

# 1

"I can play the clarinet."

He thought that she probably could. "What's your name?"

"Zenaida."

He asked her to spell it. "What would you like, Zenaida?"

"Could I just rest for a moment? I think I am tired."

"Would you like some water?"

"Champagne, I think. You have champagne?"

"Yes, I do. Will you be all right if I leave for just a few seconds?" He didn't like leaving the room. He remembered what happened when he left Honey alone.

"Of course. I shall acquaint myself with my new bed. With these walls, the painting. Rouault, isn't it?"

He would never adjust to this. "Yes, it is. When I come back you can tell me what you think of it. OK?"

"If it pleases you."

"It would please me very much." He hurried to the kitchen. He decided on the better of the two champagnes. Zenaida would probably have some knowledge of wines. The thought made him dizzy. And Christ, she could play the clarinet. He *knew* that she could. He ran tap water over the bottle, put it in the freezer and called to her: "Can you wait a few minutes, Zenaida? I'll chill the champagne." No reply. He hurried to the bedroom.

"I am not given to shouting," she said. She touched his arm. "You must have a name, too."

"My name is Michael. I'm a friend of Adrienne." He wondered why he hadn't said that he was Karla's friend.

"Ah."

"You know Adrienne?"

"I know no one. No one. But, I am known. I need to be known by you, I think. Does...Adrienne know me?"

Michael was ashamed to look at her body. She had made no attempt to cover herself. Was she even aware that she was naked? He stood by the bed wearing only a tee shirt. She didn't seem to notice him any longer. But she must have, for as soon as he became erect she turned her head to one side and closed her eyes. At the same time she put both hands on the insides of her thighs just above her knees and opened her legs.

It was a hot summer afternoon, but her body remained completely cool and dry. Her breathing was shallow, quiet. She made no sound at all. Toward the end he felt her legs begin to quiver. Her eyes never opened, but when he moved away from her she turned her head from the wall, placed her hands on her knees and held her legs firmly together.

"Champagne, Zenaida?" His whisper occasioned the slightest smile.

"Champagne. Yes."

Michael returned with two glasses. Zenaida was gone. Collie was sitting on the floor.

"Did you fuck her?"

"Who?"

"There was someone here."

"Yes, Collie. She said her name was Zenaida."

"Fuck *me*. Fuck me on this floor. On this rug. This...*rug*." She was tearing at the shag carpet with both hands. She called herself Collie Frankee Mackovich.