

Like flotsam from the world's seas, the vagrants of America's blackcities are washed into New Orleans. And Silvia scrutinized each new face of the invading waves as if all—or perhaps one miraculous one among them—would bring her the answer to an obsessive question—would ... perhaps ... redeem her for the very fact of her own bar.

Silvia followed him intently with her eyes as he stops to talk to another youngman, also in a suit, also obviously neither hustler nor score. Silvia remained as if bound to the barstool; but her body became tense, as if, of its own volition, beyond her conscious control, it might spring toward the youngman. Together, the two youngmen approached us, standing only a few feet away. Seeing the first one clearly at last, Sylvia turned from him—as she had turned form me that first day—and she sighed in frustrated expectation.

"Yeah" Sylvia said, "I did love him too much—except when he needed me. ... Kathy," she said, as if she must explain it to her, be vindicated by her, "he came to me, he started telling me— ... I made him stop. I said, 'Shut up!' And he tried to go on, trying to tell me— ... And he was crying ... crying,. And I said, 'Don't you dare go on!' I shouted, '*What youre trying to tell me isn't true!*' "

"All—all, all ... all ... my ... saintly ... children. All flung out by something—or someone! —to a city like New Orleans—to a bar—like mine. Flung out guiltily. Guiltily," she echoed herself. ... Then entreatingly, to explain, to confess: "And, that day when he wouldn't stop, I shouted to him, 'Get out! Don't come back!' ..." She covered her eyes. "And the memory of his face, that last time—his face smeared with tears as I yelled after him: 'Youre a *man*, God damn it! Youre a ... man.'" This time she whispered the last word as if it had lost all its meaning. "And you know why? You know why I couldn't face what he was trying to tell me?" she asked Kathy. "Because — ..." She stopped. Then she finished harshly: "Because— ..." "Because I felt—guilty! Crushingly, crushingly guilty—as if— he were accusing *me* in making this confession to me. ... And I—didn't understand— ..." "But you understand now," Kathy said.

Silvia looked up at her, studying the beautiful woman's face. "Understand? She said, as if perplexed by the word itself. She shook her head. "No, Ive tried. ... But I'll never ... *understand.*"

