, running as fast as he could make it on a twisting course between tables. Through the door without even bothering to close it, and up the stone steps to the sidewalk. The fog wasn't so thick now, except in patches. But he could see *niemand* in either direction. He stood utterly still to listen. All he could hear for a moment were sounds from the wine cellar, then blessedly someone pulled shut the door he'd left open and in the silence that followed he thought, for a second, that he could hear footsteps to his right, the direction from which he had come.

He had nothing to lose, so he ran that way. There was a twist in the street and then a corner. He stopped and listened again, and—*that* way, around the corner, he thought he heard the steps again and ran toward them. After half a block he could see a figure ahead, too far to recognize but thank God tall and thin; it *could* be the musician. And past the figure, dimly through the fog he could see lights and hear traffic noises. This must be the turn he had missed in trying to follow the hotel clerk's directions for finding the downtown bright-lights district, or as near to such as a town this size might have.

He closed the distance to a quarter of a block, opened his mouth to call out to the figure ahead and found that he was too winded to call out. He dropped his gait from a run to a walk. No danger of losing the man now that he was this close to him. Getting his breath back, he closed the distance between them slowly.

He was only a few paces behind the man—and, thank God, it *was* the

musician—and was lengthening his strides to come up alongside him and speak when the man stepped down the curb and started diagonally across the street. Just as a speeding car, with what must have been a drunken driver, turned the corner behind them, lurched momentarily, then righted itself on a course bearing straight down on the unsuspecting musician. In sudden reflex action Dooley, who had never knowingly performed a heroic act in his life, dashed into the street and pushed the musician from the path of the car. The impetus of Dooley's charge sent him crashing down on top of the musician and he sprawled breathlessly in this shielding position as the car passed by so close that it sent out rushing fingers of air to tug at his clothing. Dooley raised his head in time to see the two red eyes of its taillights vanishing into the fog a block down the street.

Dooley listened to the drumming roll of his heart in his ears as he rolled aside to free the musician and both men got slowly to their feet.

"Was it close?"

Dooley nodded, swallowed with difficulty. "Like a shave with a straight razor."

The musician had taken his instrument from under his coat and was examining it. "Not broken," he said. But Dooley, realizing that his own hands were empty, whirled around to look for his clarinet case. And saw it. He must have dropped it when he raised his hands to push the musician. A front wheel and a back wheel of the car must each have run over it, for it was flattened at both ends. The case and every section of the clarinet were splintered, useless junk. He fingered it a moment and then walked over and dropped it into the gutter.

The musician came and stood beside him. "A pity," he said softly. "The loss of an instrument is like the loss of a friend." An idea was coming to Dooley, so he didn't answer, but managed to look sadder than he felt. The loss of the clarinet was a blow in the pocketbook, but not an irrevocable one. He had enough to buy a used, not-so-hot one to start out with and he'd have to work harder and spend less for a while until he could get a really good one like the one he'd lost. Three hundred it had cost him. Dollars, not marks. But he'd get another clarinet all right. Right now, though, he was much *much* more inter-ested in getting the German musician's hautboy, or one just like it. Three hundred dollars, not marks, was peanuts to what he'd give for that. And if the old boy felt responsible and offered . . .

"It was my fault," the musician said. "For not looking. I wish I could afford to buy you a new— It was a clarinet, was it not?"

"Yes," Dooley said, trying to sound like a man on the brink of despair instead of one on the brink of the greatest discovery of his life. "Well, what's kaput is kaput. Shall we go somewhere for a drink, and have a wake?"

"My room," said the musician. "I have wine there. And we'll have privacy so I can play a tune or two I do not play in public. Since you too are a musician." He chuckled. "*Eire Kleine Nachtmusik*, eh? A little night-music—but not Mozart's; my own."

Dooley managed to conceal his elation and to nod as though he didn't care much.

"Okay, Otto Niemand. My name's Dooley Hanks."

The musician chuckled. "Call me Otto, Dooley. I use no last name, so Niemand is what I tell any who insist on my having one. Come, Dooley; it isn't far."

It wasn't far, just a block down the next side street. The musician turned in at an

aged and darkened house. He opened the front door with a key and then used a small pocket flashlight to guide them up a wide but uncarpeted staircase. The house, he explained on the way, was unoccupied and scheduled to be torn down, so there was no electricity. But the owner had given him a key and permission to use it while the house still stood; there were a few pieces of furniture here and there, and he got by. He liked being in a house all by himself because he could play at any hour of the night without bothering anyone trying to sleep.

He opened the door of a room and went in. Dooley waited in the doorway until the musician had lighted an oil lamp on the dresser, and then followed him in. Besides the dresser there was only a straight chair, a rocker and a single bed.

"Sit down, Dooley," the musician told him. "You'll find the bed more comfortable than the straight chair. If I'm going to play for us, I'd like the rocker." He was taking two glasses and a bottle out of the top drawer of the dresser. "I see I erred. I thought it was wine I had left; it is brandy. But that is better, no?"

"That is better, yes," said Dooley. He could hardly restrain himself from asking permission right away to try the hautboy himself, but felt it would be wiser to wait until brandy had done a little mellowing. He sat down on the bed.

The musician handed Dooley a huge glass of brandy; he went back to the dresser and got his own glass and, with his instrument in his other hand, went to the rocker. He raised the glass. "To music, Dooley."

"To *Nachtmusik*," said Dooley. He drank off a goodly sip, and it burned like fire, but it was good brandy. Then he could wait no longer. "Otto, mind if I look at that instrument of yours? It's a hautboy, isn't it?"

"A hautboy, yes. Not many would recognize it, even musicians. But I'm sorry, Dooley. I can't let you handle it. Or play it, if you were going to ask that, too. I'm sorry, but that's the way it is, my friend."

Dooley nodded and tried not to look glum. The night is young, he told himself; another drink or two of brandy that size may mellow him. Meanwhile, he might as well find out as much as he could.

"Is it—your instrument, I mean, a real one? I mean, a medieval one? Or a modern reproduction?"

"I made it myself, by hand. A labor of love. But, my friend, stay with the clarinet, I advise you. Especially do not ask me to make you one like this; I could not. I have not worked with tools, with a lathe, for many years. I would find my skill gone. Are you skillful with tools?"

Dooley shook his head. "Can't drive a nail. Where could I find one, even something like yours?"

The musician shrugged. "Most are in museums, not obtainable. You might find a few collections of ancient instruments in private hands, and buy one at an exorbitant price—and you might even find it still playable. But, my friend, be wise and stay with your clarinet. I advise you strongly."

Dooley Hanks could not say what he was thinking, and didn't speak.

"Tomorrow we will talk about finding you a new clarinet," the musician said. "Tonight, let us forget it. And forget your wish for a hautboy, even your wish to play this one—yes, I know you asked only to touch and handle, but could you hold it in your hands without wanting to put it to your lips? Let us drink some more and then I

will play for us. *Prosit!*"

They drank again. The musician asked Dooley to tell something about himself, and Dooley did. Almost everything about himself that mattered except the one thing that mattered most—his obsession and the fact that he was making up his mind to kill for it if there was no other way.

There was no hurry, Dooley thought; he had all night. So he talked and they drank. They were halfway through their third round—and the last round, since it finished the bottle—of brandy, when he ran out of talk and there was silence.

And with a gentle smile the musician drained his glass, put it down, and put both hands on his instrument. "Dooley ... would you like some girls?"

Dooley suddenly found himself a little drunk. But he laughed. "Sure," he said. "Whole roomful of girls. Blonds, brunettes, redheads." And then because he couldn't let a squarehead square beat him at drinking, he killed the rest of his brandy too, and lay back across the single bed with his shoulders and head against the wall. "Bring 'em on, Otto."

Otto nodded, and began to play. And suddenly the excruciating, haunting beauty of the music Dooley had last heard in the wine cellar was back. But a new tune this time, a tune that was lilting and at the same time sensual. It was so beautiful that it hurt, and Dooley thought for a moment fiercely: damn him, he's playing *my* instrument; he owes me that for the clarinet I lost. And almost he decided to get up and *do* something about it because jealousy and envy burned in him like flames.

But before he could move, gradually he became aware of another sound somewhere, above or under the music. It seemed to come from outside, on the sidewalk below, and it was a rapid click-click-clickety-click for all the world like the sound of high heels, and then it was closer and it *was* the sound of heels, many heels, on wood, on the uncarpeted stairway, and then—and this was all in time with the music—there was a gentle tap-tap at the door. Dreamily, Dooley turned his head toward the door as it swung open and girls poured into the room and surrounded him, engulfing him in their physical warmth and exotic perfumes. Dooley gazed in blissful disbelief and then suspended the disbelief; if this were illusion, let it be. As long as— He reached out with both hands, and yes, they could be touched as well as seen. There were brown-eyed brunettes, green-eyed blonds and black-eyed redheads. And blue-eyed brunettes, brown-eyed blonds and green-eyed redheads. They were all sizes from petite to statu-esque and they were all beautiful.

Somehow the oil lamp seemed to dim itself without completely going out, and the music, growing wilder now, seemed to come from somewhere else, as though the musician were no longer in the room, and Dooley thought that that was considerate of him. Soon he was romping with the girls in reckless abandon, sampling here and there like a small boy in a candy store. Or a Roman at an orgy, but the Romans never had it quite so good, nor the gods on Mount Olympus.

At last, wonderfully exhausted, he lay back on the bed, and surrounded by soft, fragrant girlflesh, he slept.

And woke, suddenly and completely and soberly, he knew not how long later. But the room was cold now; perhaps that was what had wakened him. He opened his eyes and saw that he was alone on the bed and that the lamp was again (or still?) burning normally. And the musician was there too, he saw when he raised his head,

sound asleep in the rocking chair. The instrument was gripped tightly in both hands and that long red and yellow striped muffler was still around his scrawny neck, his head tilted backward against the rocker's back.

Had it really happened? Or had the music put him to sleep, so he'd dreamed it about the girls? Then he put the thought aside; it didn't matter. What mattered, all that mattered, was that he was not leaving here without the hautboy. But did he *have* to kill to get it? Yes, he did. If he simply stole it from the sleeping man he wouldn't stand a chance of getting out of Germany with it. Otto even knew his right name, as it was on his passport, and they'd be waiting for him at the border. Whereas if he left a dead man behind him, the body—in an abandoned house—might not be found for weeks or months, not until he was safe back in America. And by then any evidence against him, even his possession of the instrument, would be too thin to warrant extradition back to Europe. He could claim that Otto had given him the instrument to replace the clarinet he'd lost in saving Otto's life. He'd have no proof of that, but they'd have no proof to the contrary.

Quickly and quietly he got off the bed and tiptoed over to the man sleeping in the rocker and stood looking down at him. It would be easy, for the means were at hand. The scarf, already around the thin neck and crossed once in front, the ends dan-gling. Dooley tiptoed around behind the rocker and reached over the thin shoulders and took a tight grip on each end of the scarf and pulled them apart with all his strength. And held them so. The musician must have been older and more frail than Dooley had thought. His struggles were feeble. And even dying he held onto his instrument with one hand and clawed ineffectually at the scarf only with the other. He died quickly.

Dooley felt for a heartbeat first to make sure and then pried the dead fingers off the instrument. And held it himself at last.

His hands held it, and trembled with eagerness. When would it be safe for him to try it? Not back at his hotel, in the middle of the night, waking other guests and drawing attention to himself.

Why, here and now, in this abandoned house, would be the safest and best chance he'd have for a long time, before he was safely out of the country maybe. Here and now, in this house, before he took care of fingerprints on anything he might have touched and erased any other traces of his presence he might find or think of. Here and now, but softly so as not to waken *any* sleeping neighbors, in case they might hear a difference be-tween his first efforts and those of the instrument's original owner.

So he'd play softly, at least at first, and quit right away if the instrument made with the squeaks and ugly noises so easy to produce on any unmastered instrument. But he had the strang-est feeling that it wouldn't happen that way to him. He knew already how to manage a double reed; once in New York he'd shared an apartment with an oboe player and had tried out his instrument with the thought of getting one himself, to double on. He'd finally decided not to because he preferred playing with small combos and an oboe fitted only into large groups. And the fingering? He looked down and saw that his fingers had fallen naturally in place over the finger-holes or poised above the keys. He moved them and watched them start, seemingly of their own volition, a little finger-dance. He made them stop moving and

wonderingly put the instrument to his lips and breathed into it softly. And out came, softly, a clear, pure mid-dle-register tone. As rich and vibrant a note as any Otto had played. Cautiously he raised a finger and then another and found himself starting a diatonic scale. And, on a hunch, made himself forget his fingers and just *thought* the scale and let his fingers take over and they did, every tone pure. He *thought* a scale in a different key and played it, then an arpeggio. He didn't know the fingerings, but his fingers did.

He could play it, and he would.

He might as well make himself comfortable, he decided despite his mounting excitement. He crossed back to the bed and lay back across it, as he had lain while listening to the musician play, with his head and shoulders braced up against the wall behind it. And put the instrument back to his mouth and played, this time not caring about volume. Certainly if neighbors heard, they'd think it was Otto, and they would be accus-tomed to hearing Otto play late at night.

He thought of some of the tunes he'd heard in the wine cellar, and his fingers played them. In ecstasy, he relaxed and played as he had never played a clarinet. Again, as when Otto had played, he was struck by the purity and richness of the tone, so like the chalumeau register of his own clarinet, but extending even to the highest notes.

He played, and a thousand sounds blended into one. Again the sweet melody of paradoxes, black and white blending into a beautiful radiant gray of haunting music.

And then, seemingly without transition, he found himself playing a strange tune, one he'd never heard before. But one that he knew instinctively belonged to this wonderful instrument. A calling, beckoning tune, as had been the music Otto had played when the girls, real or imaginary, had click-clicked their way to him, but different this—was it a sinister instead of a sensual feeling underlying it?

But it was beautiful and he couldn't have stopped the dance of his fingers or stopped giving it life with his breath if he'd tried.

And then, over or under the music, he heard another sound. Not this time a click-click of high heels but a scraping, scrabbling sound, as of thousands of tiny clawed feet. And he saw them as they spilled suddenly out of many holes in the wood-work that he had not before noticed, and ran to the bed and jumped upon it. And with paralyzing suddenness the bits and pieces fell into place and by an effort that was to be the last of his life Dooley tore the accursed instrument from his mouth, and opened his mouth to scream. But they were all around him now, all over him: great ones, tawny ones, small ones, lean ones, black ones . . . And before he could scream out of his opened mouth the largest black rat, the one who led them, leaped up and closed its sharp teeth in the end of his tongue and held on, and the scream aborning gurgled into silence.

And the sound of feasting lasted far into the night in Ham-elin town.