

During his residency, she'd gone personally with Gately on most of his bigger court-dates, driving him up to the North Shore in the killer *Aventura* with its Handicapped plates — she because of the neurological right-leg thing literally had a lead foot, and drove all the time like a maniac, and Gately had usually almost wet himself on Rte. 1 — and she'd throw all Ennet House's substantial respect and clout behind him with Judges and Boards, until every issue that could be resolved without finding was Blue-Filed. Gately still couldn't figure out why all the personal extra attention and help. It was like he'd been Pat M.'s biggest favorite among the residents last year. She did have favorites and nonfavorites; it was probably unavoidable. Anne Parrot and the counselors and House Manager always had their particular favorites, too, so it all tended to work out square.

About four months into his Ennet House residency, the agonizing desire to ingest synthetic narcotics had been mysteriously magically removed from Don Gately, just like the House Staff and the Crocodiles at the White Flag Group had said it would if he pounded out the nightly meetings and stayed minimally open and willing to persistently ask some extremely vague Higher Power to remove it. The desire. They said to get creakily down on his mammoth knees in the A.M. every day and ask God As He Understood Him to remove the agonizing desire, and to hit the old knees again at night before sack and thank this God-ish figure for the Substanceless day just ended, if he got through it. They suggested he keep his shoes and keys under the bed to help him remember to get on his knees. The only times Gately had ever been on his knees before were to throw up or mate, or shunt a low-on-the-wall alarm, or if somebody got lucky during a beef and landed one near Gately's groin. He didn't have any God- or J.C.-background, and the knee-stuff seemed like the limpest kind of dickless pap, and he felt like a true hypocrite just going through the knee-motions that he went through faithfully every A.M. and P.M., without fail, motivated by a desire to get loaded so horrible that he often found himself humbly praying for his head to just finally explode already and get it over with. Pat had said it didn't matter at this point what he thought or believed or even said. All that mattered was what he *did*. If he did the right things, and kept doing them for long enough, what Gately thought and believed would magically change. Even what he said. She'd seen it happen again and again, and to some awfully unlikely candidates for change. She said it had happened to her. The left side of her face was very alive and kind. And Gately's counselor, an ex-coke and -phone-bunko guy whose left ear had been one of his Losses, had hit Gately early on with the infamous Boston AA cake analogy. The grizzled Filipino had met with the resident Don G. once a week, driving Gately around Brighton-Allston in aimless circles in a customized Subaru 4x4 just like the ones Gately used to hotwire and promote to use for burgling. Eugenio Martinez had this eccentric thing where he maintained he could only be in touch with his own

Higher Power when he was driving. Down near E.W.D.'s barge-docks off the Allston Spur one night he invited Gately to think of Boston AA as a box of Betty Crocker Cake Mix. Gately had smacked himself in the forehead at yet another limp oblique Gene M. analogy, which Gene had already bludgeoned him with several insectile tropes for thinking about the Disease. The counselor had let him vent spleen for a while, smoking as he crawled along behind land-barges lined up to unload. He told Gately to just imagine for a second that he's holding a box of Betty Crocker Cake Mix, which represented Boston AA. The box came with directions on the side any eight-year-old could read. Gately said he was waiting for the mention of some kind of damn insect inside the cake mix. Gene M. said all Gately had to do was for fuck's sake give himself a break and relax and for once shut up and just follow the directions on the side of the fucking box. It didn't matter one fuckola whether Gately like *believed* a cake would result, or whether he *understood* the like fucking baking-chemistry of *how* a cake would result: if he just followed the motherfucking directions, and had sense enough to get help from slightly more experienced bakers to keep from fucking the directions up if he got confused somehow, but basically the point was if he just followed the childish directions, a cake would result. He'd have his cake. The only thing Gately knew about cake was that the frosting was the best part, and he personally found Eugenio Martinez a smug and self-righteous prick — plus he'd always distrusted both Orientals and spics, and Gene M. managed to seem like both — but he didn't screw out of the House or quite do anything they could Discharge him for, and he went to meetings nightly and told the more or less truth, and he did the shoe-under-bed knee thing every A.M./P.M. 24/7, and he took the suggestion to join a Group and get rabidly Active and clean up ashtrays and go out speaking on Commitments. He had nothing in the way of a like God-concept, and at that point maybe even less than nothing in terms of interest in the whole thing; he treated prayer like setting an oven-temp according to a box's direction. Thinking of it as talking to the ceiling was somehow preferable to imagining talking to Nothing. And he found it embarrassing to get down on his knees in his underwear, and like the other guys in the room he always pretended his sneakers were like way under the bed and he had to stay down there a while to find them and get them out, when he prayed, but he did it, and beseeched the ceiling and thanked the ceiling, and after maybe five months Gately was riding the Greenie at 0430 to go clean human turds out of the Shattuck shower and all of a sudden realized that quite a few days had gone by since he'd even thought about Demerol or Talwin or even weed. Not just merely getting through those last few days — Substances hadn't even *occurred* to him. I.e. the Desire and Compulsion had been Removed. More weeks went by, a blur of Commitments and meetings and gasper-smoke and clichés, and he still didn't feel anything like his old need to get high. He was, in a way,

Free. It was the first time he'd been out of this kind of mental cage since he was maybe ten. He couldn't believe it. He wasn't Grateful so much as kind of suspicious about it, the Removal. How could some kind of Higher Power he didn't even believe in magically let him out of the cage when Gately had been a total hypocrite in even asking something he didn't believe in to let him out of a cage he had like zero hope of ever being let out of? When he could only get himself on his knees for the prayers in the first place by pretending to look for his shoes? He couldn't for the goddamn *life* of him understand how this thing worked, this thing that was working. It drove him bats. At about seven months, at the little Sunday Beginners' Mtg., he actually cracked one of the Provident's fake-wood tabletops beating his big square head against it.<sup>195</sup>

White Flagger ('Ferocious') Francis Gehaney, one of the most ancient and gnarled of the Crocodiles, had a white crew cut and skallycap and suspenders over the flannel shirt that encased his gut, and an enormous cucumber-shaped red schnoz you could actually see whole arteries in the skin of, and brown stumpy teeth and emphysema and a portable little oxygen-tank thing whose blue tube was held under the schnoz with white tape, and the very clear bright eye-whites that went along with the extremely low resting pulse-rate of a guy with geologic amounts of sober AA time. Ferocious Francis G., whose mouth was never without a toothpick and who had on his right forearm a faded martini-glass-and-naked-lady tattoo of Korean-War-vintage, who'd gotten sober under the Nixon administration and who communicated in the obscene but antiquated epigrams the Crocs all used<sup>196</sup> — F.F. had taken Gately out for eye-rattling amounts of coffee, after the incident with the table and the head. He'd listened with the slight boredom of detached Identification to Gately's complaint that there was no way something he didn't understand enough to even start to believe in was seriously going to be interested in helping save his ass, even if He/She/It did in some sense exist. Gately still doesn't quite know why it helped, but somehow it helped when Ferocious Francis suggested that maybe anything minor-league enough for Don Gately to understand probably wasn't going to be major-league enough to save Gately's addled ass from the well-dressed Sergeant at Arms, now, was it?

That was months ago. Gately usually no longer much cares whether he understands or not. He does the knee-and-ceiling thing twice a day, and cleans shit, and listens to dreams, and stays Active, and tells the truth to the Ennet House residents, and tries to help a couple of them if they approach him wanting help. And when Ferocious Francis G. and the White Flaggers presented him, on the September Sunday that marked his first year sober, with a faultlessly baked and heavily frosted one-candle cake, Don Gately had cried in front of nonrelatives for the first time in his life. He now denies that he actually did cry, saying something about candle-fumes in his eye. But he did.

Gately is an unlikely choice for Ennet House chef, having fed for most of the last twelve years on sub-shop subs and corporate snack foods consumed amid some sort of motion. He is 188 cm. and 128 kg. and had never once eaten broccoli or a pear until last year. Chef-wise, he offers up an exceptionless routine of: boiled hot dogs; dense damp meat loaf with little pieces of American cheese and half a box of cornflakes on top, for texture; Cream of Chicken soup over spirochete-shaped noodles; ominously dark, leathery Shake 'N Bake chicken legs; queasily underdone hamburgs; and hamburg-sauce spaghetti whose pasta he boils for almost an hour.<sup>197</sup> None but the most street-hardened Ennet residents would ever hazard an open crack about the food, which appears nightly at the long dinner table still in the broad steaming pans it was cooked in, with Gately's big face hovering lunarily above it, flushed and beaded under the floppy chef's hat Annie Parrot had given him as a dark joke he hadn't got, his eyes full of anxiety and hopes for everyone's full enjoyment, basically looking like a nervous bride serving her first conjugal dish, except this bride's hands are the same size as the House's dinner plates and have jailhouse tats on them, and this bride seems to need no oven-mitts as he sets down massive pans on the towels that have to be laid down to keep the plastic tabletop from searing. Any sort of culinary comments are always extremely oblique. Randy Lenz up at the northeast corner likes to raise his can of tonic and say that Don's food is the kind of food that helps you really appreciate whatever you're drinking along with it. Geoffrey Day talks about what a refreshing change it is to leave a dinner table not feeling bloated. Wade McDade, a young hard-core flask-alkie from Ashland KY, and Doony Glynn, who's still woozy and infirm from some horrendous Workers Comp. scam gone awry last year, and is constantly sickly and who's probably going to get Discharged soon for losing his menial job at Brighton Fence & Wire and not even pretending to look for another one — the two have this bit they do on spaghetti night where McDade comes into the living room right before chow and goes 'Some of that extra-fine spay-ghetti tonight, Doonster,' and Doony Glynn goes 'Ooo, will it be all lovely and soft?' and McDade goes 'Leave your teeth at home, boy' in the voice of a Kentucky sheriff, leading Glynn to the table by the hand as if Glynn were a damaged child. They take care to do the bit while Gately's still in the kitchen tossing salad and worrying about course-presentation. Though Tiny Ewell never fails to thank Gately for the meal, and April Cortelyu is lavish in her praises, and Burt F. Smith always rolls his eyes with pleasure and makes yummy-noises whenever he can get a fork to his mouth.