It was March 11, 1977. I was waiting in the inner courtyard of the Hotel Villa de France for Paul Bowles to arrive. The sun shone brilliantly on the tiled surfaces and on the white columns of the surrounding arcades. The air in Tangier carried an odor that was strange and yet familiar; I had noticed it the moment I landed that morning. It was an odor of the natural world, of plants and dirt, of moisture from the sea, compounded by car exhaust and spices and a faint hint of decay. At first I had thought it was like the smell of an older California. But this was no California, old or young, with its arches and tiles and triangular shadows, with its suggestion of an undertow that had nothing to do with the sea.

At the center of the courtyard was a large circular fountain, faced with blue and white and ochre tiles. No water ran into its basin, which was filled with pots of scraggly geraniums. On either side of the fountain, the arcade, set off by a series of white columns and high arches, sheltered a row of large potted plants. At the front of the courtyard, a stairway led up to the hotel parking lot, beyond which were high gates opening onto a narrow street. Now and then hotel guests, mainly Europeans, passed by me. Employees of the hotel in Moroccan dress carried baggage in and out.

Paul had made the reservation for me at the Villa de

France, writing that it was where Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas had stayed when they vacationed here before World War I. The hotel must once have been luxurious. Now it was charming but dilapidated; the water on, then off, on, then off; the electric cords frayed, only one outlet working in the room. My room looked out upon a garden enclosed by stone walls. Beyond the wall was a street leading to a bus stop and an enclosed market. In the distance were several tall mosques and many low buildings leading down to the sea.

Promptly at four o'clock, Paul appeared at the top of the stairway. I recognized him from his photos, though in truth the photos had not done justice to the actuality of his physical beauty. His white hair, his blue-green eyes, his lined but still boyish face conveyed a presence that was light and quick, luminous, controlled, and elusive. His voice was musical, complex in its range and overtones.

We got into Paul's Ford Mustang, and Abdelouahaid Boulaich, Paul's driver and helper, drove us from the city center to the Inmeuble Itesa, the apartment house where Paul lived. Constructed of gray concrete, it was surrounded by empty fields, littered here and there with small mounds of rubble. In the tiny elevator we rode up to the fourth floor. Paul unlocked the door to his apartment and led the way through the small foyer, stacked on the left with suitcases. Pulling aside the thick woven curtain, he beckoned me into a dark living room. The end wall faced a windowed patio, but the light to the room was cut off by a mass of tall, leafy plants, ranged together like a miniature jungle.

Before coming, I had asked Paul if I could bring him anything from New York. He had answered that he would be grateful if I would bring him a newly published book

by Jorge Luis Borges, *Imperial Messages,* and a small turkish towel. When I presented him with several towels, he thanked me with evident delight. I had been nervous about meeting him, and now I detected in myself a curious gratification, a sense of pleasure that I had been able to give him something he wanted and needed. As I handed him the Borges book, I mentioned a recent article in which the elderly Argentinian writer was quoted as saying that in his final years he, who had always been so devious in his writing, wanted nothing more than to be simple. "I liked his deviousness," Paul said.

A young American, Dan Bente, a teacher at the American School, came in, and we all—he and Abdelouahaid and Paul and myself—had tea, which Paul prepared. He had been smoking cigarettes steadily before this, but now he began to smoke kif (a form of cannabis), as did Dan. I declined the offer to smoke, as did Abdelouahaid, but soon the thick, sweet smell pervaded the air in the room. Paul was in continuous motion, going into another room, coming back in, and soon going out again. From a back room, I heard birds singing—finches perhaps.

Mohammed Mrabet entered, pulling aside the curtain. I had also seen photos of him from the 1960s, depicting him as a handsome young man. In the flesh he looked older and heavier than in the photos, his face running slightly to puffiness. But he was still very muscular, and there was a raw, sensual quality in the way he moved. Immediately he took over center stage. He spoke English haltingly and, when he could not find the right word, moved to Spanish and occasionally to Darija, a Moroccan dialect. Whether laughing or telling a story—frequently a story involving violence—the energy of his feelings poured forth, unmeasured.

"I have had a bad life," he announced ("bad" meaning *hard* or *terrible,* I did not know), "so I have many books in me. A bad life in jail," he added. "I do not read, I do not write." (His books were produced by his speaking into a tape recorder in Paul's presence, after which Paul transcribed the tapes and translated the stories.) "A bad life," he repeated. "Nazarenes, Westerners, they do not know what it is to have a bad life."

"Even in the West," I said, rising to the bait, "there is enough suffering to go around."

"In Western civilization, the suffering comes from neurosis," Paul said coolly. He sat on the low couch beside me, but the next moment he was in motion across the room. Soon he was on the floor, leaning on his elbow. He smoked constantly. The conversation continued, much of it in Spanish, which I did not understand. Above the fireplace I saw some scorch marks and a curious mask with bared teeth.

The talk finally turned to Jane, but it was a curiously prepared conversation, as if the words had been said many times before. A performance was being presented, with Mrabet as the one taleteller, making large, fierce gestures, scowling and exhorting, and Paul as the second taleteller, prompting, correcting, his face subtly mobile and imperturbable in turn.

Gossip was offered up: that Brion Gysin had hated Jane, that Gore Vidal had hated Jane. I brought up a story I'd been told in New York about Vidal's version of the death of the lyricist John LaTouche, who had been a very close friend of the Bowleses. This led to Paul telling a story about LaTouche's family, ending in a description of LaTouche's mother: "All she ever talked about was food."

"Like that recording you made of a dinner party," Dan

said to Paul, "in which everyone talked about the food and how marvelous it was, and Jane said, 'Well, it's not going to change my life.' "

"I used to take my tape recorder along and tape without anyone knowing," Paul responded. "Jane hated it, but at least I have some things of her I wouldn't have otherwise. She always hated to have her voice recorded or her picture taken." Was this a statement to me about her desire for privacy, which I, as the biographer, had come here to violate?

Incident piled upon incident, story upon story. There was a jousting or a jockeying going on that I was not astute enough to keep up with. Mostly I listened, though now and then I offered a comment. When I did, the easy sliding from incident to incident stopped. There was a pause, and then the energy—and ritual—of the conversation picked up again. That I was the listener and that they were conscious of my listening and reporting was inescapably present here. I sensed a gathering together, a resolve, a circling about Paul for the sake of protection. Yet he had wanted me to come, he wanted me to do this book on Jane—hadn't he written that to me?

Suddenly Mrabet turned to another subject, unconnected to Jane, telling how he had stolen Carol Ardman's shoes. (Carol Ardman was a young American writer who had become very friendly with Paul; she came to Tangier frequently for extended periods.) From what I could make out, Mrabet justified his theft as an act of revenge against Carol for her having, supposedly, stolen the shoes of a Moroccan at a picnic. "Why are you so sure she took them?" Paul asked Mrabet. Mrabet said something in Spanish in an undertone to Paul. Then he laughed and Paul laughed. It was as if one scenario, the mischievous youth being in-

dulged by the proud parent, had suddenly given way to another—that of the jokester, the trickster ironically acknowledging his jokes, his tricks, to a confederate.

Later, driving me back to the hotel, Abdelouahaid said, "Mrabet talks a lot." To which I responded with a cautious "He is like an actor."

I spent the next morning in my room, going over copies of Jane's unpublished notebooks and manuscripts and letters from her archive at HRC (the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center of The University of Texas at Austin). Now and then I looked out the window. I saw two women in country garb, with large straw hats and red and white woven cloths wrapped around their bodies, descend the hill toward the bus stop. Next came a man in a cloak and a hood, leading a goat by a rope. He pulled to the side of the road as a car raced by him, honking. I recalled the muezzin's cries that had wakened me early in the morning. I had entered a world of visual and aural density, where it was hard to know background from foreground.

I turned once again to the material I had brought with me. At four in the afternoon, Paul, who was a very late riser, would come to pick me up in the car. Then I would go back with him to the flat and stay for dinner. I wanted to be prepared with my questions, if the opportunity arose to ask them, although I was reluctant to start my inquiries in the presence of Mrabet and the others.

Before seeing Paul, I was to have lunch with the writers Virginia Sorensen Waugh and Alec Waugh. It was Virginia who was responsible for my being in Tangier. I had met her in May 1973 at the MacDowell Colony. One night at dinner, after reading my work, she told me she thought I

would like Jane's novel, *Two Serious Ladies.* Virginia had lived in Tangier for a number of years and had known Paul and Jane socially during the early and mid-sixties, although after Jane had been confined to a convent hospital in Málaga in 1968, Virginia had not seen her. "Paul goes to visit her there every six weeks," she added. As it happened, Jane had died on May 4, 1973, a few days before our conversation, but word of her death did not reach the U.S. until some weeks later.

Virginia's intuition had been correct, though "like" was not the precise word for my response to Jane's novel. I had been astonished by its originality, by the brilliant and unexpected prose, and by something in the tone that suggested a constantly shifting border between the life of the writer who created the fiction and the fiction itself.

I had not begun to write until I was almost forty, which is to say that I had spent most of my life until then not thinking of myself as a writer. I had originally been trained in science—in physics—and then, as many young women did in the early fifties after getting married, I stayed at home to take care of my children. To the extent that I had examined my own life, it was not on a writer's terms, with a writer's means.

Writers who begin to write when they are young begin early to view their life experience as raw material for their work: the people they meet, the events that occur. There is a continual monitoring of experience for the purpose of giving form to experience in words. Then life informs the work and work informs the life naturally, unconsciously, or so it seemed to me.

But I had not had that natural progression. Suddenly, at the age of forty, I'd been impelled to narrative. I'd published a book of short stories and a novel, but I continued

to feel that when I wrote I was on a precarious edge—fiction/life, life/fiction. In Jane Bowles's fiction I recognized another kind of edge, one that might provide a clue to my own dilemma. This I say now, after so many years. Then, perhaps, it had seemed to me that simply in obedience to a natural impulse I had written to Virginia, asking for Paul's address, saying I was interested in doing a book on Jane. Although Virginia was initially reluctant to contact him about my request, she eventually passed my note on to him, and so I had come to be in Tangier.

Virginia greeted me at the door and led me up the steps to her apartment, where my first impression was of light-filled rooms, furnished with red Moroccan rugs and brass tables. Every wall was lined with books. Sun streamed in through open doors to a balcony that looked down upon a walled-in garden blooming with exotic flowers.

It was clear from the outset that our lunch was to be a "social" lunch, our conversation a "social" conversation. I did not ask about Jane, and, at first, neither Virginia nor Alec spoke of her. Then, at one point, Alec said to me, "You are very like Jane, charming like she was." (Charming? I had not thought of myself as charming for many years.) "Before the stroke," he went on, "she was the kind of woman you would make a pass at, but not afterward. Her limbs seemed all awry."

"It was," said Virginia, "premature senility that she had. When she was in Málaga, Paul said to me, 'Don't go to see her there. She won't know you. She doesn't even know me.' "

In the midst of that social lunch, the conversation had shifted. In my new capacity as a teller of a life, it was necessary for me to be reminded how terrible and pro-

longed Jane's deterioration had been. Looking back, Alec and Virginia were no longer able to think of her at an earlier time without recalling what she had become in her illness.

When I got back to the Villa de France, I was given a note from Paul.

> Dear Millicent:
>
> This never happens to me, or perhaps once a year it does, but I'm in bed, I suppose with a liver attack, or what seems like one. (Dizziness, nausea and chills.) I can't prepare dinner for you, and I apologize for not being able to. All this should not last long . . .
>
> Why I had to get sick the very day of your arrival, I don't know. (It came on last night.) . . .
>
> Until soon,
> Paul B.

Why indeed had he gotten sick the very day of my arrival? Because of my arrival? I recalled what had happened in New York one afternoon in the apartment of the duo-pianists Robert Fizdale and Arthur Gold, who had known Jane well in the forties. I had been waiting for them in their living room, but they were delayed. After a while I got up and went over to a window, which overlooked Central Park. Standing there, I heard them come in; I turned just as I heard Robert Fizdale gasp, "For a moment, I thought it was Jane."

And then there was an evening when I went to see Karl Bissinger, who had done a series of remarkable photos of Jane in the forties. After he talked for a while, he paused and, looking at me with his photographer's eye, said, "You know, you could be her more serious sister."

It had happened on a number of occasions during my interviews with those who had known Jane. I would see the sudden small shift in the eyes of the person talking. And then would come the statement: You know, you look like Jane. It had been unsettling to me. And the telling of this, I find, even so many years later, is still unsettling, as if I am overstepping a line, violating that most rudimentary law of biography—not to confuse oneself with one's subject. I myself did not think I looked like Jane, but I couldn't quite dismiss what others were saying to me.

Had Paul had a similar response to my appearance? No, in his imperturbability I had seen no indication of this. You are making too much of this, I warned myself, letting things get out of hand, as usual. Later Virginia was to tell me that one day she did ask Paul whether he thought I looked like Jane. "Not at all," he replied, but then amended his comment with "Well, maybe the same physical type."

The next day, Sunday, at Virginia and Alec's invitation, I attended the Anglican church service with them. Unused as I was to attending a religious service of any kind, I was struck by the intermixture of spiritual and worldly considerations. The priest invoked protection from God for the queen of England and the government of Morocco and the president of the U.S. He read as his text a passage from *A Handful of Dust,* by Evelyn Waugh (Alec's brother). Praising the body as the temple of the spirit, the priest spoke of all sexuality as natural. Those who are chosen for celibacy, he added, should not take any pride in being better than others.

After the service Alec told me with some glee of the latest Tangier scandal. An elderly British doctor had recently

taken a Greek mistress. The doctor and his wife lived in a flat above his clinic, while he maintained his mistress discreetly in an apartment in another part of town. But then one day the doctor brought his mistress to the church service. Everybody had known about the affair before, but this action on the part of the doctor provoked considerable consternation. The doctor's wife played the organ during the service, so the congregation was now forced to be a silent witness to this drama. Actually, Alec said, he was sympathetic to the doctor. He found the doctor's wife terribly dull.

I knew Abdelouahaid did not come to Paul's flat on Sunday, and I thought of Paul, ill and alone. He didn't have a telephone, so I couldn't call him, but I could, at the very least, so decency dictated, walk out to his flat and leave a note at his door expressing my concern.

As I got off the tiny, creaking elevator, Paul's door opened, and he came out. He greeted me without surprise. He told me that he had been very uncomfortable yesterday, nauseated and his stomach bothering him, but today he felt much better. In fact, he was just going out for a walk. Would I like to join him?

When we got outside, he suddenly felt cold—a stiff breeze was blowing—and he went back in for his overcoat. We proceeded through unpaved streets and passed a group of young boys. "Bonjour, Madame," some of them said to me, grinning. One boy asked Paul for the time. Paul gave him the time in Darija and laughed. "They always ask about the thing they don't care about," he said. Then he added, "Janie always said that the one thing you can be certain of is that you will never know what they will do."

We passed a small, decaying house with shuttered win-

dows. In the garden were two cows grazing. "We almost bought that house," Paul said. "We thought it was a pretty little house."

He led, I followed, downhill into a flat, barren area, where there were markers for lots, in preparation for a new subdivision. "They came in and took all the trees off the property, and now, after the rain, there is runoff into pools where mosquitoes can breed. And still there are no buildings. It is too bad about the trees. They hate trees; they like to walk in the open."

We stopped to look at one of the pools, whose surface was covered with a thick mat of white flowers. "Those look like wild strawberry," I said. Paul leaned over to pick one of the blossoms, but he slipped, and his right foot sank into the muddy pool. Drawing it out, he looked with disgust at his soaked suede shoe. "Do you want to go back?" I asked, recalling that he had not felt well and that he had been easily chilled. In the short space of time I had known him, there was already being elicited in me a need, an urge, a desire to protect him. "You might catch cold," I added, gratuitously.

"I won't catch cold, but it's uncomfortable."

As we walked back uphill, I told him briefly about being in Texas. I mentioned the many photographs of Jane at HRC. "I have no photos of Jane," he said (though later he found a number of them stashed away among other papers in the flat). The one thing he most regretted was the loss of the first novel she had written, in French. "I had it, but then she wanted it back. I gave it to her, and she lost it. She always lost everything."

(What can I say about this conversation? It was social; it was not social. It was again glancing. It was the first time I had been alone with him. I did not question him as an

interviewer, penetratingly. After all, we were out on a walk. I could not say that there was unease in his speaking; what he was saying to me, he could have said to anyone. I noted the fleeting quality of feeling, the quick transitions that covered over disconnections. Everything was polite, proper, at some distance, at some remove. If he felt pressure from me, he did not show it.)

As we came to his building, he invited me in for tea. I said, "No, I—" and made some excuse about feeling that I should leave. "Don't say no on my account," he said.

"I'm only saying it because I know how I would feel if I had slipped in the mud." I didn't—and I don't really know on whose account I said it.

The next afternoon at four, Paul called for me at the hotel. With Abdelouahaid driving, we went first to the post office, then to the market, made a stop for wood, and drove out of town to a freshwater spring, where Abdelouahaid filled a number of bottles. From there we drove up through a forested area to an open space where we could see out over the Atlantic. The day was beautiful and warm. I said that I could see why one would want to stay here. "It costs ten thousand dollars a year to live here," Paul commented. "The rent is cheap; only the cars cost a lot, my car and Mrabet's."

When we arrived at the flat, Mrabet and Dan were present. There was the ritual of tea and kif-smoking and conversation. Paul spoke of how extraordinary Jane had been in person, so mercurial. "It was a performance," he said.

Now Mrabet took over, or, should I say, Paul let him take over. He was the focus of all eyes, he was the storyteller enacting his story, in halting English, in Spanish. He was sixteen, he began, when he met Jane in the house of

Madame McBey (Marguerite McBey, the American-born painter, who had lived in Tangier for many years). At once he jumped to the last years of Jane's illness, when for a brief period Paul brought her home from Málaga. "Jane wouldn't eat or take medicine from Paul, but she would take it from me," he announced.

He entered upon a long account of what happened when he went with Paul to see Jane in Granada in 1968. (Later I was to read Mrabet's story of this visit—as it was told to Paul and translated by Paul—"What Happened in Granada." Of course, what Mrabet meant by "story," what differentiation he made between what was life and what was invented, was not clear to me then and has never been clear to me.) Telling the story aloud, he was the macho man, the tough guy who, when offended by others, immediately takes retribution—throws this one around or that one around, male or female. He acted the story out with vehement gestures and loud words. It was a bravura performance. Warming to his part, he went on to tell of his hatred for Cherifa, Jane's Moroccan peasant lover. He expressed rage that Cherifa had referred to him as "the man from jail" when she herself was the dangerous one, a woman who had poisoned Jane and tried to poison Paul.

Confirming Mrabet's judgment of Cherifa, Paul noted, "She once came after me with her fingers like this"—he held out the index finger and third finger of his left hand in a V. Cherifa had, he said, aimed her fingers at his eyes.

Suddenly Mrabet's telling changed; his voice grew more expansive, softer. He told of Jane once saying to him that she wanted to die. Why, he asked her, did she want to die? "Janie told me, 'I no like this life.' " He told her the life she had was a beautiful life. He told her that all people were small, that only God was big. "I told Janie everything

that comes from God is good, and we have to say thanks to God."

Then Paul spoke of Jane in the convent hospital at Málaga and of his going to see her and sitting by her bed. At the end, he said, it was as if she were flying over an abyss and seeing death. When the nuns would come in and talk to her about Jesus, "she'd look at me and smile and it was as if she were saying '*ossir.*' " (*Ossir* was a word often used in Jane's mother's family, implying the denial of what had just been said. It may have been of Hungarian origin.)

2

Everything about Tangier seemed to suggest that it was a world where disjunctions could resolve themselves without active intervention. At home, I would have straightaway asked Paul for a private interview. Here, I waited. He will suggest it; it will be arranged, I told myself. But several days passed, and he made no move to alter the situation.

Once again I found myself in the light-filled rooms of the Waughs' flat, at a luncheon that included two guests, Paul and myself. Once again there was the ready surface sliding of social conversation until the moment when Virginia announced that John Hopkins, a young American writer living in Tangier, was preparing an article about Jane's grave in Málaga. As the grave was unmarked, a movement had been initiated by some expatriates in Tangier to take up a collection for a stone.

At the mention of the stone, Paul stiffened. He said he wanted no marker on her grave.

"But, Paul, a lot of people will want to come to her grave," Virginia protested gently.

"That's nonsense," he insisted coldly. "The marker would be a symbol that someone is there. But she was never there. Only the body is there. We have not progressed from savagery," he added. Then, in a sudden transition, he told an amusing and terrifying story of a man who drank a cocktail into which had been mixed the ashes of a corpse.

By the time we arrived at my hotel, I had decided not to wait any longer. As I got out of the car, I told Paul that I hoped I would have some time with him alone, as I had a lot of questions to ask him. Yes, he admitted, someone was always at the flat; it was hard to have a private conversation there. At my suggestion he agreed to come to the hotel for an interview the following day.

Promptly at four in the afternoon, Paul appeared at the Villa de France, and we adjourned to a small, glassed-in room overlooking the garden. After tea was served, I asked his permission to turn on the tape recorder. His first words were about Jane's illness and the part that he thought drinking had played in bringing on that illness. Then he reverted to the subject of her unmarked grave. He said that he was very angry at those people who had suggested a collection to buy a stone, implying that he was too cheap to buy one. "I don't want a cross on Jane's grave. As far as I'm concerned, she has no grave. I don't believe in cemeteries."

When I said something about mourning, he asked, "Who wants to mourn?"

"It's a way to get over it."

"You never get over it. I mean, it's always with you. I'm no longer connected with anything. I think I lived life vicariously and didn't know it. When I had no one to live

through or for, I was disconnected from life. Oh, I'm connected all right—so what?—with eating and sleeping . . ."

After a pause, I spoke of the profound impact Jane's writing had had upon me, how it had suggested a deep connection to her own being.

"When it happened—that feeling—" he nodded, "it happened right away, and people thought they had always known her."

I asked him about Jane's childhood. He said she seldom spoke of it. I asked about Jane's father, who had died when she was twelve. He said she never spoke of him at all. "It was as though she never had a flesh-and-blood father," Paul added.

I mentioned "A Stick of Green Candy," Jane's story of a young girl's struggle with her father about her imaginative life. I suggested that there might have been some connection with her memory of her own father. "Jane would have objected if you said her fiction had to do with her life," he said summarily.

"At some level, all fiction is autobiographical," I insisted.

"Of course," he conceded, but it was an admission that seemed given only out of politeness.

By now the small room was crowded with guests, talking and laughing. All around us were the sounds of tea time at a hotel: plates and cups being set out, forks and spoons clattering, chairs scraping against a marble floor. A waiter appeared, asking whether we needed anything. When he went away, I brought up Jane's notebooks at HRC, how they were filled with uncompleted stories and uncompleted drafts of novels and plays. He said he knew nothing about them. She did not discuss them with him.

"Would you discuss your work with her?" I asked.

"Not really. Sometimes I let her see a manuscript, but we didn't discuss it. We felt there was nothing to discuss. Her work was her work. My work was my work. Unless she'd ask me something. And sometimes I'd ask her, 'Do you like the idea of it happening this way?' She never made suggestions for amelioration."

I reminded him of a letter in HRC that Jane had written to him in 1949, just after the publication of her story "Camp Cataract." She told him that she believed it would never have been properly finished without his help.

"I don't know. How can you tell? I never would have written anything, probably, if I hadn't gone over the manuscript of *Two Serious Ladies* carefully, making corrections in spelling and punctuation. It was the excitement of participating in that that got me interested in writing. There were so many interactions and interinfluences. Two people are together and are very close—which we were—we don't have to tell each other what we're doing because each one knows what the other is doing. What you want, what I wanted most of all, is to present the thing completed and have her read it and say, 'It's wonderful.' That's all I wanted. As Gertrude Stein said, 'No artist wants criticism; all he wants is praise.' That's all she wanted too."

"I should have given her more on 'Camp Cataract,' " he suddenly added. "When I first read it, I said to her, 'Yes, I like it, but it's so strange and mysterious. I don't understand it.' She was terribly depressed by that, and then she tried giving it to other people, and none of them understood it. Nobody understood it. I should have. But I was so busy writing *The Sheltering Sky* . . ."

In her daily life, he recalled, she was always using the expression "I am at the mercy of . . ." He never really knew

what she meant by it. "She felt ideas as such were far less important than what one knew; and one didn't know with one's intellect, one knew with some other organ, according to her."

"And you? Do you make that separation in yourself?"

"I consider myself a nonintellectual. All my creative work was done without any intellect at all."

When I expressed doubt about this statement, he said, "I mean, writing music doesn't require what one would call the intellect, and writing my kind of fiction doesn't require it either."

Perhaps we were talking about different things, what he called intellect and what I called intellect. "When I speak of intellect," I said, "I include the shaping intellect, that which gives form to the work, and in that sense at least, intellect is strongly present in your work."

"Probably is. Probably is," he admitted. "It comes out by itself." Again I warned myself not to take this admission for agreement.

"Of course, what preoccupies the reader of your work is the narrative flow," I went on.

"That preoccupies me too, the narrative. I believe in narrative, don't you?"

At that moment it came to me that if I loved narrative, I also feared it. After a silence, I said, "Of course I believe in narrative. But Jane's narrative is not narrative in the ordinary sense."

"No, not sequential narrative. It's what happens to the people, inside them. The meaning of it isn't implicit in events but in the reactions of the people to whom they happen." After a pause, he added, "I don't see anything in common between her writing and mine."

"Oh," I said, "I think there is."

"I believe you; I just don't see it." He was being polite again.

"It must make you irritable, this stranger coming and telling you—"

"I'm not irritable. I'm not an irritable person."

After that day, Paul did not come again to the Villa de France to talk of Jane. He made it clear to me that he felt uncomfortable, giving an excuse about the noise at the hotel. I had not realized—others would tell me this later—that in the four years since Jane's death he had become reluctant to go out to public places. (Nor had it occurred to me that at the hotel he could not smoke kif, which—I was also to learn—was so helpful to him in alleviating anxiety.) He suggested that I interview him in his flat, saying that we could talk better there. When I mentioned that other people were usually around, making discussion difficult, he said he would make the time to see me alone.

And so began our daily conversations about Jane, extended conversations that went on for four or five hours at a time. Each day he waited for me to begin. As he waited, perhaps he was steeling himself, as for an ordeal, but he never gave any direct indication that this was so. He did make it clear, however, how much he admired her work, how he regretted that it had not been adequately recognized in her lifetime.

I soon learned that if I came to him with my theories about Jane's writing—for theorizing, working at an abstract level, was part of my history (part of myself that was often at odds with storytelling)—he would listen politely, but the conversation would go nowhere. At such times his

answers had the quality of reiteration, of having been solidified. But if I could make myself stay with the specific, a phrase in her work or in a letter she had written to him, a phrase that was provocative and mysterious at the same time, something new appeared in his response: a new incident in her life, a new memory. Then there would be a new story, a revealing that was like a skein unwinding after the proper thread had been pulled.

When he responded to my questions, he was forthcoming but in a way that is difficult to describe. It has been said of Paul many times that he is very deceptive; he even said so himself in his autobiography. Yet, listening to him, I did not have a sense of deception—there was withholding, yes, but not in the sense of a deliberate refusal to tell. Rather, it seemed to me that his withholding was a process akin to his method of telling a story, where what is revealed is revealed only at the necessary moment.

I was being immersed in a world of stories: her stories, his stories about her, his stories about the two of them when they were together, about the games they would play together. And then there were all the other stories, the subsidiary stories surfacing around me, arising out of the world of his daily life.

One afternoon as Paul and I were just about to begin work, Mrabet came into the flat and sat down. He began a story about taking Jane to the market, in which he featured as a central character.

"I take Janie with me in car. Janie buy three bottle wine, one kilo meat, chocolate. Janie like chocolate. I look [at the bill]. Seventy-five hundred francs. I told him [an Italian shopkeeper], with seven thousand francs I could buy—" Mrabet listed in Spanish a number of items that he could

buy with this sum. "Janie told me no. I told Janie this day, 'Shut up.' "

"Glad I wasn't there," Paul said.

"Janie became small."

"Like Alice in Wonderland," Paul interjected.

"Italiano hit me." And then, broadening the base of his accusation, "Cherifa hit me. Ayse [a Moroccan woman who had worked for Jane] hit me."

"Ay, ay, ay," said Paul.

"Everybody hit me. Never buy anything from Italiano."

"And Angèle?" Paul asked. Angèle was a Spanish woman who had also worked for Jane.

"Angèle hit me."

"One time," noted Paul, "Janie had six servants altogether. Not all at the same time. They rotated."

"*Culpa,*" announced Mrabet loudly. "Your fault."

"According to him," Paul turned to me, "everything is my fault because I didn't command her, make her do this or that. Nobody could make her do anything," he insisted.

Mrabet said something about men needing to control women.

"All right, it's my fault. It's all over, so don't tell me it's my fault." Whereas earlier in Mrabet's story Paul had prompted him to further telling, now the tone of his voice was aggrieved.

"Besides, Mrabet," I interjected, "Paul wouldn't have wanted to tell her."

"He has a different idea—the man has to command," Paul explained.

"In this world," Mrabet said expansively, "every woman has to have a man over her." Then he added something

about Paul not having been serious enough and supplemented it with an aside to Paul in Spanish.

"He says the man has to keep the bit in the mouth, otherwise the woman runs away. Never let her do what she wants, or it's too late," Paul translated.

"It was too late when he met her," I said.

"It's never too late," Mrabet pronounced and got up and left.

Of course, there was much about this by-play that I did not understand, including how much of what he said Mrabet really believed, how much was for effect, and what in fact was his purpose in telling the story about Jane to begin with. As for Paul, he had entered into the "game," the story, readily, but then it had suddenly turned more serious for him, as if in the midst of it a nerve had been touched.

Thinking of Mrabet's way of telling, fused as it was with an almost terrifying energy of loud gestures and expansive cries, I said, "He's an actor."

"He's a mythoman. He doesn't understand the difference between fantasy and reality, especially with kif. He allows it to affect him. He likes that, making an embroidery in his mind, which he then speaks of as if it were true. He tells it as though it's true, and people have to listen to him and say, 'Oh, really?' And when I speak to him later about it, he says, 'Well, you know the difference, don't you, when I'm telling the truth and I'm not? I know the difference, you know the difference, so what are you complaining about? It sounds better.' " It sounded eminently rational, yet I remained puzzled. Something about story was going on between them: story was being enacted for multiple purposes—as attack, as counterattack . . . And I was the audience for this multifaceted

unfolding drama, without enough clues to know either the plot or the background or the rules that were being adhered to.

I turned again to Jane, to her stories, to several fragments in her uncompleted work in which she spoke of sin and salvation. After listening to the fragments, Paul said, "The salvation—what is it? When she was there, in front of one, it was terribly hard to understand what she was talking about, for she often talked that way too, to me. Yes, I think that was a fundamental part of her mind's work. I would always say, 'What do you mean, Janie? I know what you mean by this and by that, but I don't understand what you mean.' "

Yet, oddly, I had had a sense that I understood what she meant. That I did not know her, had never seen her, had never heard her speak, did not know the emphasis she gave to this or that, had never been forced to see the necessary contradictions between the life and the writing—all this not knowing had made it possible for me to think that I understood. Now I saw, as I listened to Paul, that my understanding was premature; it had been arrived at too easily.

That night I had a dream about Jane. It is curious that all the time I was obsessed with Jane as a subject, I do not remember dreaming of her except this one time. It was a dream divided into two sections. In one section, shut off like a dream within a dream, I saw Jane as a young girl with sparkling eyes, surrounded by others, hurrying by. In the other section of the dream, I was in California visiting a friend, and I was told that a new story of Jane's had been found that everyone was talking about. Suddenly, in that section of the dream, I knew that the other part of the dream was wrong, that Jane was dead.