

Chapter 23

Henry Leyden, a blind radio personality, finds himself in a tense negotiation with Penniman, an ESPN representative, at the Oak Tree Inn bar. Penniman, an overweight and pushy man, insists on another drink to "seal the deal" for Henry's show to go national under ESPN. Henry, however, is hesitant, sensing the offer might compromise his integrity. The encounter is laced with Henry's disdain for Penniman's arrogance and his own internal conflict about commercializing his work.

Amid the negotiation, Henry is struck by the sudden scent of "My Sin," his late wife's perfume, and even feels her touch on his neck. This sensory hallucination unsettles him, as his heightened sense of smell has never deceived him before. The bartender, Nick Avery, confirms no one else is present, deepening Henry's confusion. The moment serves as a poignant reminder of his past and his unresolved grief, contrasting sharply with the crass commercialism of Penniman's pitch.

Penniman grows increasingly drunk and belligerent, attempting to strong-arm Henry into accepting the deal by implying his career hinges on ESPN's approval. Henry, however, remains composed and arranges for a taxi to escape the situation. His refusal to be manipulated highlights his self-respect and disdain for Penniman's lack of authenticity. The bartender's subtle support underscores Henry's dignity in contrast to Penniman's boorishness.

In the end, Henry decisively rejects Penniman's offer with a biting insult, choosing integrity over financial gain. The chapter closes with Henry walking away, reaffirming his independence and moral compass. The encounter, punctuated by the ghostly presence of his wife, reinforces his commitment to staying true to himself, even at the cost of professional advancement.