

. . . after I was riding a while, the cab driver and I sort of struck up a conversation. His name was Horwitz. He was a much better guy than the other driver I'd had. Anyway, I thought maybe he might know about the ducks.

"Hey, Horwitz," I said. "You ever pass by the lagoon in Central Park? Down by Central Park South?"

"The *what*?"

"The lagoon. That little lake, like, there. Where the ducks are. You know?"

"Yeah, what about it?"

"Well, you know the ducks that swim around in it? In the springtime and all? Do you happen to know where they go in the wintertime, by any chance?"

"Where *who* goes?"

"The ducks. Do you know, by any chance? I mean does somebody come around in a truck or something and take them away, or do they fly away by themselves—go south or something?"

Old Horwitz turned all the way around and looked at me. He was a very impatient-type guy. He wasn't a bad guy, though. "How the hell should I know?" he said. "How the hell should I know a stupid thing like that?"

"Well, don't get *sore* about it," I said. He was sore about it or something.

"Who's sore? Nobody's sore."

I stopped having a conversation with him, if he was going to get so damn touchy about it. But he started it up again himself. He turned all the way around again, and said, "The *fish* don't go no place. They stay right where they are, the fish. Right in the goddam lake."

"The fish—that's different. The fish is different. I'm talking about the *ducks*," I said.

"What's *different* about it? Nothin's *different* about it," Horwitz said. Everything he said, he sounded sore about something. "It's tougher for the *fish*, the winter and all, than for the ducks, for Chrissake. Use your head for Chrissake."

I didn't say anything about it for a minute. Then I said, "All right. What do they do, the fish and all, when the whole little lake's a solid block of ice, people *skating* on it and all?"

Old Horwitz turned around again. "What the hellaya mean what do they do?" he yelled at me. "They stay right where they are for Chrissake."

"They can't just ignore the ice. They can't just *ignore* it."

"Who's ignoring it?" Nobody's *ignoring* it!" Horwitz said. He got so damn excited and all, I was afraid he was going to drive the cab right into a lamppost or something. "They live right *in* the goddam ice. It's their nature, for Chrissake. They get frozen right in one position for the whole winter."

"Yeah? What do they eat, then? I mean if they're frozen *solid*, they can't swim around looking for food and all."

"Their *bodies*, for Chrissake—whats'a matter with ya? Their bodies take in nutrition and all, right through the goddam seaweed and crap that's in the ice. They got their *pores* open the whole time. That's their *nature*, for Chrissake. See what I mean?" He turned way the hell around again to look at me.

"Oh," I said. I let it drop. I was afraid he was going to crack the damn taxi up or something. Besides, he was such a touchy guy, it wasn't any pleasure discussing anything with him [. . .]

When I got out in front of Ernie's and paid the fare, old Horwitz brought up the fish again. He certainly had it on his mind. "Listen," he said. "If you was a fish, Mother Nature'd take care of *you*, wouldn't she? Right? You don't think them fish just *die* when it gets to be winter, do ya?"

"No, but—"

"You're goddam right they don't," Horwitz said, and drove off like a bat out of hell. He was about the touchiest guy I ever met. Everything you said made him sore.