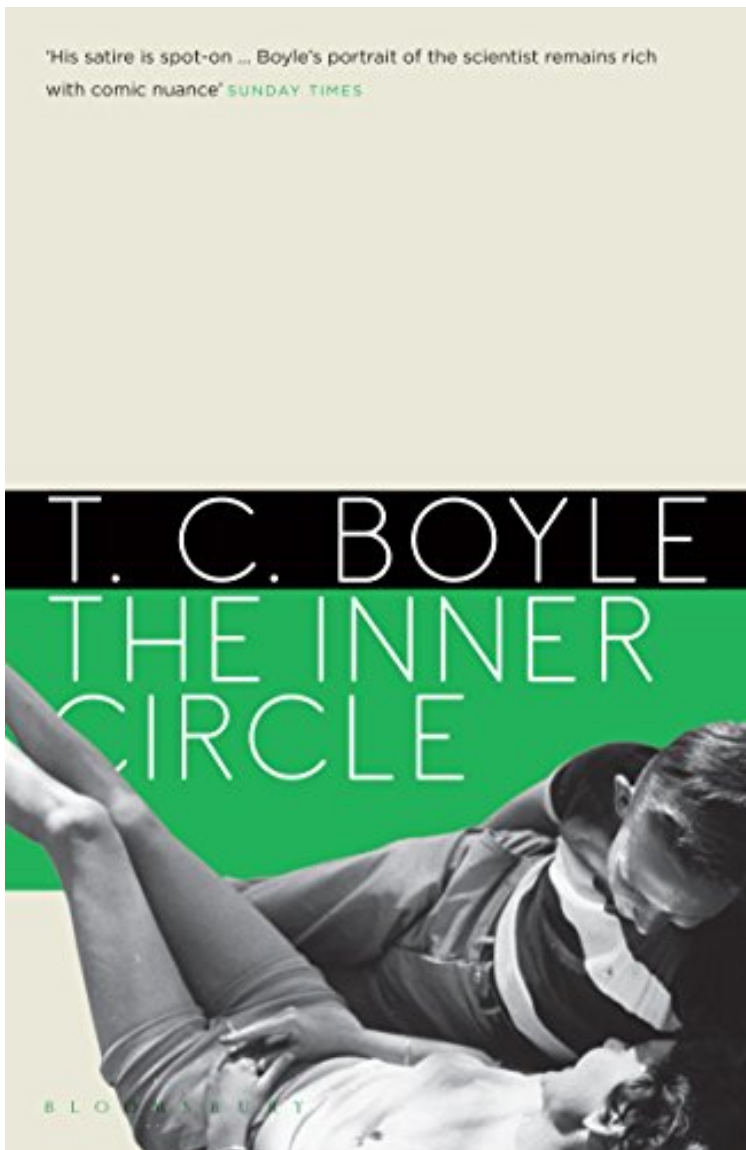


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# The Inner Circle



*Par T. C. Boyle*  
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## Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurIn 1939, on the campus of Indiana University, a revolution has begun. The stir is caused by Alfred Kinsey, a zoologist who is determined to take sex out of the bedroom. John Milk, a freshman, is enthralled by the professor's daring lectures and over the next two decades becomes Kinsey's right hand man. But Kinsey teaches Milk more than the art of objective enquiry. Behind closed doors, he is a sexual enthusiast of the highest order and as a member of his 'inner circle' of researchers, Milk is called on to participate in experiments that become increasingly uninhibited ...ExtraitPROLOGUEBloomington, IndianaAugust 25, 1956Looking back on it now, I dont think I was ever actually sex shy (to use one of Proks pet phrases), but Ill admit I was pretty nave when I first came to him, not to mention hopelessly dull and

conventional. I don't know what he saw in me, really or perhaps I do. If you'll forgive me a moment of vanity, my wife, Iris, claims I was something of a heartthrob on campus, though I would have been the last to know of it because I wasn't dating and had always been uncomfortable with the sort of small talk that leads up to the casual inquiry about after-class plans or what you might or might not be doing on Saturday after the game. I had a pretty fair physique in those days, with a matching set of fullback's shoulders and a thirty-inch waist (I was first string on my high school team till I suffered a concussion midway through my junior season and my mother put a premature end to my career), and unlike most men at college, I was conscientious about keeping myself in trim. I still am but that's neither here nor there. To complete the portrait, because already I've managed to get myself out on a limb here, I was blessed with what Iris calls sensitive eyes, whatever that might mean, and a thatch of wheat-colored hair with a natural curl that defeated any cream or pomade I'd ever come across. As for sex, I was eager but inexperienced, and shy in the usual way, unsure of myself and just about as uninformed as anyone you could imagine. In fact, the first time I developed anything more than a theoretical grasp of what coitus involved—the mechanics of the act, that is—was during my senior year at IU, in the fall of 1939, when I found myself sitting in a lecture hall jammed to the rafters with silent, dry-mouthed students of both sexes as Prok's color slides played hugely across the screen.

I was there at the instigation of a girl named Laura Feeney, one of the campus femmes fatales who never seemed to go anywhere without an arm looped through some letterman's. Laura had the reputation of being fast, though I can assure you I was never the beneficiary of her sexual largesse (if, in fact, the rumors were true: as I was later to learn, the most provocative-looking women often have the most repressed sex lives, and vice versa). I remember being distinctly flattered when she stopped me in the corridor one day during fall registration, took hold of my arm at the muscle and pecked a kiss on my cheek. Oh, hi, John, she breathed, I was just thinking about you. How was your summer? My summer had been spent back home in Michigan City, stocking shelves and bagging groceries, and if I had five minutes to myself my mother had me pruning the trees, reshingling the roof and pulling weeds in the vegetable garden. I was lonely, bored to tears, masturbating twice a day in my attic room that was like a sweatbox in a penal institution. My only relief derived from books. I came under the spell of John Donne and Andrew Marvell that summer, and I reread Sir Philip Sidney's *Astrophel and Stella* three times in preparation for an English literature course I was looking forward to in the fall. But I couldn't tell Laura Feeney all this or any of it. She would have thought me a washout. Which I was. So I just shrugged and said, All right, I guess. Voices reverberated in the stairwell, boomed in the corners and fled all the way down the corridor to where the registration tables had been set up in the gymnasium. Yeah, Laura said, and her smile went cold a moment, I know how you feel. With me it was work, work, work. My father owns a lunch counter in Fort Wayne, did you know that? I didn't know. I shook my head and felt a whole shining loop of my hair fall loose, though I must have used half a bottle of cream oil on it. I was wearing one of the stiff new Arrow shirts my grandmother had sent me from Chicago and a glen-plaid tie I think I wore to class every day that year in the hope of making a good impression, my briefcase was in one hand, a stack of library books in the other. As I've said, the gift of small talk eluded me. I think I said something like, Fort Wayne, huh? In any event, it didn't matter what I said, because she let her turquoise eyes go wide (she was a redhead, or a strawberry blonde, actually, with skin so white you'd think it had never seen the sun), gave my muscle a squeeze and lowered her voice. Listen, she said, I just wanted to know if you'd mind getting engaged to me. Her words hung there between us, closing out everything else—the chatter of the group of freshmen materializing suddenly from the men's room, the sound of an automobile horn out on the street—and I can only imagine the look I must have given her in response. This was long before Prok taught me to tuck all the loose strands of my emotions behind a mask of impassivity, and everything I was thinking routinely rushed to my face along with the blood that settled in my cheeks like a barometer of confusion. John, you're not blushing, are you? No, I said, not at all. I'm just—She held my eyes, enjoying the moment. Just what? I shrugged. We were out in the sun yesterday it was, yesterday afternoon.

Moving furniture. So, I guess, well—Someone brushed by me, an undergraduate who looked vaguely familiar—had he been in my psych class last year?—and then she let the other shoe drop. I mean, just for the semester. For pretend. She looked away and her hair rose and fell in an ebbing wave. When she turned back to me, she lifted her face till it was like a satellite of my own, pale and glowing in the infusion of light from the windows at the end of the corridor. You know, she said, for the marriage course? That was the moment it all began, though I didn't realize it at the time—how could I? How could I have foreseen that a shallow, manipulative girl I hardly knew would be the motive force that was to lead me to Prok and Mac, Corcoran, Rutledge, to the desk at which I'm now sitting, trying to get as much of this out as I can before the world

goes to pieces? I said, Yes. I said, Yes, all right, and Laura Feeney smiled and before I knew it I was on my way to becoming an initiate in the science of sex, abandoning the ideal for the actual, the dream of Stella

(True, that true beauty virtue is indeed) for anatomy, physiology and an intimate knowledge of the Bartholins glands and the labia minora. All of it all the years of research, the thousands of miles traveled, the histories taken, the delving and rooting and pioneeringspun out like thread from an infinite spool held in the milk-white palm of Laura Feeney on an otherwise ordinary morning in the autumn of 1939. But I dont want to make too much of itwe all have our defining moments. And I dont mean to keep you in the dark here either. The marriage course to which Laura Feeney was referring Marriage and the Family, properly was being offered by Professor Kinsey of the Zoology Department and half a dozen of his colleagues from other disciplines, and it was the sensation of the campus. The course was open only to faculty and staff, students who were married or engaged, and seniors of both sexes. There were eleven lectures in all, five of them covering the sociological, psychological, economic, legal and religious facets of marriage, these to be delivered by faculty outside of the Zoology Department, and they were to prove to be informative enough, I suppose, and necessary, but if truth be told they were nothing more than window dressing for the six unexpurgated lectures (with audiovisual aids) Prok was scheduled to give on the physiology of intramarital relations. Word was out on campus, and I suspect there were any number of junior girls like Laura Feeney shopping at the five-and-dime for rhinestone rings maybe even sophomores and freshmen too. My guess is that Lauras lettermen were engaged to their fall sports, and, by extension, their coaches, and so she cast me in the role of prospective bridegroom. I didnt mind. I would say she wasnt my type, but then all women are every mans type, under the right circumstances. She was popular, she was pretty, and if for an hour or two a week people took her to be mine, so much the better. To this point, Id been immersed in my studies I made deans list five out of the first six semesters and I barely knew any girls, either on campus or back at home, and to have her there at my side as other couples strolled by and the late-blooming sun ladled syrup over the trees and the apparent world stood still for whole minutes at a time was like no feeling Id ever had. Was it love? I dont know. It was certainly something, and it stirred me I could always hope, couldnt I? At any rate, as I say, word was out, and the lecture hall was full to overflowing when we got there the first day. I remember being surprised at the number of younger faculty crowding the front rows with their prim and upright wives and how many of them I didnt recognize. There was a sprinkling of older faculty too, looking lost and even vaguely queasy, and their presence was a real puzzleyou would have thought people in their forties and fifties with grown children should be acquainted with the basic facts of life, but there they were. (Maybe they need a refresher course, Laura said with half a grin and very much sotto voce, and even that, even the barest mention of what those couples must have done in private or once have done made me go hot all over.) But of course the real multitude was composed of students there must have been three hundred or more of us there, crowded in shoulder to shoulder, all waiting to be scandalized, to hear the forbidden words spoken aloud and see the very act itself depicted in living color. Dr. Hoenig, the Dean of Women, had been stationed at the door as we filed in, ready to pounce on anyone who wasnt on her list of registered students. She was a short, top-heavy woman in a dowdy dress and a gray cloche hat that seemed like an extension of her pinned-up hair, and though she must have been in her forties then she seemed to us as ancient and vigilant as the Sphinx, her spectacles shining as she bent to check names against the list and scrutinize the ring fingers of all the girls who claimed to be engaged. We passed muster, and sat through the preliminary lectures, biding our time until Dr. Kinsey took the stage. We had seen him at the outset he electrified us all in his introductory lecture by claiming that there were no abnormalities when it came to sex, save for abstinence, celibacy and delayed marriage but then he had been succeeded by a doctor from the medical school whose voice was perfectly pitched to the frequency of sleep, and then a Methodist minister and a pinched little man from the Psychology Department who spoke ad nauseam on Freuds Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality. It was raining, I remember, on the day we had all been waiting for the day of the slide presentation and as Laura Feeney and I stepped into the anteroom with the mob of other students divesting themselves of umbrellas and slickers, I was struck by the deep working odor of all that massed and anointed flesh. Laura must have noticed it too, because the minute she ducked demurely past Dean Hoenig, she wrinkled up her nose and whispered, Smells like somebody let all the tomcats loose. I didnt know what to say to that, so I gave her a faint smile it wouldnt do at all to look as if I were enjoying myself, because this was education, after all, this was science, and every face had been ironed sober and allowed my right hand to rest lightly at her waist as I guided her through the crush and into the semi-darkened hall. We were fifteen minutes early, but already all the aisle seats had been taken and we had to edge awkwardly through a picket of folded knees, book bags

and umbrellas to reach the middle of one of the back rows. Laura settled in, shook out her hair, waved to thirty or forty people I didn't recognize, then bent forward over her compact and stealthily reapplied her lipstick. She came up compressing her lips and giving me the sort of look she might have reserved for a little brother or maybe the family dog. She was a junior from Fort Wayne and I was a senior from Michigan City and no matter how much I wanted to believe otherwise there was nothing, absolutely nothing, between us. I gazed down the row. Nearly all the girls were glancing round them with shining eyes while the men fumbled with loose-leaf binders and worried over the nubs of their pencils. A man from my rooming house Dick Martone happened to glance up then and our eyes met briefly. Both of us looked away, but not before I could read his excitement. Here we were he wedged in between two other senior men, I with Laura Feeney preening at my side about to see and engage what we'd been hungering after for the better part of our lives. I can't begin to describe the frisson that ran through that hall, communicated from seat to seat, elbow to elbow, through the whole yearning mass of us. Over the course of the past weeks we'd been instructed in the history and customs of marriage, heard about the emotions evoked, the legal ramifications of the nuptial bond and even the anatomy of the structures involved in reproduction, heard the words penis, nipple, vagina and clitoris spoken aloud in mixed company, and now we were going to see for ourselves. I could feel the blood pounding in my extremities. Then the side door swung open and Dr. Kinsey was there, striding purposefully to the podium. Though a moment before he'd been slogging across campus in galoshes and southwester, you would have thought he'd just stepped out of a sunlit meadow, the sheaf of his bristling flat-topped pompadour standing upright from the crown of his head as if it had been pressed from a mold, his dark suit, white shirt and bow tie impeccable, his face relaxed and youthful. He was in his mid-forties then, a looming tall presence with an oversized head, curiously narrowed shoulders and a slight stoop the result of the rickets he'd suffered as a child and he never wasted a motion or a single minute of anybody's time either. The anticipatory murmur fell off abruptly as he stepped up to the lectern and raised his head to look out on the audience.

Silence. Absolute. We all became aware of the sound of the rain then, a steady sizzle like static in the background. Today we shall discuss the physiology of sexual response and orgasm in the human animal, he began, without preliminary, without notes, and as his equable, matter-of-fact tones penetrated the audience, I could feel Laura Feeney go tense beside me. I stole a glance at her. Her face was rapt, her white blouse glowing in the dimness of the lecture hall as if it were the single radiant point in the concave sweep of the audience. She was wearing knee socks and a pleated skirt that pulled tight to reveal the swell of the long muscles of her thighs. Her perfume took hold of me like a vise. Professor Kinsey went on, with the help of the overhead projector, to document how the penis enlarges through vasocongestion and at orgasm releases between two and five million spermatozoa, depending on the individual, and then turned his attention to the female reproductive organs. He talked at length about vaginal secretions and their function in easing intromission of the penis, spoke of the corresponding importance of the cervical secretions, which, in some cases, may serve to loosen the mucous plug that ordinarily lies in the opening of the cervix, and can prevent fertilization by blocking movement of the sperm into the uterus and subsequently the Fallopian tubes. We bowed our heads, scribbled furiously in our notebooks. Laura Feeney swelled beside me till she was the size of one of the balloons they floated overhead during the Macys parade. Everyone in the place was breathing as one. And then, abruptly, the first of the slides appeared, a full-color, close-up photograph of an erect, circumcised phallus, followed by a shot of the moist and glistening vagina awaiting it. The vagina must be spread open as the erect male organ penetrates, Dr. Kinsey went on, as the next slide dominated the screen behind him, and thus the female has employed two fingers to this end. You will observe that the clitoris is stimulated at this point, thus providing the erotic stimulation necessary for the completion of the act on the part of the female. There was more a very detailed and mechanical account of the various positions the human animal employs in engaging in coitus, as well as techniques of foreplay and a teaser (as if we needed one) for the next lecture, which was to focus on fertilization and (here the whispers broke out) how to circumvent it. I heard it all. I even took notes, though afterward I could make no sense of them. Once the slides appeared I lost all consciousness of the moment (and I can't overemphasize the jolt they gave me, the immediate and intensely physical sensation that was like nothing so much as plunging into a cold stream or being slapped across the face here it was, here it was at long last!). I might have been sitting there upright in the chair, Laura Feeney swelling at my side, and I drew breath and blinked my eyes and the blood circulated through my veins, but for all intents and purposes I wasn't there at all. Afterward and I can't for the life of me recall how the lecture concluded people collected their things in silence and moved up the aisles in a somber processional. There was none of the jostling and joking you would normally expect from a mob of

undergraduates set loose after an hours confinement. Instead, the crowd shuffled forward listlessly, shoulders slumped, eyes averted, for all the world like refugees escaping some disaster. I couldnt look at Laura Feeney. I couldnt guide her with a hand to her waist eitherI was on fire, aflame, and I was afraid the merest touch would incinerate her. I studied the back of her head, her hair, her shoulders, as we made our way through the crowd toward the smell of the rain beyond the big flung-open doors at the end of the hallway. We were delayed a moment on the doorstep, a traffic jam there on the landing as the rain lashed down and people squared their hats and fumbled with umbrellas, and then I had my own umbrella open and Laura and I were down the steps and out into the rain. We must have gone a hundred yards, the trees flailing in the wind, the umbrella streaming, before I found something to say. Do you would you like to take a walk? Or do you need to, perhaps because I could take you back to the dorm if thats what you Her face was drawn and bloodless and she walked stiffly beside me, avoiding body contact as much as was possible under the circumstances. She stopped suddenly and I stopped too, awkwardly struggling to keep the crown of the umbrella above her. A walk? she repeated. In this? Youve got the wrong species here, Im afraid Im a human animal, not a duck. And then we were laughing, both of us, and it was all right. Well, how about a cup of coffee then and maybe a piece of, I dont know, pie? Or a drink? I hesitated. The rain glistened in her hair and her eyes were bright. I could use a stiff one after that. I was what I mean is, I never She touched my arm at the elbow and her smile suddenly bloomed and then faded just as quickly. No, she said, and her voice had gone soft, me either. I took her to a tavern crowded with undergraduates seeking a respite from the weather, and the first thing she did when we settled into a booth by the window was twist the rhinestone band off her finger and secrete it in the inside compartment of her purse. Then she unpinned her hat, patted down her hair and turned away from me to reapply her lipstick. I hadnt thought past the moment, and once we agreed on where we were going, we hadnt talked much either, the rain providing background music on the timpani of the umbrella and plucking the strings of the ragged trees as if that were all the distraction we could bear. Now, as I braced my elbows on the table and leaned toward her to ask what she wanted to drink, I realized that this was something very like a date and blessed my luck because I had two and a half dollars left in my wallet after paying out room and board from my scant weekly paycheck (I was working at the university library then, pushing a broom and reshelving books five evenings a week). Oh, I dont know, she said, and I could see she wasnt quite herself yet. What are you having? Bourbon. And a beer chaser. She made a moue of her lips. I can get you a soft drink, if you prefer ginger ale, maybe? A Tom Collins, she said, Ill have a Tom Collins, and her eyes began to sweep the room. The lower legs and cuffs of my trousers were wet and my socks squished in my shoes as I rose to make my way to the bar. The place was close and steaming, shoulders and elbows looming up everywhere, the sawdust on the floor darkly compacted by the impressions of a hundred wet heels. When I got back to the table with our drinks, there was another couple sitting opposite Laura, the girl in a green velvet hat that brought out the color of her eyes, the man in a wet overcoat buttoned up over his collar and the knot of his tie. He had a long nose with a bump in it and two little pincushion eyes set too close together. I dont remember his name or hers either, not at this remove. Call them Sally and Bill, for the purposes of this account, and identify them as fellow students in the marriage course, sweethearts certainly worlds more than Laura and I were to each other though not yet actually engaged. Laura made the introductions. I nodded and said I was pleased to meet them both. Bill had a pitcher of beer in front of him, the carbonation rising up from its depths in a rich, golden display, and I watched in silence as he tucked his tongue in the corner of his mouth and meticulously poured out half a glass for Sally and a full one for himself. The golden liquid swirled in the glass and the head rose and steadied before composing itself in a perfect white disc. You look like youve done that before, I said. You bet I have, he replied, then lifted his glass and grinned. A toast, he proposed. He waited till wed raised our glasses. To Professor Kinsey! he cried. Who else? This was greeted with a snicker from the booth behind us, but we laughed all four of us as a way of defeating our embarrassment. There was one thing only on our minds, one subject we all were burning to talk of, and though Bill had alluded to it, we werent quite comfortable with it yet. We were silent a moment, studying the faces of the people shuffling damply through the door. I like your ring, Sally, Laura said finally. Was it terribly expensive? And then they were both giggling and Bill and I were laughing along with them, laughing immoderately, laughing for the sheer joy and release of it. I could feel the bourbon settling in my stomach and sending out feelers to the distant tendrils of my nerves, and my face shone and so did theirs. We were in on a secret together, the four of us wed put one over on Dean Hoenig and wed just gone through a rite of initiation in a darkened hall in the biology building. It took a minute. Bill lit a cigarette. The girls searched each others eyes. Jeez, Bill said finally, did you ever in your life see anything like that? I thought I was going

to die, Sally said. She threw a glance at me, then studied the pattern of wet rings her beer glass had made on the table. If my mother she began, but couldnt finish the thought. God, Laura snorted, making a drawn-out bleat of it, my mother wouldve gone through the roof. Shed lit a cigarette too, and it smoldered now in the ashtray, the white of the paper flecked red from the touch of her lips. She picked it up distractedly, took a quick puff, exhaled. Because we never, in my family, I mean never, discussed, you know, where little boys and girls come from. Sally raised a confidential hand to her mouth. They call him Dr. Sex, did you know that? Who does? I felt as if I were floating above the table, all my tethers cut and the ground fast fading below me. This was heady stuff, naughty, wicked, like when a child first learns the verboten words Dr. Kinsey had pronounced so distinctly and disinterestedly for us just an hour before. Sally raised her eyebrows till they met the brim of her hat. People. Around campus. Not to mention town, Bill put in. He dropped his voice. He makes you do interviews, you know. About your sex life he laughed or lack of it. I would hate that, Sally said. Its so...personal. And its not as if hes a medical doctor. Or a minister even. I felt overheated suddenly, though the place was as dank as the dripping alley out back. Histories, I said, surprising myself. Case histories. Hes explained all that how else are we going to know what people The human animal, you mean, Laura said. what people do when they, when they mate, if we dont look at it scientifically? And frankly, I dont know about you, but I applaud what Kinseys doing, and if its shocking, I think we should ask ourselves why, because isnt a, a...a function as universal as reproductive behavior just as logical a cause for study as the circulation of the blood or the way the cornea works or any other medical knowledge weve accumulated over the centuries? It might have been the bourbon talking, but there I was defending Prok before I ever even knew him. Yes, but, Bill said, and we all leaned into the table and talked till our glasses were empty, and then we filled them and emptied them again, the rain tracing patterns in the dirt of the window, then the window going dark and the tide of undergraduates ebbing and flowing as people went home to dinner and their books. It was seven oclock. I was out of money. My head throbbed but Id never been so excited in my life. When Bill and Sally excused themselves and shrugged out the door and into the wafting dampness of the night, I lingered a moment, half-drunk, and put an arm round Lauras shoulders. So were still engaged, arent we? I murmured. Her smile spread softly from her lips to her eyes. She plucked the maraschino cherry from her glass and rotated it between her fingers before gently pressing it into my mouth. Sure, she said. Then shouldnt weor dont we have an obligation, to, to Sure, she said, and she leaned forward and gave me a kiss, a kiss that was sweetened by the syrup of the cherry and the smell of her perfume and the proximity of her body that was warm now and languid. It was a long kiss, the longest Id ever experienced, and it was deepened and complicated by what wed seen up there on the screen in the lecture hall, by the visual memory of those corresponding organs designed for sensory gratification and the reproduction of the species, mutually receptive, self-lubricated, cohesive and natural. I came up for air encouraged, emboldened, and though there was nothing between us and we both knew it, I whispered, Come home with me. The look of Lauras face transformed suddenly. Her eyes sharpened and her features came into focus as if Id never really seen them before, as if this wasnt the girl Id just kissed in a moment of sweet oblivion. We were both absolutely still, our breath commingling, hands poised at the edge of the table as if we didnt know what to do with them, till she turned away from me and began to gather up her purse, her raincoat, her hat. I became aware of the voices at the bar then, someone singing in a creaking baritone, the hiss of a newly tapped keg. I dont know what youre thinking, John, she said, and I was getting to my feet now too, rattled suddenly, flushing red for all I knew. Im not that kind of a girl. But let me step back a moment, because I dont want to get off on the wrong foot this isnt about me, this is about Prok, and Prok is dead, and Im sitting here in my study, the key turned in the lock, the sorry tepid remains of a Zombie cocktail at my elbow, trying to talk into this machine and sort out my thoughts while Iris paces up and down the hall in her heels, stopping on every third revolution to rattle the doorknob and remind me in a muffled shout that were going to be late. Late for what, Id like to know. Late for tramping through the funeral home with a mob of newspaper reporters and the rest of the curiosity seekers? Late to show our support? Or dedication? Is it going to do Mac any good? Or the children? Or Corcoran, Rutledge, or even my own son, John Jr., who locked himself in his room at the top of the stairs two hours ago because hes had enough of death and sorrow and mourning, because unlike the ghouls and the carrion sniffers and all the rest he hasnt the faintest desire to look on the empty husk of greatness? The corpse, that is. The mortal remains. Prok in his casket, propped up like a wax effigy, drained and flushed and pumped full of formaldehyde, the man who had no illusions, the scientist, the empiricist, the evolutionist, Prok. Prok is dead, is dead, is dead, and nothing else matters. John, goddamn you, will you open this door? Iris is abusing the doorknob, shes

pounding with a balled-up fist at the oak panels of the door I myself stripped and varnished. And who took us to look at this house, who loaned us the money for it? Who gave us everything we have? Okay, okay! I shout, and then I'm up from the desk, forcing down the dregs of the joyless drink and shuffling across the carpet to twist the key in the lock and fling open the door. Iris is there, her face blotted with anger, with exasperation, stalking into the room in her black dress, her black stockings and heels, the hat and the veil. My wife. Thirty-six years old, the mother of my son, as slim and dark and wide-eyed and beautiful as the day I met her. And angry. Deeply, intensely angry. What are you doing? she demands, crowding into me, her hands windmilling in my face. Don't you realize we're twenty minutes late already? And then, catching sight of the glass in my hand: Are you drinking? At two o'clock in the afternoon? Jesus, you make me sick. He wasn't God, you know. I'm feeling hollow, a cane with all the pith gnawed out of it. I don't need prodding, don't need anything but to be left alone. Easy for you to say. I don't know what I expect, the baring of the talons, the first superficial swipes of the marital row that has been going on here now for the past fifteen years, and then the rending of the deeper wounds, the ones that fester. I'm ready for it, ready to fight and throw it all back at her, because she's wrong and we both know it, but she surprises me. Her hands go to her hips, then drop to her side, and I watch her take the time to compose her face. No, John, she says finally, and she puts all the bruising power of the years into the sad low hopeless cadence of her voice, it's not easy. It's never been easy. You know what I wish? I won't answer, won't give her the satisfaction. I wish I'd never met him, never heard of him. I wish he'd never been born. I can hear our son moving around in his room overhead, the dull reverberation of his feet like distant thunder. Iris's jaw is set, her shoulders thrown back in full martial display, and she's already dismissed me, moving toward the door now in her brisk chopping strides. Get your tie on, she snaps over her shoulder, and she's gone. But no. She's back suddenly, on the rebound, her head framed in the doorway, her eyes slicing from me to the tape recorder and back again. And shut that damn thing off, will you? PART I BIOLOGY HALL 1 For all my bravado that day at the tavern, I have to admit I had my qualms about the interview, and I know this must sound ridiculous coming from me, since I've contributed materially to the project to a degree exceeded only by Corcoran and Prok himself, and ultimately wound up conducting some two thousand interviews on my own, but if the truth be known, I was scared. Or perhaps intimidated would be a better word. You have to understand that back then sex and sexuality simply weren't discussed anywhere, in any forum and certainly not in a public lecture hall on a college campus. Marriage courses had begun to spring up at other colleges and universities around the country, most pointedly in response to the VD scare of the thirties, but they were bland and euphemistic, and as far as counseling was concerned, as far as a frank face-to-face discussion of pathologies and predilections, there was nothing available to the average person aside from the banalities of the local minister or priest. And so, as Dr. Kinsey reiterated in his concluding lecture, he was undertaking a groundbreaking research project to describe and quantify human sexual behavior as a way of uncovering what had been so long hidden behind a veil of taboo, superstition and religious prohibition, so as to provide data for those in need of them. And he was appealing to us, the prurient, feverish, sweaty-palmed undergraduates of the audience to help him. He had just concluded his overview of the course, summarizing his comments on individual variation, as well as his remarks on birth control (adding, almost as an afterthought, that if condoms lacked the natural lubrication provided in the male by secretions from the Cowper's glands, saliva could be used as an effective succedaneum), and he stood there before us, his face animated, his hands folded on the lectern in front of him. I appeal to you all, he said, after a momentary pause, to come forward and give me your individual histories, as they are absolutely vital to our understanding of human sexuality. The light was dim and uniform, the hall overheated, a faint smell of dust and floor wax lingering in the air. Outside, the first snow of the season was briefly whitening the ground, but we might as well have been in a sealed vault for all it mattered. People squirmed in their seats. The young woman in front of me glanced furtively at her watch. Why, we know more about the sex life of *Drosophila melanogaster* the fruit fly than we know of the commonest everyday practices of our own species, he went on, his voice steady, his eyes fixed on the audience, more of an insect's ways than of the activities that go on in the bedrooms of this country, on living room sofas and in the rear seats of automobiles for that matter, the very activities through the agency of which each of us is present here in this room today. Does that make scientific sense? Is it in the least rational or defensible? Laura was seated beside me, keeping up the pretext, though in the course of the semester she'd fallen hard for a member of the basketball team by the name of Jim Willard and had twice been caught in his company by Dean Hoening, who had a fine eye for the temperature gradient of campus romances. Both times Laura had managed to wriggle out of it. Jim was a friend of the family, a cousin actually, second cousin, that

is, and she was just taking it upon herself to help him with his studies, seeing that basketball consumed so much of his time but Dean Hoenig was on to us. She bristled visibly as we came in the door together and made what I thought was a wholly inappropriate remark about wedding bells, and I was still fuming over it midway through the lecture. At any rate, Laura was by my side, her head bent to her notebook in the further pretext of taking notes, when in fact she was doodling, sketching elongated figures in dresses and furs and elaborate feathered hats and at least one palpitating heart transfixed by the errant arrow. What Dr. Kinsey wanted from us what he was appealing for now was our one-hundred-percent cooperation in arranging private sessions with him to give up our sex histories. For the sake of science. All disclosures to be recorded in code and to remain strictly confidential in fact, no one but he knew the key to this code he'd devised, and thus no one could ever possibly put a name to a given history. And I must stress the importance of one-hundred-percent cooperation, he added, gesturing with a stiff swipe of his hand, because anything short of that compromises our statistical reliability. If we are to take histories only from those who seek us out, we will have a very inaccurate picture indeed of the society at large, but if we can document one-hundred-percent groups all the college students present in this lecture hall, for instance, all the young men in a given fraternity house, the membership of the Elks Club, women's auxiliaries, the incarcerated at the State Penal Farm in Putnamville then we are getting an accurate, top-to-bottom picture. He paused to run his gaze over the entire audience, left to right, back to front. A stillness descended on us. Laura lifted her head. Very well, he said finally. In the service of this end, I will be scheduling appointments directly after termination of this lecture. Because of our ruse, Laura and I were scheduled consecutively, as future husband and wife, though Laura's use for me had by this time expired and she pointedly avoided me as she strolled around campus in the towering company of Jim Willard, who, at six feet one and one hundred ninety pounds, provided stability under the boards for our basketball team. We went separately to Biology Hall on a bitter, wind-scoured December afternoon, the husks of leaves chasing across a dead scrub of lawn, the trees stripped and forlorn, and everybody on campus sniffing with the same cold. Laura had been scheduled first, and as the interviews in those days averaged just over an hour, there really wasn't much point in my escorting her there. Still, I'd got cold feet the night before and when I ran into her and Willard on the steps of the library I'd argued that we should nonetheless show up together for appearances sake. I didn't mind, I'd bring my books and study while she was in Kinsey's office but she was shaking her head before I'd even got the words out. You're very sweet, John, she said, and I appreciate your concern, I really do but the semesters nearly over. What can they do to us? Willard was hovering in the background, giving me the sort of look he usually reserved for tip-offs at center court. Besides, she said, showing her teeth in a tight little smile, people do fall out of love, don't they? Even Dean Hoenig has to be realistic she can't expect every engagement to last. I didn't want to concede the point. I was feeling something I'd never felt before, and I couldn't have defined it, not then, not with the powers available to me and the person I then was, but can I say that her face was a small miracle in the light spilling from the high, arching windows, that I remembered the kiss in the tavern, the feel of her stirring beside me in the lecture hall? Can I say that, and then let it rest? What about disciplinary action? I said. She let out a curt laugh. Disciplinary action? Are you kidding? She looked to Willard and back again. I don't care two snaps for all the disciplinary action in the world. And so I went alone to Biology Hall, following the faint lingering traces of her perfume, the collar of my overcoat turned up against the wind, a load of books tucked under one arm. The building, like most on campus, was made of local limestone. It rose up out of the black grasp of the trees like a degraded temple, the sky behind it all but rinsed of light, and I couldn't help thinking how different it had looked in September when it was cushioned in foliage. As I came up the path, leaves grating underfoot, I felt a sudden sharp stab of apprehension. I didn't know Prok yet or I knew him only as a distant and formal presence on the podium and I was afraid of what he might think of me. You see, it wasn't only the subterfuge with Laura that cast a shadow over things, but my history itself. I was deeply ashamed of it, ashamed of who I was and what I'd done, and I'd never broached the subject of sex with anyone, not my closest friends, not the school counselor or even the uncle (Robert, my father's youngest brother) who did his best to take my dead father's place till the wandering bug got him and he disappeared too. I was turning it over in my mind, wondering what sort of things Dr. Kinsey would want to know and whether I could dare equivocate or lie, outright lie when the outside door swung open and Laura emerged. She was wearing a dark, belted coat, white socks and saddle shoes, her lower legs bare against the cold, and she looked small and fragile in the lee of the building and the big weighted slab of the door. A gust came up and both her hands went automatically to her hat, and if she hadn't glanced up in that instant and seen me there, I don't know if I wouldn't have just turned heel and vanished. But she did glance up. And she gave me a curious look, as if she

couldnt quite place meor was somehow seeing me out of context. I had no choice but to continue along the path and up the stone steps, and now she gave me a rueful smile. Your turn, huh? she said. She was poised on the landing, holding the door for me. What did he ask? I puffed, taking the steps two at a time. The corridor behind her was deserted. I saw the dull gleam of linoleum tile, the lights set at intervals, the dark stairwell opening like a mouth at the far end. Oh, I dont know, she said, her breath streaming in the cold, everything. Did he ask about, about us? Uh-uh. Frankly, I dont think he cares one way or the other. Heshe really believes in what hes doing, and he wants people to...open up, I guess youd say. Its all about the research, about getting at the real truth of things, and the way he does itI mean, its not what youd think. Its not embarrassing, not at all. Youll see. He just puts you at ease. I didnt know what to say to this. She was right there beside me, so close I could smell the faint aroma of her mint toothpaste, which was all mixed up with her perfume and the scent of the shampoo shed used on her hair. Her face was open and her lips parted, but her eyes looked beyond me, as if she expected Jim Willard or Prok himself to issue from the line of trees across the street. She simply stared, as if shed just woken up or been hypnotized by one of the charlatans at the county fair. The wind was at the back of my neck and I could feel the heated air of the building like the breath of some beast on my face. He doesnt hypnotize you, does he? Her back was propped against the door and she gave me a long, slow look of appraisal. No, John, she said, patronizing me now, no, he doesnt hypnotize you. But listen she reached up to tuck one last flowing curl under her hat I never really got to thank you for what youve done a lot of the boys I know wouldnt have been caught dead in that course and it was really white of you. So, thanks. Really. Sure, I mumbled, my pleasure, and then she let the door go and I caught it with one hand and slipped into the building as she retreated down the steps. Dr. Kinseys office was at the end of the corridor on the second floor. My appointment was the last of the day, and the halls that had been thrumming with students an hour ago were deserted now. The staff had gone home too, all the offices and classrooms darkened up and down the length of the building even the janitor was apparently busy elsewhere. I paused at the water fountain my throat had gone dry and then continued down the hallway, my footsteps echoing like gunshots in the empty innards of the building. There was a small anteroom, windowless and drab, and beyond it, the softly lit confines of the office itself. The door stood open and I could see two crammed metal bookcases reaching all the way to the ceiling, and then the blond flash of what I took to be Kinseys head bent over a desk in a nimbus of yellow light. I hesitated a moment, then rapped my knuckles on the doorframe. He swung his head out away from the desk so he could get a clear view of the doorway, then immediately sprang to his feet. Milk? he called, rushing to me with his hand extended and a look of transport on his face, as if I were the single person in all the world he was most happy to see. John Milk? I took his hand and nodded, fumbling through the usual gestures of greeting. Its a pleasure, I might have said, but so softly I doubt if he would have heard me. Good of you to come, he pronounced, still squeezing my hand. We stood there in the doorway a moment, and I was conscious of his height he was six feet tall at least and of his sheer physical presence, thinking he would have made a match for Jim Willard if he were so inclined. But please come in, he said, releasing my hand and guiding me into the office, where he indicated the chair stationed on the near side of his desk. Milk, he was saying, as I settled in the chair and he in turn eased himself back behind the desk, is that of German derivation originally, that is? Yes, we were Milch in the old country, but my grandfather changed it. Too overtly Teutonic, eh? Of course theres nothing harder than good Anglo-German stock except maybe the Scots. Were Scots in my family, you know, though I suppose you surmised that from the surname... Care for a cigarette? On the desk before me, spread out like an offering, were fresh packs of cigarettes in four different brands, as well as an ashtray and lighter. I didnt know then how much Prok detested smoking he thought it should be banned in all public places, and no doubt in most private ones as well nor that he provided the cigarettes despite himself, in addition to soft drinks, coffee, tea and, in the appropriate venues, alcohol, all in an effort to make the interviewing process more congenial. What he wanted above all else was to gain the sort of intimacy that yields up confidences, and he had a true genius for it for putting people at ease and bringing them out. Absent it, the project would never have gotten off the ground. At any rate, I selected the brand I liked best but couldnt really afford, lit up and took a deep, palliative pull and let the gentle pulse of the nicotine calm me. All the while Prok was beaming at me, the kindest, friendliest man in the world, and you would have thought from his expression that hed invented cigarettes himself and owned a controlling interest in the Pall Mall company. I hope youve enjoyed the marriage course, he was saying, and that any misconceptions you and your fiance may have had charming girl, by the way, lovely, very lovely have been cleared up... I looked away from him a mistake, as it was one of his cardinal rules to engage the subject at all times in direct eye contact, as the first indicator

of veracity. I said something noncommittal. Or rather mumbled something both noncommittal and non-audible. Don't be afraid, Milk, there's no one here going to bite your ass in judgment either, and I'm well aware that any number of ingenious undergraduates are forming, let us say, convenient attachments in order to satisfy Dean Hoenig and the other self-appointed moral guardians of the campus and community. I tapped my cigarette in the ashtray, studying the perfect cylinder of pale ash that dropped from it, then looked him in the eye. I felt my face flush in an instant, the old exposure. I'm sorry, sir, I said. He waved an impatient hand. Nothing to be sorry for, Milk, nothing at all. I'm interested in getting information out to people who need it, and if it were up to me and me alone, there would be no prohibitions of any kind on the course. But tell me about yourself: how old? Twenty-one. Birth date? October second, 1918. Are you a native of Indiana, born here, that is? Michigan City. And your parents? My mother teaches elementary school back at home. My father's dead. He was killed in an accident on the lake or, actually, no one really knows what went wrong.

There was they weren't able to recover the body. Prok never took his eyes from mine, but he was making notations on a single sheet of paper that lay on the desk before him. Without my knowing it, the interview had already begun, but he paused now to express his sympathy. He asked how old I was at the time of my father's death. I was nine, not quite out of school for the summer, and my father had gone mad for sailing, sanding and varnishing the boat all winter and into the spring, and now it had been launched and all I could think of was the long irradiated days ahead when we would coast unencumbered over the chop like the God who made the water and the son who came to walk on it and then he said that he too had had to make do without a father's guidance, at least once he went to college and broke free of a stifling paternal influence. His father had seen him as an engineer could I imagine that? but he himself had preferred biology. Biology was his passion. And he made a casual gesture to the cramped office behind him, and the great standing racks of insects pinned in trays. Did you know, he added, that I've identified sixteen new species of gall wasp? And he let out a chuckle. If it was up to my father they'd be unknown today. His eyes were shining. Poor things. Our conversation it was just that had developed its own logic and rhythm. It was uncanny. The

longer we spoke, and it was almost like speaking with your inner self or confiding in the family doctor behind closed doors, the more he seemed to know what I was thinking and feeling. And it wasn't simply that he was a master at what he was doing, but that you felt he really and truly sympathized, that when your heart was breaking, so was his. Which brings us to the real content of the interview: my sex history. We talked for perhaps fifteen minutes before the first question insinuated itself, as casually as if it were no more charged than a reflection on one's parents or upbringing. We'd been talking about my playmates when I was a boy, and I was lost in nostalgic recollection, faces and places and names drifting like gauze through my brain, when Dr. Kinsey, in his softest, most dispassionate tones, asked, How old were you when you first became aware of the anatomical differences between girls and boys? I don't know. Early on, I suppose. Five?

Six? Was there nudity in your home when you were a child? On the part of your parents or yourself? I took a moment, trying to recollect. No, I said, no, I don't think so. Did your parents make you put your clothes on when you appeared naked? Yes. But again, this would have been at a very early age, probably two or three. Or no, later. There was one incident I must have been five, five at least, because it was before we'd moved to the house on Cherry Street a hot day, bathing with my mother at the lake, and I came out of the water and removed my wet trunks. She was angry with me, and I remember I couldn't understand why. Were you

reprimanded then? Yes. Physically? I must have been. Not the first time, though. What were the other occasions? Each question followed logically from the one previous, and they were very much rapid-fire: as soon as Prok got and recorded his response, he was on to the next, and yet you never felt as if you were being interrogated, but rather were part of an ongoing conversation focused on the most fascinating subject in the world: yourself. And the questions were always formulated so as to achieve the most precise and unambiguous answer. So it was not Have you ever masturbated? but rather When did you first masturbate? and How old were you when you first saw the naked genitalia of your own sex? Of the opposite sex? All the while, as the interviewee progressed in recollected age, so too did the questions delve ever more deeply into his sexual practices, going from the relatively innocuous data-based queries (How old were you when you first began to sprout pubic hair?) and calculations of your height, weight and handedness, to When did you

first experience coitus? My nose was dripping I too had contracted the cold that held the campus in its thrall and I was on my fourth cigarette and entirely unaware of where or even who I was by the time this last question came up. Dr. Kinsey studied my reaction, my face, his eyes locked on mine, his pencil poised over the sheet of paper. It's all right, he seemed to say, whatever it is, it's all right. You can confide in me. And further: You must confide in me. I hesitated, and that hesitation told him everything. Never, I said. Or, that is,

not yet, I mean. Unbeknownst to me, there were a series of questions twelve of them, to be exact that gave an indication of ones predilection toward same-sex behavior, or, as Prok liked to call it so as not to alarm or prejudice anyone, the H-history. It was at this point that he shifted in his chair and cleared his voice.

Backtracking now, he said, you were how old when you first saw the naked genitalia of a person of your own sex? I gave him the answer, which he quickly checked against my previous response. And when did you first see another individuals erect penis? I gave him the answer. And then the questions proceeded in what we would come to call our steamroller fashion, one hard on the heels of the next. When did you first touch the genitals of a person of your own sex? When did you first bring to orgasm a person of your own sex? When was the first time you brought a person of your own sex to orgasm orally? I looked away and he broke off the interview a moment. There was a silence. I became aware of the bells tolling six on the clock tower across campus. Milk, he said, John let me remind you that there is nothing, nothing whatever, to be ashamed of. There is no sexual act between consenting parties that is in any way qualitatively different from any other, no matter what the prevailing ethos of a given society may be. If it will interest you to know, my own sex history was very much similar to yours when I was your age and even later. But perhaps this would be a judicious time to bring up the 06 scale Prok devised to measure an individuals sexual preferences a scale that seeks to chart the entire range of human sexual proclivities, from the purely opposite-sex context (0) to the purely homosexual (6). You see, Prok believed and I've come to believe too that man in a state of nature is pansexual, and that only the strictures of society, especially societies under the dominion of the Judeo-Christian and Mohammedan codes, prevent people from expressing their needs and desires openly, and that thus, whole legions suffer from various sexual maladjustments. But I get ahead of myself. That day, in that room, with a handkerchief pressed to my dripping nose and Proks presence guiding me, I began to know myself in a way I'd never thought possible. What I'd seen as a source of shame became usual Prok himself had had similar experiences as a boy and had masturbated continually and if I could say I rated perhaps a 1 or 2 on the 06 scale, then that was something, something momentous. And I hungered for experience, like anyone else, that was all. I'd been awkward with girls, terrified of them I'd placed them on a pedestal and never saw them as sexual beings just like me, who had the same needs and desires as I, and that it had been perfectly natural to experiment with the only partners available to me, with boys, because as Prok says, we all need outlets. Or perhaps I didn't realize all this on that late afternoon in Proks office, but I did think of Laura Feeney sitting there before me in the very chair and how Prok would have asked her at what age she began to masturbate and when she'd first seen the naked genitalia of the opposite sex, and when she'd first seen the phallus erect and first brought the opposite sex to orgasm, and I felt like Columbus spying land on the horizon. The clock on the tower was tolling the quarter hour, for six forty-five, by the time we were finished and Dr. Kinsey leaned across the desk to hand me a penny postcard addressed to himself Dr. Alfred C. Kinsey, Professor of Zoology, Biology Hall, University of Indiana. Just here, you see, he was saying, I will need four basic measurements, please. Yes, I said, taking the card in what seemed like a trance and no, he hadn't hypnotized me, not in the conventional sense, but he might as well have. Very well, then. We will need you, when you arrive at home, to measure first the circumference and then the length, from the base of the abdomen out, of the flaccid penis, and then, when you're properly stimulated, the circumference and length while erect. And, oh, yes, if you would just note the angle of curvature as well... The wind perched in the trees that night, gathering force for a run down into Kentucky, and by nine o'clock it was flinging compact little pellets of sleet against the window of the attic room I shared with a fellow senior, Paul Sehorn, in Mrs. Elsa Lorbers rooming house on Kirkwood Avenue. This was an old house, aching in its bones and not at all shy about voicing its complaints, especially at night. It had been built in the 1870s and was solid enough, I suppose, even after a generation of undergraduates had given it the sort of hard use that had brought down any number of other houses of its era. Unfortunately, it was insulated about as thoroughly as an orange crate and the balky antiquated coal furnace never seemed to elevate the temperature much above the zone of the distinctly uncomfortable. The winter previous, I'd woken one morning to find a crust of ice interposed between my lips and the water in the glass I'd left out on the night table, and for a month thereafter Paul referred to me as Nanook. There was a desk in one corner, dominated by the secondhand Olympia typewriter my mother gave me when I went off to college and an old Philco radio I'd salvaged after my grandmother had given up on it. Against the facing wall, beside the door, was an armoire that stank regally of naphtha, and we shared its limited space, our shirts, trousers and suits (we each had one, mine in glen plaid, to match my tie, Pauls a hand-me-down blue serge that showed a good three inches of cuff at the wrist) hanging side by side on a dozen scuffed wooden hangers. Other than that, it was shoes under the bed, overcoats

downstairs on the hooks reserved for them in the vestibule, personal items laid out on our matching bureaus and books neatly aligned on a cheap pine bookcase I'd found at a rummage sale (four shelves, equally divided, eighteen inches per shelf for me, eighteen inches for Paul). The bathroom was across the hall. Most nights, Paul and I tuned in the radio (we limited ourselves to two serials, and then it was swing out of Cincinnati, as soft and fuzzed with distance as a whisper), propped ourselves up in our beds and studied till our fingers went numb from the cold. Tonight, though, Paul was out on a date and I had the room to myself, though it was hardly peaceful, what with the unending stamp and furor of the other undergraduate men in the house and the long disquisitions on everything from the existence of God to the Nazi push for lebensraum that seemed always to take place outside the bathroom door. By ten, the sleet had changed to snow. I lay there beneath the comforter on my bed, trying to read as I remember, I had an exam the following day but I didn't get very far. The branches of the elm out back kept scraping at the house as if something were trying to crawl up the side of the building to escape the storm and the reception on the radio was so bad I had to get up and switch it off. I rubbed a circle in the frost and peered out the window. The world was dense and blurred, the streetlights pinched down to nothing, no sound but the wind and the intermittent rasp of the snow thrust up against the pane. I felt small and boxed-in. Felt restless. Bored. I thought of Dr. Kinsey then if truth be told, I hadn't really thought of much else all evening, even at dinner and crossed the room to my desk for what must have been the twentieth time to examine the postcard he'd given me. I let a hand drop to my trousers, a pressure there, and began massaging myself absently through a layer of gabardine. And how would I measure it? I didn't have a ruler, but I could easily have gone down the hall and borrowed one from Bob Hickenlooper, the architectural whiz if anyone would have one, he would and yet I still wasn't sold on the idea. It was vaguely obscene, ridiculous even. Measuring your own penis? But there was more to it than that, of course and I'm sure you've anticipated me here what if I didn't measure up? What if I was, well, smaller, than other men? What then? Would I add an inch or two so as not to disappoint the distinguished scientist eagerly waiting to tabulate the results? Of course, I had little idea what the average length of the male penis was but then wasn't that the whole concept of the enterprise to begin with? What had Kinsey's lecture on individual variation been but an attempt to make us all feel a bit more secure with regard to such things as breast size and penis length and the like? Yes, I told myself, yes, certainly I'll do the measurements and see to it that I'm as accurate and honest as possible. But, of course, in thinking about it, imagining the cold butt of some architectural student's T square pressed to my penis, I found I had an erection. It was then (and please don't mistake my meaning here) that I thought of Mrs. Lorber. She sat in the parlor downstairs each evening, listening to her own radio and knitting, and I knew she had a tape measure in her sewing basket, a soft and supple one, made of finger-burnished cloth, the very sort of thing you might imagine yourself using in a private scientific endeavor akin to the one I was contemplating. All right. Fine. Before I could think I was thumping down the three flights of loose-jointed stairs, ignoring a shout from Tom Tomalin to come play a hand of pinochle and an off-color greeting from Ben Webber, all two hundred and forty-five pounds of him, who was laboring up to his room on the second floor. Out of breath, and with my excitement barely contained, I paused outside the open parlor door and tapped gently at the doorframe. Mrs. Lorber was seated in her favorite armchair, working at a ball of butterscotch-colored yarn, a cat sprawled in her lap. She didn't glance up, though she knew I was there she knew everything that went on in the house, every least stir and breath of her charges, and she'd positioned her chair so as to give her a strategic view of the entry hall and stairway in the event that anyone might be so foolish as to attempt to smuggle contraband into his room. (Mrs. Lorber was in her mid-sixties then, a big-shouldered ventricose old lady with a succession of chins and a focused, predatory look: alcoholic beverages, foods that required heating and, especially, women were strictly interdicted.) Uh, excuse me, Mrs. Lorber? I murmured. She fixed her gaze on me, and I expected her to smile or at least nod in recognition, but her face showed nothing. I just wondered, if I could, uh, if I could borrow your, uh, tape measure. For just a minute. I'll bring it right back, I promise. She let out a sigh compounded of all the little inconveniences, crises and mounting disasters undergraduates had inflicted on her over the years, and then, without a word, leaned down to her right and began fishing through her sewing basket. Here, she said finally, coming up with the tape measure as I crossed the room to her, but just make sure you return it. Leaning over her, I caught a smell of the liniment she rubbed on her legs each night and of the warm, yeasty air trapped beneath her skirts. The cat looked up at me blankly. Yes, I said, her cool, dry fingers coming into contact with mine as I took the tape measure from her, I will. I'll just be a minute and I'll be right back with it, I promise. I was nearly out of the room when she stopped me. But what on earth would you need to measure, John? What is it, curtains? Because I sincerely hope you two haven't damaged. It's a, uh,

project. For my literature class. Literature? What, lines of poetry? The number of feet per line in Don Juan? Hmm? She let out a laugh. Now there was a poem that part of the syllabus still? Or, no, of course it must be. Lord Byron, eh? Now there was a poet. Yes, I agreed, but you'll have to, I mean, I have to go, go, she said, making a shooing motion with both hands. No need to waste your time on an old woman when you've got measuring to do. I trudged back up the stairs, the tape measure burning like a hot coal in my pocket. I felt guilty, dirty, all the worse for the lie and the use to which I was going to put my landlady's blameless instrument, and I kept thinking of her handling the thing and holding it up to a scarf she was knitting for a favorite niece or granddaughter. Maybe I should just return it to her, I thought, right now, before it's been desecrated. I could slip out in the morning and purchase one of my own. A tape measure was a practical thing to have, after all, because you never knew when you'd be called upon to measure something, like bookshelves, for instance. My feet hit the stairs like hammers. The storm whispered at the windowpanes. By the time I got back to the room, I found that my enthusiasm for Dr. Kinsey's little statistical exercise had worn thin, but I loosened my belt and dropped my trousers dutifully, unscrolling Mrs. Lorber's tape measure to record my now-flaccid dimensions. But the thing was, as soon as I laid the measure against my penis I began to grow hard again and couldn't get an accurate measurement; before I knew it, I was stroking myself and trying to summon the look of Laura Feeney as she sat beside me in the semi-darkness of the lecture hall while the slide projector clicked and clicked again and we all held our breath. And then I was seeing a girl from the front row of my literature class, a girl with puffed lips and violet eyes and calves that caressed each other under the desk until I wanted to faint from the friction of it, and finally there was just a woman, featureless, anonymous, with her breasts thrust out and nipples hard and her cunt that was what I wanted to call it, her cunt just exactly like the one on the screen. I was up early the next morning, the light through the window trembling on the sloped ceiling above the bed. It was a paler light than we'd been used to, bluer, like the aqueous glow at the bottom of a swimming pool, and I was filled with the anticipation that comes with the first good snow of the season. The storm had passed on, but outside the sky was a polished silver, a big, upended tureen of a sky, flurries trailing down like an afterthought. I didn't wake Paul. He'd come in late long after I'd gone to bed and I didn't want to disturb him, not so much out of any consideration for his beauty rest, but because I wasn't in the mood for company. I wanted to tramp the streets, see the world transformed, just enjoy it, all to myself before heading over to the Commons for breakfast and a final look at my notes for the exam. There was a foot and a half of snow, maybe more. It was hard to say because the wind had piled it up in drifts against the fences and buildings. None of the walks had been cleared yet, people's automobiles sat drifted over at the curb and the birds dipped in perplexity from the black field of the evergreens along the street to the sealed white envelope of the ground. Lights gleamed dully from the depths of the houses. I smelled bacon, woodsmoke, the clean, dense perfume of the new air swept down out of the north. It wasn't yet seven, and hardly anyone was stirring on campus. Those who were out moved silently across the quad, huddled figures excited from a dream and patched in here where they didn't belong, and there were no more than ten students in the Commons where normally there would have been a hundred even. The staff was reduced to a single ill-defined woman who served out the food mechanically and then moved to the cash register through crashing waves of silence to record the sale. I took a table by the window and sat there staring out over my books and into the trees along the creek, idly stirring sugar into a cup of coffee. It was one of those quiet, absorbing moments when the world slows to a standstill and all its inherent possibilities become manifest. Magic. The magic moment isn't that what they call it in the love songs? She was speaking to me before I became aware of her. Hello, John; hello, I said, and when I did look up I didn't recognize her at first. She was in a winter coat and hat, the black silk of her hair tugged down like an arras on either side of her face, her eyes lit from within as if there were twin filaments behind them and a battery secreted under her clothes. It was seven a.m. or no, not even, and she was wearing mascara, the better to show off the color of those eyes, which managed to be both blue and green at the same time, like the sea off the port of Havana where the onshore waters meld with the pelagic and the white prow of your boat drifts placidly from one world to another and everything dissolves in a dream. Don't you recognize me? She was unfastening the snap at her collar, working at her hat, her hair, the scarf wrapped twice round her throat. Everything was suddenly in motion again, as if a film had just been rethreaded through the projector, her books sliding onto the tabletop beside mine, the coat open to reveal her dress and the way it conformed to her, and then the chair beside me pulling out and the girl who was she? perching at the edge of it. And then it came to me. You're Iris, I said. She was giving me her full-lipped smile, the smile that borrows some of the juice from her eyes and runs off the same hidden power source. Iris McAuliffe, Tomm's little sister. But you knew that. I did, yes. Of

course I did. My mother I mean, she, and then I saw you around campus, of course I hear you're engaged. I didn't know what to say to this I certainly wouldn't want it getting back to my mother in any way, shape or form so I dipped my head and took a sip of coffee. Iris's smile faded. She's very pretty, she murmured. Laura Feeney. Yes, I said, my gaze fixed on the cup. But I'm not really, were not... I looked up at her. Off on the periphery of my vision the woman at the cash register rang up a coffee and cruller as if she were moving underwater, and I saw the balding head and narrow shoulders of my literature professor, his coat dusted with snow. That is, it was a pretense, you know. For the marriage course. I watched her grapple with this ever so briefly before the smile came back. You mean, you faked it? Just to? God, she said, and she let her posture go, slouching back in the seat, all limbs and jangling, nervous hands, I hear it was really dirty... *Revue de presse* "Kinsey is in some ways a perfect subject for this sly and intrepid novelist while Boyle is fascinated by the zealous energy of perfectionists like Kinsey, he is at bottom a defender of romance against the tyranny of reason. The New York Times Book The Inner Circle may draw readers because of its sexy subject matter, but they will stay for the emotional punch of Boyle's meditations on love, marriage, and jealousy. The San Francisco Chronicle Terrific Kinsey looms as one of the most wonderfully repellent figures in recent literature, but Circle's hero is smart, commonsensical Iris, who understands that Kinsey's mechanistic views of sex fails to account for love, jealousy, and human nature. Entertainment Weekly The Inner Circle is a harrowing depiction of how questionable are some of the consequences of sexual liberation that the novel is a page-turner, with lots of sex in it, only serves Boyle's purpose all the better. The Washington Post Compelling and subtly humorous a biting satire of emotional manipulation, sexual indiscretion, and scientific hubris. The Boston Globe "The Inner Circle never lets you tear your eyes from the page." The Washington Post Book World