

academic preparation and if he hadn't
(as is true in the vast majority of cases)
had genuine literary genius as well,
his choice of vocations would in fact have
been a tragic waste.

MY FATHER-IN-LAW'S BRIEF CASE

it has a strong tobacco odor.

i suspect he used to smuggle
cuban cigars back from mexico in it.
just for his own use.
maybe some jewelry for
his wife and little girl.
a middle-class salesman
of agricultural and office supplies,
he was above suspicion.

he loved his daughter.
he loved his granddaughter.
he always dealt with me
man to man. he was
a gracious host.

i'm glad my mother-in-law
offered his brief case to me.

TWO KINDS OF KINDNESS

the old guy at the y
who swims about the same time i do
and never fails to show up with
a new joke or two
asks me if i have any trips coming up,

and i say, yes, as a matter of fact, i'm
flying out with my family next week
for a month or so in england,

and he immediately becomes concerned
with how we are going to get to
l.a.x. and offers to drive us all
there and pick us up on our return.

i didn't even know his name.
he writes that and his phone number down
for me in case the plans i have
for a buddy to take us fall through.

later i recall that this is
the way it was growing up
in upstate new york:
people were always looking
for ways to help each other
out. it made you feel good
to plow a neighbor's lawn or
shovel his car out or mow his
grass or run an errand for someone
who was old or sick or disabled

i don't notice much of that
anymore, except for those who are
ready and willing to put you
out of your misery.

AFTER VIEWING ZEFFIRELLI'S JANE EYRE

my uncle lost his wife to tuberculosis
when she was still quite young
and very beautiful. she had, in
fact, been a legendary beauty,
one of those women whose name,
among her family and friends
is virtually synonymous with beauty.

it was expected that he would be
inconsolable.

but shortly thereafter he re-married,
this time with their longtime housekeeper,
a likeable, competent, notoriously
plain woman.

he was quite well off,
an engineer for a prominent electronics firm,
and he could presumably have had his choice
of many women.

but he and his second wife
had an excellent marriage.
it might even be said,
in the manner of the fairy tales,
that they lived happily ever after.

as a child this seemed a mystery to me,
but today i am tempted to regard him as
among the wisest of men.