



Race, Respectability, and Masculinity

MITCHELL DUNEIER

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PART

1

The Caring Community

CHAPTER

1

Slim and Bart



They both came of age at the height of segregation. Sixty-five, a lifelong Chicagoan, Slim is a black mechanic in a back-alley garage in the ghetto. Bart, white, and ten years older, is a retired file clerk who grew up in the rural South. Both are regular patrons of the Valois “See Your Food” cafeteria.

I first met Bart during my early days as a university student, long before I ever set foot inside Valois. Like many older residents of the Hyde Park neighborhood, he ate regularly in the cafeteria of International House, or I-House, as it was called, a dormitory for graduate students close to the University of Chicago campus.

Tall and skeletal in his mid-seventies, Bart dressed in fine suits and sported a Dobbs hat. Sometimes when he’d be sitting alone at one of the cafeteria’s long wooden tables, I’d join him and ask about his past. He did not have any strong family ties. His only brother lived in Colorado, and he hadn’t seen him in about five years. They spoke on the telephone no more than once a year. He had retired from a long career as a clerk at Swift’s, one of the major meat-packing companies, during the era when Chicago was still “hog butcher for the world.” Then he took a job as a file clerk at one of Chicago’s largest law firms.

Bart moved to Hyde Park in 1928 to attend the University of Chicago as a premedical student and supported himself for a time by working at the Streets of Paris section of the 1933 Cen-

tury of Progress Exposition. He had little to say about that experience. He had been a ticket collector at the entrance to the shows but had never gone inside to look.

Bart was a very incurious person, one of many odd human beings who become attached to a university community as students and continue the association for decades. His explanation for not marrying was that "some people just never find a person to jive with." His biggest dream had been to become a physician like his father, but the hardships of the Depression made it impossible for him to continue his studies.

He wasn't bitter about his life. The only resentment he ever displayed was toward blacks in the local community. With the southern drawl of the Kentucky town in which he had been raised, he often complained that Hyde Park had long ago turned into a "high-class slum."

Because I thought about Bart only when I saw him sitting in "his" chair after dinner at I-House, many weeks may have gone by before I realized that the old man had been absent for some time. I wondered if he had taken ill. Months passed with no sign of him. I asked the front desk clerk and other residents if they had seen Bart. No one had, and I finally decided that he might have died.

Two years later, when I entered Valois Cafeteria for the first time, I was startled to see Bart sitting by himself eating a bowl of radishes, amidst black men sipping coffee at the surrounding tables. On a chair next to him was the same Dobbs hat I had seen him wearing before he abandoned I-House. He asked me how I had been and inquired about some of the people he remembered from the dormitory cafeteria. He told me that although he had liked being around the students, prices there were high and the quality of food very poor. He had been eating at Valois for a year. I asked what he could tell me about the restaurant, which is known locally by its motto "See Your Food."

"I don't know anything about the place."

"But you eat here every day?"

"Yes, but I don't pay any attention to the place. I just eat my meal and go home."

As our conversation came to a close, he informed me that I might direct my questions about Valois to the owner.

Over the weeks and months that followed, I would see Bart constantly. Despite his claims, he seemed to be well aware of the other habitual patrons of the restaurant, including the group of black regulars that congregated at Slim's table.

I came to learn that Slim's table has, for over a decade, been the meeting place of a group of black men who regularly patronize this cafeteria on the margin of the ghetto. Slim, who comes to the restaurant every day is usually joined by Harold, a self-employed exterminator; Cornelius, a retired meter inspector; Ted, a film developer for *Playboy Magazine* who received an honorable discharge from the army after twenty years of service; and Earl, an administrator at the Chicago Board of Education. These and others constitute a core group that frequents the restaurant daily. Besides them, hundreds of other black men frequent Valois less often, some only on weekends. Ties binding members of the larger collectivity have developed over decades, and it is not uncommon for someone entering the restaurant to be playfully scolded by Slim or his buddies: "Now, don't you go hiding from us again" or "Come by and see us more often," if he has been absent for any significant amount of time.

The spectrum of social classes among the black men is very broad. At one end of the spectrum are a few men like Earl from the Board of Education, middle class and college educated. In the middle, most of the men are solidly working class. At the other end of the spectrum are a significant number who have been downwardly mobile in their later years and have incomes which would place them among the working poor. These are individuals whose wages would place them at or below the poverty line.¹ But even this description is tidier than the reality because most of the men have social characteristics which would place them in various classes at the same time.² Most of

the men live in small apartments in Hyde Park or local ghettos, but some like Slim own small homes. By the standards of mainstream American society, none of these men are members of the "underclass" or "undeserving poor," though they are sometimes treated as such by whites from the nearby university.

These black men were very much aware of Bart. Sometimes they would refer to him as "the gentleman" because he wore a Dobbs hat and a suit and tie. And then, after another year had passed and they had come to regard his eccentricities with affection, as Bartie. Although Bart seemed to want to remain detached from the blacks around him, he had a neighborly, jocular relationship with them. He found himself inextricably drawn into the social life at Valois as the men began to greet him cordially:

"How you feeling today, Bartie?" Harold once asked him.

"I feel with my hands," was his response.

He continued to sit alone, and the black men came to know him only gradually. Through comments back and forth, from their table to his, they developed a sense for the kind of man he was:

"I bet you got the cleanest kitchen in that building you live in."

"You're right. I don't put nothing on that stove. Not even boiling water."

Interaction between blacks and whites is common on the outskirts of American ghettos.³ Many American universities are in or close to black neighborhoods, and the territorial margins of these locales are typified by interaction between middle-class whites like Bart and blacks like the regulars at Valois who come from nearby neighborhoods. Whites in such areas often see clusters of single black men routinely passing time together in public places like barbershops, street corners, bars, and restaurants, and blacks who live in these districts have a category in their minds for the "university types" and other gentrifying forces who settle on the margins of their neighborhoods.

Bart was an object of curiosity to many of the men. When he was out of earshot, they would often try to size him up. "Bart's

unusual," Leroy, an electrician, once said. "He is antisocial. He don't care about nobody. He comes in. He eats. Sometimes he just sits there and don't say nothin'."

Slim balanced his chin on his thumb and forefinger, trying not to look in the direction of the old man. "He don't bother nobody."

After a brief silence Harold glanced at Bart and ended the sober appraisal. "You ever notice sometimes he fidgets around when he's eating? He be looking to see if anything is on his tie."

The group of men broke out laughing. "You notice that too?" Leroy chortled hysterically. "Then he'll take his coat and look it over to make sure there's nothin' on it." Bart's little quirks were amusing to the men, but they were also endearing. Later that night, when he started looking at his coat, the men joked with him about his ways:

"Bartie, what are you looking for on your coat?"

"Oh, just looking to see if it's okay."

"Bart, you can stop looking at your tie now."

"Oh, I can?"

"Yes, you can."

"Thank you, Harold."

Through such conversations, the men learned very little about Bart's beliefs and values, but they began to comprehend something about his temperament. As far as they were concerned, these certain habits and idiosyncracies of Bart's disclosed much they needed to know about the old man who sat near them every day.

Bart had once let it be known that during the fifty years of his working life he had never been late or missed a day of work. The only technical exception was on account of a famous crash of the Illinois Central Railroad. Having been aboard the train on his way to the office, he once described the devastation for the men—seats flew out of the train, people were hanging out of windows, others were lying in the aisles screaming. Bart somehow remained unscathed. Stepping over bodies, he picked his way out of the car and got to work a few minutes late. He seemed proud to let the men know that under the

circumstances, and given his prior work record, the supervisor decided to mark him on time.

"Did you help anybody?" Harold asked.

"No. 'Cause I figured there was nothing I could do, and anyway I didn't want to be late for work."

"Didn't it bother you to just leave like that?"

"Why should it bother me? Wasn't a damn thing I could do. I was on my way to work."

The old man's machinelike routines and indifference became lore among the regulars.

In part, Bart developed a connection to the men through Hughes, a white contractor originally from North Carolina who had a close rapport with several of the black regulars. Like a handful of other white patrons—like the meat-packer Werner Mandlebaum, the landlord Morton Fruchman, and the long-time Hyde Parker Lou Ann Davis—Hughes commanded a great deal of respect. Both blacks and whites in the restaurant thought of him as the finest of men, one who took a deep and abiding interest in others. Like Bart, Hughes was raised in the South, but unlike the older man he was an outgoing, easy-mannered person.

During Bart's first few weeks at Valois, a year before, Hughes had become apprehensive when he saw that the old man walked home alone. He told Bart that anytime he wanted a ride, there was "no problem." For over a year, the regulars at Valois knew that Bart was Hughes's passenger.

At times, Hughes found the old man's inflexible ways to be burdensome and aggravating. Sometimes he would be ready long before Bart, but he would patiently wait for the old man to finish his dinner. Often he would be relieved as Bart took his last bite and seemed to be moving toward the coat rack, only to be disheartened when he realized Bart was actually edging toward the front counter to pick up another bowl of radishes or a dish of vanilla ice cream.

One evening Hughes was expecting an important phone call at his home at exactly 9:00 P.M. He told the old man, who had

long since finished eating, that he had to go. But in a characteristically rigid manner, Bart said that he wouldn't be ready till 9:30. Hughes had no choice but to leave. The regulars at Valois feared more for the old man than he feared for himself.

On other occasions Bart would be ready a few minutes before Hughes. His way of hinting that he was ready to leave was a source of both amusement and annoyance to the regulars. First he would pick up his hat and coat, bringing them over to Hughes's table. There he would stand, slowly putting on the coat, one sleeve at a time, and then the hat. The entire ritual would last several minutes. Hughes might still be in the middle of a meal. Although he was tolerant of Bart's ways, he found the old man's attempts to hurry him annoying.

During one two-week period in the middle of August, Hughes had to work late. When Slim saw Bart walking home alone, he was horrified: he knew that the streets around Valois were dangerous for an old man at night. Bart accepted Slim's offer of a ride. Slim told Bart that he should never walk home again, that he would be glad to take him from then on, and Bart accepted the offer.

Slim is a reserved black man, who has lived near the Hyde Park neighborhood for most of his life. Slim has an unimposing but self-assured and dignified presence. He wears the navy blue uniform of a car mechanic with a zipper jacket that says his name; a wool cap in winter or a black and white Chevy "Heartbeat of America" cap in warm weather; and on Sunday, like many of his contemporaries, Florsheim or Stacy Adams dress shoes. The Stacy Adams lace up shoes popular among this generation of men come in two styles, ankle high or low cut. For the black men, Stacy Adams shoes are to respectability what a Dobbs hat is for an older white man like Bart.

In his pockets, Slim keeps a chain with many keys (a symbol of responsibility in the ghetto), and a plastic wallet compliments of the Internal Auto Parts Co. Inside are family pictures, an Aamco bond card, a driver's license, and an automobile I.D. He also carries a pack of Camel cigarettes, business cards from

some of the firms he relies on as a mechanic, and loose papers with information related to the various jobs he is engaged in down at the garage.

Slim usually comes to the cafeteria for breakfast and for after-dinner coffee. His back-alley garage off Forty-seventh Street, a ghetto thoroughfare, rented as part of a larger parking establishment, is not visible to pedestrians. But Slim is one of the most respected mechanics on the South Side, and local folks have no trouble finding him. Most of his days, including many weekends, are spent there in the heart of the ghetto. At Valois, Slim is a central figure among the black male patrons, although he is hardly outgoing and rarely demonstrative. To most people who don't know him, he seems aloof and proud. Some people think it is hard to get a fix on him.

The relationship between Slim and Bart intrigued me. Slim seemed to harbor little resentment about injustices of the past, though it was evident from occasional remarks that he had unpleasant dealings with whites once in a while. At the same time, he was a human being with strong moral sensibilities. He viewed himself as a member of a social world characterized by general standards that applied equally to people of all colors.

In the black belt, where traditional family forms are more disorganized than in mainstream society, people often develop substitute kinship ties, in which many of the functions served by families are taken up by other caring individuals.⁴ Thus a man such as Slim might take a liking to a senior citizen and do the kinds of things for him that in white society would more normally be done by the man's son, if at all. At Valois, the black counter ladies sometimes even referred to Bart as Slim's "pappy" ("Where's your Pappy tonight?") indicating that in their minds Slim had developed a substitute kinship tie with Bart.

By contrast to Slim's universal morality, Bart was a reserved Southerner who believed that white people were naturally superior to black people. He had not been pleased by the civil rights movement of the 1960s. The fact that he took his meals in the same restaurants as black folks was to him a natural con-

sequence of living in the integrated Hyde Park-Kenwood district.

The two men seldom sat with one another, but at closing time Bart would usually move to a table near Slim's and wait for him to finish his conversation. Bart didn't dare take the firm and resolute Slim for granted as he did Hughes, a fellow white Southerner. He rarely stood up and hinted to the black man that he wanted to leave. He never resisted when Slim told him that it was "time." Usually he would stay by himself until around 9:45, sometimes nodding or even falling asleep at his table. Slim would tap Bart affectionately on the knee to wake him up. The regulars knew that when Slim gave Bart "the tap," the two men would soon be walking out together. Once in a while, Bart would first go to the adjacent liquor store to get himself a pack of Chuckles candy and, on rare occasions, a pack of Camels for Slim.

One November night, some friends and I took Bart with us to dinner at an old German restaurant, the Golden Ox. Werner Mandlebaum, a regular white patron of Valois, had recommended the restaurant to us. As the owner of Chicago's last slaughterhouse, Werner supplied meat to the Golden Ox (as he did to Valois) and vouched for the quality of the steaks. On our way back to Hyde Park from the Golden Ox, Bart asked us to stop by the cafeteria. He explained that he needed to talk to someone for a minute. "My man is still in there, and he'll be wondering where I am." In Bart's vocabulary, there was perhaps no better way to describe the chauffeur that Slim was to him, a man with whom he could occasionally exchange cigarettes for rides.

Given Bart's upbringing and background, there was nothing surprising about his remark. But many months later, the language changed. A young woman who had known him when she was a student came to town for a visit. She later told me that Bart took her to dinner at Valois and said that he had a "friend" in the restaurant, that the friend was a black man, "but"—he emphasized—"he is very nice and he *is* a friend."

The fact that Bart made a point of calling the man his friend,

instead of trying to disassociate himself from him in advance, indicated that he had come to value his relationship with Slim. Perhaps Bart was now willing to ignore boundaries that had been vital to him before he grew old and lonely. It seemed also that the very trust he had placed in Slim's reserved but caring behavior had changed Bart's conception of himself vis-à-vis a black person.

I knew that at Christmas time, and for Slim's birthday, Bart would usually ask Hughes to shop for his gifts. Once Bart said to Hughes, "You know what Slim likes. Get him whatever you think he needs 'cause you been to where he works, and I hate to just give him five or ten dollars. The present will show more thought. If you don't mind wrapping the present, I'll get the card."⁵

Though he knew that Bart was trying to show his appreciation, Hughes believed that the old man was being cheap. "Bart, I'm gonna get whatever I think he needs. I'm not gonna insult him by giving him a five or ten dollar pair of socks. Not after what that man's done for you. If you needed that man in the middle of the night, he would be there."

"Well, Hughes, use your own judgment. That's why I want you to do it."

When Hughes picked out a rechargeable flashlight for one of Slim's birthdays and an electric heater on another occasion, it made Bart very happy.

Yet, I sometimes wondered to what extent Bart's use of a more respectful designation, "friend," to describe his relationship with Slim, implied a degree of intimacy. In addition to his feelings of racial superiority, Bart possessed a conception of the male role that militated against vulnerability and closeness with another man, black or white. What kinds of things did these two human beings, raised in a society that earlier in their lifetimes discouraged social interaction between the races, talk about on their way home each night? The answer to my question came more easily than I ever expected it would.

On one of the rare days when I did not go to Valois, I ran into Earl, the middle-class man who was one of the most con-

sistent regulars at Slim's table. On the street near the restaurant, he told me that Slim's old man had died. As all of the regulars knew, many years ago Slim had taken a man in the ghetto "for his father," rather the way he had Bart. In recent months he had been deeply concerned about the older man's health, moving him into a nursing home when he became very ill. Earl told me the details of the death. He had come from the funeral earlier that day, as had some others at the restaurant. Apparently they had all stopped by Valois after the service was over.

When I spoke to Bart the next day, I decided to ask him about what had happened. I hoped that by inquiring into some of the details, I might learn something about the nature of his friendship with Slim.

"What's new, Mitch?" Bart asked.

"Oh, nothing much," I replied. "I ran into Earl and he told me Slim's father died."

"Slim? Yeah. Funeral's tomorrow, I guess."

"Tomorrow?"

"Yeah."

I knew that the funeral had occurred twenty-four hours ago and I took this as a first hint that Bart was not really aware of what had been going on.

"I thought the funeral was yesterday."

"Well, I don't know, Mitch. I just heard that his father died. He didn't mention nothing to me about it, and I didn't say anything to him. A friend of mine gave me the information."

"Who was this?"

"Hughes."

I asked if Hughes had been dressed in a suit the day before. "Yeah, why?"

"Maybe he was coming from the funeral."

"The funeral isn't until tomorrow."

"Are you going to the funeral, Bart?"

"No."

"I see."

After a brief silence, Bart continued, "No, I don't know when

the funeral is. Maybe the funeral's tomorrow. I'll be damned if I know."

"Okay, I guess I'll just ask Slim about it when I see him. Did he look like he was depressed tonight?"

"No. Why would he be? He's a grown man. His father was at the age when they all go. It isn't like when you're young. It can happen any time. He lived a long time. You know a lot of them blacks don't live that long. He hadn't been depressed as far as I know. He hasn't been depressed all week. I think his father was in a nursing home for a while. I don't talk to him much about his affairs. I figure if there's something he wants me to know he'll tell me. I don't think he wants me to ask him any questions."

"Well, I don't know. I thought you might have mentioned it to him on the way home one night."

"No, no, no. I don't talk to him about that."

"Did you drive home with him last night?"

"Oh, yes."

"And he seemed okay to you?"

"He seems okay to me all the time. He wasn't any different last night than any other time."

Again there was silence. I decided to try one more time to learn about Bart's private time with Slim.

"I figure that the funeral must have been yesterday, Bart, because I thought Earl said something about that."

"Well now, I may be wrong. I don't say I'm right. I don't know anything about it really. Slim tells me nothing, and I ask him nothing. I figure he figured it's none of my business 'cause if it was any of my business he'd tell me. He don't want me asking him any questions. You know, that's the way I look at it. What he wants you to know he'll tell you, and what he don't want you to know he's not gonna tell you and he don't want you asking."

"Okay, Bart. I'll see you later on tonight."

"Okay, then."

When I entered the cafeteria later that evening, the old man waved me over to his table. He informed me that the funeral

had indeed been the day before.

It is evident that the relationship between Slim and Bart is not one of great depth. Yet Slim places a value on Bart that goes beyond the occasional exchange of a pack of cigarettes or a Christmas gift for a car ride home. Slim often tells me he doesn't think it right that people neglect their elders. His attitude of caring exists within a framework of barriers to closeness set up by Bart, perhaps to protect himself from developing too much intimacy with a black man, or simply with any man.

The standards by which Slim treats Bart are universal, applying equally to any elderly person, black or white, in or out of the ghetto. Inside this restaurant on the margins of the ghetto the black regulars have entered into an affirmative relationship with the wider society, orienting themselves to situations that make it possible for them to apply their high standards and adopting unique social forms, like the substitute kinship tie, beyond the fringes of the black districts.

One day Bart collapsed inside the restaurant and was rushed by ambulance to the University of Chicago hospital. As it turned out, he was merely dehydrated, and within a day he was back at Valois on his usual schedule. Many of the regulars asked about his health, and on one occasion Leroy, the electrician, began telling him what he should do, how much water he should drink, and which foods he should eat. After a few minutes, Bart responded in his typically direct manner: "I appreciate your concern. But it's none of your business and please change the subject."

Leroy responded, "Bart, it's because I love you and I think a lot of you. That's why I'm saying these things. . ."

But Bart wasn't pleased. "Well, thank you for your concern, Leroy. But I can manage pretty well." And that was that.

Others asked Bart about his health, too. As Hughes explained to me, "It was a constant thing, because people don't have anything to talk to Bart about. I have to dig to the bottom of everything to find anything to talk to him about."

So Bart was annoyed.

A few weeks after he first collapsed in the restaurant, he began to feel dizzy again. This time he was at home, and he telephoned Hughes. The men agreed to meet at the hospital later on that day. When they arrived, Bart decided to check in for tests, and he told Hughes that nobody in the restaurant was to know he was there: "Don't say nothing to anybody in the shop about it. I hate for everybody to see me and say, 'Oh, how are you feeling? Oh, I hear you're sick.'"

Hughes recalled the conversation he had with the old man. Bart was tired of being asked about his health, all right. With a smile he concluded, "So don't tell anybody, Hughes. If anybody asks me about it, I'll know you told them."

"Don't you think we should tell Slim?" Hughes responded.

"What do you think?" Bart asked.

"Well, Bart, think about it . . ."

"Well . . ."

"Bart, Slim's your friend. And you know all the things we do for each other. And if Slim finds out somehow that you been in the hospital when you wasn't at Valois and didn't let him know. . . . You owe it to Slim to let him know."

"Well, you're right. I hadn't thought of it that way."

The two men tried to figure out what Hughes would tell the others at Valois.

Bart came up with the solution. "Just tell them that in this cold weather I'm eating in a restaurant closer to home until the weather breaks."

Hughes said, "Bart, that's real good. That way we don't have to get into details or anything. I can tell them and be so casual and change the subject so fast that they won't have any reason to come back with another question."

After he left the hospital, Hughes stopped by Valois to tell Slim the news. The instant Hughes walked in, Slim asked, "What have you done with my daddy?" Hughes sat down and explained what had happened.

Slim said, "He probably never should have been sent home the last time."

Hughes explained, "He was getting rid of more liquid than

he was taking in, and through evaporation and everything, that can kill you. Even a severe diarrhea can dehydrate you. Everything's checked out okay other than that. All he needs is the right blood pressure medicine and to drink his fluids."

Slim said, "Well, he's like a machine. He has a glass of orange juice in the morning at home. Then he walks six blocks to the restaurant and has two cups of coffee. And then a little later he has a glass of water. Then at night he has two cups of coffee and a cup of tea."

With a laugh Hughes added, "And that's it. And if they tell him to add three glasses of water, he'll add three glasses."

Both men had ambivalent feelings about Bart, some positive and some not. It was not uncommon for sentimentality and humor to mingle when they talked of him. As they sat together at the table, Hughes told Slim more about what had happened at the hospital:

"I took him a couple of candy bars. I went over to the liquor store because I know he always goes in there before you drive him home. I described Bart to the guy behind the counter. He said, 'Oh, yes.' I said to him, 'What kind of candy does he buy?' He laughed, 'Chuckles.'

"So I took a couple of Chuckles to him. When I walked into the hospital room, he said, 'What do you got?'

"I said, 'Chuckles.'

"He said, 'Hughes, I don't eat candy. I don't eat candy.'

Slim and Hughes laughed together.

"I said, 'Well, they're here. And if you get hungry you can have them.'

"He said, 'Well, why don't you take them with you and eat them?'

"As I reached for them, he put his hand in the air and said, 'Leave one.' I don't know if he didn't know how to . . . all he had to do was say thanks.

"Then later on I said, 'Bart, would you like a cup of coffee or something.' He was a bit chilly.

"So I went down to the restaurant, and it was like a maze in that hospital. I've gotten well acquainted with most people who

work there because there's hardly an employee there I haven't asked for directions! When I finally reached the cafeteria, I figured I'd get him some toast to go along with the coffee. Sometimes he tells me he eats a cookie or something before he goes to bed.

"So I finally found my way back to his room. I said, 'Bart, here's the coffee.'

"He said, 'Well, put it down. I'll only have two sips of it anyway.'

"And two sips is what he took."

"He said, 'Hughes, you finish it. And I wish you wouldn't get me anything more than I ask you for. I don't want any toast.' I said, 'No problem, Bart.' I wanted to say, 'Stick it up your ass!' But I said, 'Bart, it's better to have it and not want it than to want it and not have it.'"

Slim and Hughes laughed. Together they had gone through so much with the old man that they understood each other's feelings exactly. As Hughes later described it, "Oh, last night I could have chopped him up into little pieces and today I like him." Hughes told Slim how he had felt earlier that day when he went to Bart's apartment to pick up the things Bart had asked for at the hospital:

"As soon as I walked into his apartment his real pretty overcoat, the real nice one, was over a chair. And right next to it on the table was his Dobbs hat. When I saw him again later on I said, 'Bart, everything in your apartment was okay. But one thing really upset me. When I saw your hat. I know the complete history of the hat. And the hat is you up and down. And when I saw your hat and realized where you were, and not knowing just what the outcome would be, I really had a few seconds of feeling sad at that moment. 'Cause I thought ahead and I said, 'Oh my God. That poor hat!'"

Again, Slim and Hughes laughed hard. Then, before he went away, Hughes went over the official story with Slim, emphasizing that not a soul was to know Bart was in the hospital.

At the restaurant that night, before I'd heard anything about the conversation between Slim and Hughes, I sat with Harold,

Earl, and Slim. It was very slow. We were about the only ones present, and it was one of those evenings when it seemed that nobody had anything to say. The biggest event was when a Greek accent would yell, "Cheeseburger's ready!" and the men would look to make sure someone had risen to pick it up from the counter.

Suddenly I turned around to check where Bart was and found that he was nowhere to be seen. Turning to Slim, I asked about the old man. He responded that Bart was having his meals at home until the cold weather let up. Later, as the workers cleaned the steam table in preparation for closing, Spring and Ruby, the counter ladies, yelled across the room to Slim: "Where's your Pappy tonight?"

Slim repeated what he had just told me. Harold asked Slim if Bart was okay and Slim said, "Yes."

I thought nothing of this incident until later on that evening. On my way home from the restaurant I stopped by Bart's apartment to see if there was anything he needed in the freezing weather. I rang his bell for five minutes and got no answer. When I arrived home, I attempted to reach him by phone and again received no answer. It occurred to me that Bart might have gone back to the hospital. I called the switchboard and asked whether Bart was listed. He was. When I finally reached Hughes the next day and told him I had spoken to Bart, he explained why Slim hadn't told the truth. Before we hung up, Hughes said, "Whatever you do, don't let Slim know you know. Because he might think I told you."

As I reflected on the previous evening, I was struck that Hughes conceived of himself as living up to standards which were not his alone but were also embodied in the moral authority of Slim. Although middle-class blacks are usually conceptualized as potential role models for other blacks, here an exceptionally sensitive middle-class white man sought the respect of a working-class black man as he attempted to live in accordance with high ideals.

I marveled at the willpower and self-control that Slim exhibited on a night when nobody seemed to have anything to say.

After all, the whole circle could have gotten a lot of mileage out of that news. Despite his complicated feelings for the old man, he demonstrated a tremendous respect for Bart's privacy. Slim's perception of his own moral worth could not be separated from a disposition to act in accordance with standards appropriate to his associates, whose worthiness was taken for granted in that setting. A person of the weak moral constitution portrayed in major accounts of the black male would have preferred to let his friends know that he was on the inside.⁶ At Valois, Slim and his sitting buddies demonstrate an inner strength characterized by self-control and willpower that is seldom, if ever, attributed to the black male in social scientific and journalistic reports. Though black men are usually portrayed as so consumed with maintaining a cool pose that they are unable to "let their guard down and show affection,"⁷ these black men had created a caring community in which one of the men, Leroy, had even expressed his feelings for Bart by telling him the men were interested in his illness because they loved him.

In Thomas and Znaniecki's *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*, one of the first great field studies in American sociology, the authors emphasized that immigrants to America not only were transformed by the society of which they became a part, but had a transforming effect on that society as well.⁸ The same can be said about the relations between blacks and a wider, integrated society, though we more commonly focus on the welfare rolls, the murder rate, and the prison population in understanding the way that blacks, and especially black males, have changed America. Here, on the margins of the ghetto, I witnessed the adaptation of one of the ghetto's prevalent social forms, the substitute kinship tie, to show, through little acts of caring, an alternative conception of civility and of what it means to be a black man.

Bart died alone in his studio. When, one Tuesday evening, he didn't show up at the cafeteria, Slim notified Hughes, who called the manager of Bart's building.

"The manager just called me back," Hughes told Slim an hour later. "He had opened the door, but the chain was on it. He is waiting for the police to come. I can't say a thing about it, but it doesn't look good."

Slim suggested that Hughes call Bart's brother in Colorado. "They haven't spoken in a year, and he'll want to know."

Hughes got the number from directory assistance, reached the brother, and reported back to Slim: "I just tried to tell him that Bart might be in trouble. But he cut me off, saying, 'He isn't nothing but a bachelor. Who's gonna miss him?'"

"That's a horrible thing to say," said Slim. "How could a man say that about his own brother?"

"I told him we were waiting for the police to enter the room," said Hughes. "That I would call him back when we knew. But he told me he takes his phone off the hook when he goes to sleep. I said, 'Don't take it off tonight. That way if he's gone we can get hold of you.'"

Bart was found dead at the side of his bed, one leg in his pajamas, one leg out.

Hughes dialed Bart's brother, but the line was busy. The building manager referred the Chicago police to Hughes for the brother's number, and an officer called Colorado himself. A few minutes later he called Hughes back to report the constant busy signal. "That's all you're gonna get," Hughes told him.

Bart stayed in the city morgue three weeks. Hughes says he died the way he lived. "We all die alone, but he died totally alone; being in the morgue for so long." In truth Bart wasn't completely by himself. He had Slim, and he had Hughes, and he had the entire caring community at Valois.

Bart did not have to be intimate with Slim to feel affection for him. The moral authority embodied in Slim's caring behavior had pushed Bart to the limits of his own potential for tolerance, friendship, and respect.

Yet, the power of integration over ingrained beliefs is slow and incremental and should not be exaggerated. Years later I asked Hughes, who had himself so clearly looked up to the black man, whether he believed that Bart had changed as a

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consequence of his relationship with Slim. "There was only so much he could change. But it certainly made him more accepting. He saw what it means to care for another person. It gave him an understanding about the caring behavior of the black race. He probably figured at least some could be human."