

"Fine, thanks," says Billings.

The messenger stares. Oh. The manager hands him a coin and returns to his desk. The youth is transfixed by the coin.

"Look," Billings shouts, "that's it. Buzz off!"

The messenger dives out the window, spreading his angel wings and throwing a shadow over the office. He turns, thumbs his nose, and flies away.

#### DRY RUN

I called Milt. "Where were you at two o'clock, a week ago yesterday?"

"Asleep," he said. "No wait, on the subway, reading How To Eat Like A Teenager."

"Gilda?"

She couldn't remember.

"Try."

"Shit," she was embarrassed. "Working. Writing copy for new, improved Pampers. What else?"

Donald was in his walk-in closet, groping on the floor for a coin he heard fall. He knew it was two o'clock because the clock struck in the church down the street and he thought, what if I die now?

Marvin was in the john, looking at his watch and worrying his colon.

Della, I know, was in bed, having sex with everyone she could imagine when she was supposed to be walking her kid in the park.

"Why?" they asked.

"Because," I said, "it almost happened, that's why."

#### COLD FRONT

He sits in his garden, amusing himself by moving the cumulus clouds around in the sky. But, after a half hour or so, a gray front starts moving in from the west; he tries to fight it off, tries to hold it back so that he can play with his summer clouds, but it is no good. A cold wind springs up. The gray clouds fill the sky and there is the smell of rain.

He gets up and, shivering, picks up his chair. He notices a woman in the window of the house next door. She is looking at him. Her arms are folded and she is smiling.