

THE
Best
AMERICAN
SHORT STORIES
1943

and The Yearbook of the American Short Story

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Edited by
MARTHA FOLEY



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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO
IRWIN SHAW, PRIVATE, U.S. ARMY

TO
ALL WRITERS
ENLISTED IN A GREAT TASK

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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To the Editors of *Accent*, *The American Magazine*, *The Antioch Review*, *The Atlantic Monthly* and the Atlantic Monthly Press, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Harper's Magazine*, *The Kenyon Review*, Little, Brown and Company, *Mademoiselle*, *The New Yorker*, *Rocky Mountain Review*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Story*, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, and *The Yale Review*; and to Vicki Baum, Warren Beck, Kay Boyle, John Cheever, Guido D'Agostino, Murray Dyer, William Faulkner, the Estate of Rachel Field Pederson, Vardis Fisher, Grace Flandrau, Robert Gibbons, Peter Gray, Nancy Hale, Paul Horgan, Laurette MacDuffie Knight, Clara Laidlaw, Mary Lavin, Edita Morris, William Saroyan, Delmore Schwartz, Irwin Shaw, Margaret Shedd, Wallace Stegner, Alison Stuart, Jesse Stuart, Richard Sullivan, James Thurber, Jessie Treichler, Jerome Weidman, and Eudora Welty.

FOREWORD

THE American short story this year may be considered as bridging two worlds — the world before the war and the world as it now is. For many authors, it has been a year of nostalgic looking backward toward a time that has vanished; for many others, it has been a period of sharpened perception into more immediate events.

This editor is no believer in forcing any form of creative expression into a propaganda mould. Rather, I prefer to look for what might be termed the fourth dimension of writing, a dimension that transcends characters, action, and subject. A simpler expression is art.

Therefore, in attempting to survey the American short story for this year, I do not wish to place only a topical interpretation on any of the thousands of stories which have been published. I do believe, however, that what happens to literature during a great war can be of more than usual interest. It often has been noted that the great stories of the last World War were not written until after the conflict had ended. There had to come a distillation of the profound events writers, like their countries, had undergone.

It is too early to know whether that will be true of this war. Since Pearl Harbor, hundreds of stories already have been written with the war as a theme. Unfortunately, the vast majority of these stories have been written hurriedly and slickly to fit hackneyed fiction patterns and contrived happy endings. They are far more remote from a globe encircled by history's greatest drama than dispatches in the daily newspapers.

Likewise, there has been a multitude of stories obviously written with the word 'escape' in the minds of their authors

and often so labeled by the editors seeking them. And, because their authors are so desperately and self-consciously in flight from any reality, the stories themselves lack significance.

On the other hand, a trend in the non-realistic story that was a genuine one before the war continues. This is the fantasy story. The writers of such stories, through a kind of literary alchemy, marry everyday life with the magical. Growing out of this are overtones of mysticism, and it will be interesting to see where this trend leads.

But the really outstanding development of the past year seems to have been a post-peace writing. Much more than the previous year, I found a preoccupation with the problems that confronted America before the war, an appraisal of deeds and attitudes leading to the present. There has been an amazing number of stories about the underprivileged and the foreign-born. The number of stories about Negro life, for instance, has been so large as to appear phenomenal. These stories are not the deliberate, propagandizing type which featured the depression years of the early thirties, nor are they stories written simply out of pity; instead, they are told for the human values in them.

Edward J. O'Brien, the founder of this anthology, surveying his life work shortly before his death, said: 'America has made one discovery. It has learned to surprise the mood on the face of the man next door and to transfer it innocently to paper so that it tells us something we need to know about ourselves.'

Perhaps the intensified study this year of 'the man next door' is an essential prelude to the real impact of the war, and the peace to follow, not only upon that man but upon the writers themselves.

The artificial story still abounds, but more and more even the popular magazines continue to give way before a living style of tale-telling. Apart from the rapidly growing acceptance of ever freer forms of writing, as contrasted with the old, rigid rules and framework that once imprisoned the short story, the actual technique of story-writing has seen no startling innovations during the year.

Several of the smaller magazines, notably *The Southern Review*, have disappeared, and their passing is to be lamented. The little magazine, however, is a valiant figure on the American literary scene and still is the champion of many new, unknown, and worthwhile writers.

The so-called 'quality magazines' and some of the literary quarterlies limit the stories they publish to one or two an issue, or even none. Ironically enough, many of the articles published in these same magazines are critical essays on creative writing.

In preparing this anthology, I have been fortunate in having the very great assistance of Miss Ruth Portugal.

No foreword to a volume called *The Best American Short Stories* can be written without reminding the reader that it was not the present editor but the late Edward J. O'Brien who founded this anthology and made it an inspiring record of the short story in America. And, just as this editor can claim no credit for the anthology's existence, neither does she expect to equal O'Brien's high achievement.

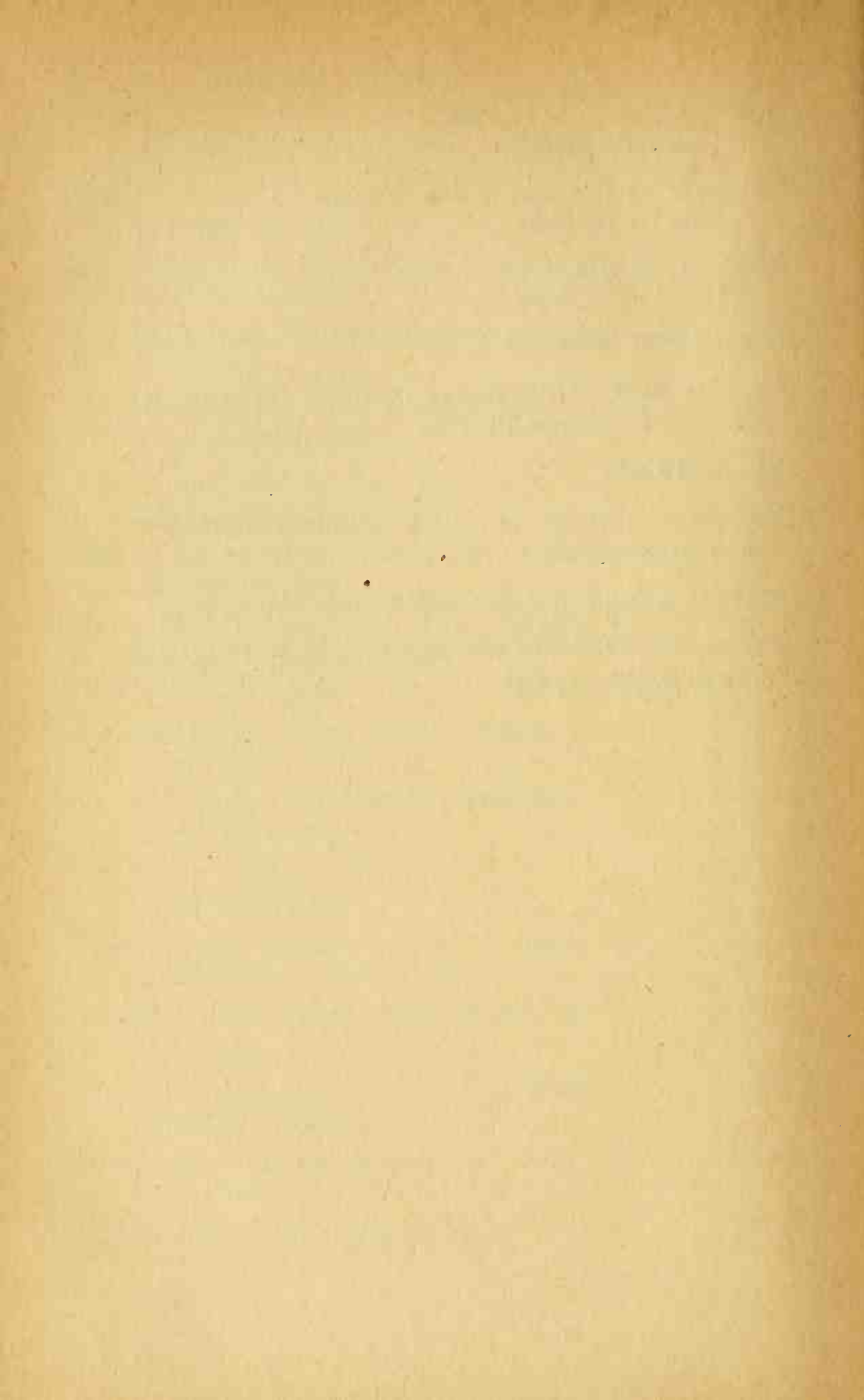
MARTHA FOLEY

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THIS HEALTHY LIFE

BY VICKI BAUM

THE smell around the training farm was compact like a wall, rising from the ground which was muddy with yesterday's rain, and surrounding the chicken coops huddled white in the muffled dark night. It clung to Clarissa's hands and nostrils, choking her and making it impossible to eat the boiled chicken Mrs. Gibbs had served them for dinner. Besides, at least one of these chickens had been a personal acquaintance of hers. They had killed it this afternoon because it insisted on hatching, instead of laying a new, futile egg every second day.

'I suppose one gets used to it,' Clarissa said briskly, stepping out on the dark porch and absentmindedly tapping a cigarette against the back of her hand. She spoke the careful, too deliberate English she had learned when she had hoped to get a part in *Underground*. The young man with the thin, stooped shoulders, whose name she had not grasped, was quickly at her side with a match.

'Yes, one does, really,' he said eagerly. 'I assure you, it is only the first day. Tomorrow you will not notice any more that we are stinking to heaven.'

She looked at him with the quick birdlike movement of her head that had been the enchantment of many audiences. 'But I love it here,' she said in a desperate blaze of cheerfulness. 'I love country life, I always did. This is healthy. This is real.' Her voice was too high and her eyes a bit too

bright. In the old days this would have meant that she was getting ready for a tantrum. But she had dropped tantrums, together with other luxuries, back in 1938.

'Did you notice how they all put on the fine dresses for dinner? That is on account of you,' he said, pointing with his chin toward the lighted room inside, where Mr. Gibbs had assembled the others to give them a last pep talk before sending them to bed. 'You do not realize what it means to us that you are in the same boat, as they say here.'

From the porch Clarissa could see the American flag and the blackboard over the fireplace, with formulas for chicken feed written on it, and flypaper everywhere, swaying sleepily in the warm air; she also saw part of her husband's face. Von Porten looked very tired and as if it were a great feat to keep one's eyes open. He was a tall, heavy man, but his skin had grown somewhat too large for him. He was different from the other men in the room, with their intelligent, heavy-lidded faces. They looked like people who would play chess for relaxation, Clarissa thought. But Von Porten had been a polo player and a hunter. Clarissa felt sorry for him. Mr. Gibbs, whom the Society for the Settlement of European Refugees had entrusted with the thorny task of converting useless, unwanted intellectuals into useful producers of eggs, seemed to address most of his speech to him, but Clarissa could not understand what he was saying.

'It is about the future boom in eggs. He makes us courage from the morning to the evening,' the young man said, switching to German. 'We whistle in the dark; we eat chicken, we talk chicken, we dream of chicken, we smell of chicken — because nothing else is left over for us.'

'What did you do before you came to the farm?' Clarissa asked, uninterested.

'History of art. Oh, you mean in America? I drilled holes in the stones of apricots. They make fancy jewelry of it, it is the fashion now. But the shop has taken on defense work and we were dismissed. They do not use aliens for defense work.'

'Yes, I know,' Clarissa said, depressed.

'But I will not talk about me, I will talk about you,' he

said, perking up. 'When I heard first that you were coming to the farm, I thought, it cannot be true. Clarissa Fank in this hell? What has happened to her? But you have not changed.'

'When did you see me last?' Clarissa asked him, getting interested.

'In the theater in München, when you played Lulu in Wedekind's *Erdgeist*; what a performance!' he said. 'And later in a French picture when you played in Paris —'

'But I made two French pictures; which was the one you saw?' Clarissa asked. She quickly switched back to the porch, with her husband in his wake.

'Time to go to bed, Mr. Lindner,' he said. 'And for you, too, Mrs. Porten. You must be good and tired. The first day is always the hardest and you've got to get up at five-thirty.'

'Yes, I'm going,' Clarissa said without moving. Gibbs waited another moment. 'Well, good night — and don't keep that young fellow out in the night too long. He ain't as strong as your husband,' he said and went back into the house.

Mr. Gibbs liked chickens but he didn't like refugees. It was hard on the hens to be confronted by new faces all the time and to be handled by the clumsy hands of these foreigners. It made them nervous and unwilling to lay eggs, and Mr. Gibbs felt sorry for them. It did not occur to him to feel sorry for the people who came to the farm to learn. They did not come because they liked to be farmers; they grabbed chicken farming as a last straw, after they had failed at everything else. This fellow Porten, though, might make a good farmer after all, Gibbs thought as he went to turn off the lights in the house.

'Coming, Ciss?' Von Porten said, putting his hand on Clarissa's shoulder. She rubbed her cheek against it. Still, after twelve years of being married, he had not stopped wondering at her smallness. It gave him a feeling of great strength and ultimate responsibilities.

'In three minutes,' she said. 'It is so lovely out here. So silent. You can almost hear the silence.' The nice things

she liked to say came back often to her with a funny echo; she could never be sure whether she had thought them up herself or whether she had spoken or heard them before, in some play.

'Well — don't be long, child. You need your rest,' Von Porten said. 'You worked hard.'

Clarissa laughed. 'They made me scrape a few tons of chicken dirt off the dropping tables,' she said. 'They told me that was the easiest work out here. Well, I liked it; I really did.' Her voice was almost shrill with cheerfulness and Porten gave her shoulder another little squeeze, before he took out his flashlight.

'Good night, Mr. Lindner,' he said. 'Please send her to bed soon, will you?'

'*Gute Nacht, Herr Baron,*' Lindner said, getting up and making a bow. They watched the small beam of the flashlight disappear into the house and flicker up the stairs.

'Your husband speaks such beautiful English,' Lindner said with respect in his voice. 'Where did he learn it?'

'In London. As a young man he was with the Austrian legation.'

'He is a wonderful man,' Lindner said. 'Tell me, is it true that he has been in Dachau for two years?'

'Not in Dachau. And only for seven months,' Clarissa said modestly. Lindner nodded in admiration. 'What a world,' he said. 'Baron Von Porten! A pure Aryan! And they put him into a camp like all the others. But I can understand him. I can understand that a man will rather go through hell than give you up —'

Clarissa gave no answer, and Lindner wondered if he had been tactless. He could see nothing but the spark of her cigarette in the darkness.

'You said you saw me in a French picture,' she said at last. 'Was it the one where I play the stationmaster's wife or the other one?'

'No, the one where you have that big scene in the Salvation Army,' Lindner said eagerly. '*Mein Gott*, and how you played that scene —'

Clarissa threw her cigarette away and took out a new one.

'It's lovely here,' she said. 'Now I hardly notice the smell. I really think I'm getting used to it —'

Von Porten was still awake when Clarissa tiptoed into the room an hour later. He had been thinking of the farm he could buy for fourteen hundred dollars. Twenty-eight acres ground. And a big barn that could easily be turned into a henhouse. But no electricity, and the house was run down — and he had no fourteen hundred anyway. He sat up in the narrow iron bed and pulled the string that was fastened to the electric bulb on the ceiling. The tiny room with all its shoddy ugliness sprang into light. It had slanting walls and was so cramped that the bed had to stand diagonally and yet filled it up entirely. On the window sill stood a wash-bowl of chipped gray enamel. Clarissa looked around for a chair, but there was none. 'Go on, sleep, darling,' she said softly. 'Don't mind me. I've got to get clean.'

Von Porten closed his eyes and listened to the small noises of her undressing. 'This bed is so narrow, I don't see how two people are to sleep in it,' he muttered.

'Can't we ask for a bigger one?'

'I guess not. You can't demand the royal suite when you pay five dollars a week for room, board, and tuition.'

'Well, we'll have to play Little Spoons,' Clarissa said. That's what she had called it in her childhood when she and her sister snuggled up in one bed. Porten had first heard the expression on their honeymoon. It was one of the thousand little things which tied him so irrevocably to her small, whimsical person.

'You should put me over your knee and spank me for spending eighty-two dollars on a fake agent like this Carson,' Clarissa said. 'But I was so sure he would get me that Hollywood contract. It was my last chance.'

No, that's not true, Von Porten thought. Our last chance is this. 'If I could make Brennert pay me back the four hundred I lent him in Paris —' he said, half asleep.

'Darling, we still haven't touched the two hundred and sixty we got for my furs,' Clarissa said. Her voice came from the floor and sounded muffled. He opened his eyes and

found her kneeling there, tugging at the heavy suitcase which he had stored away under the bed.

'What do you want, Ciss?'

'My mirror,' she said. 'It's right on top of everything.'

'Heavens, Clarissa — what do you need that damned mirror for in the middle of the night?'

'Never mind. Sleep now. I can get it myself.'

He closed his eyes again, so exhausted that he was afraid he might start to cry. Not since the World War had he been this exhausted. His hands were covered with blisters which Mr. Gibbs had doctored with some smelly iodine balm. His back ached and his legs were beginning to get sore and stiff. But what worried him most was a funny, empty feeling around his laboriously pumping heart. Would be a bad joke if his heart should let him down just when he needed to show that he was a strong and capable man. His heart had never been the same after his seven months in concentration camp; their escape from France across the Pyrenees hadn't made it any better either; walking, climbing, running, dodging, bribing their way across the border — and lugging all the time that same confounded suitcase, which Clarissa now tried to get out from under the bed.

He sat up, groaning at the stiffness in his knees, shook himself fully awake and, without a word, he lifted the suitcase up and looked around.

'Now where do I put the damned thing?' he asked.

'I did not ask you to help me,' Clarissa said. She was wrapped in the old robe which had traveled with her through the dressing rooms of most of the great European stages.

'I know you didn't,' Porten said. He dropped the suitcase on the bed and sat down heavily beside it. 'Where are the keys?' Clarissa said. 'I gave them to you, darling.'

He got up once more, fumbled in the pocket of his coat which hung on the door, brought out the keys and sat down again. Clarissa worked on the lock, rattling with the keys and sighing deeply. 'Darling, I'm an idiot,' she said. 'Please, get it open for me.' Porten, the moment he sat down, had fallen into a stupor of fatigue. He blinked, took the keys, but did not open the suitcase.

'Look here, Ciss,' he said sensibly. 'You ought to be in bed by now. What do you need the mirror for?'

'I can't help it if there's no mirror in this establishment,' she said petulantly. Porten turned the keys, first the one and then the other, and the suitcase gave a sigh of relief, like a woman getting rid of too tight a corset, and began spilling its contents over the bed. Porten shrank toward the headboard to make room for the things Clarissa took out and arranged on the blanket. At last she found the mirror. It was a beautiful piece, a royal gift which Max Reinhardt had given her after her success as Cleopatra. It was said to have belonged to the Empress Maria Theresa, and it looked it, too. The frame was made of silver, in the shape of a playful, graceful laurel wreath. A flattering dedication in Max Reinhardt's own handwriting was engraved in the uppermost leaves, and Clarissa had carried on this idea and had the autographs of all her friends engraved, leaf by leaf. She hugged the mirror in her arms like a baby, carrying it from one end of the room to the other, but found no place to put it down. At last she kneeled down on the floor and tried to stand the mirror on top of the suitcase. It wobbled a little and collapsed when Porten made a movement. His head had been dropping to his chest and he was about to fall asleep, when he felt that Clarissa was kissing his temple.

'What is it?' he said, startled.

'Can you hold it for me, darling? Just five seconds?' she said, and the mirror was thrust into his hands. He tried to get a hold on the sharp silver leaves, but they cut into the split blisters on his palms and the ointment made them slippery. Clarissa, with the intent and serious expression of a woman whose make-up is part of her profession, was covering her face with a mask of cleansing cream.

'Oh dear, oh dear,' she said, after a while. 'I can't see a thing. Can't we bring that bulb lower down?'

'No,' said Porten.

'I tell you what, darling. You stand up and hold the mirror under the bulb and I can kneel on the bed — that should do the trick.'

'Look here,' Porten said. 'I'm tired. I'm so dog-tired I

could cry. I've dug up stumps and roots all morning long. I've carted manure to the dung pile for hours. I've carried bags with concrete to the pumphouse till I thought my back would break. I've split wood for the fence, I've — I've —'

'Are you complaining?' Clarissa asked, making her voice clear and vibrant.

'No, I'm not complaining,' Porten shouted and felt that he was getting out of hand. 'I only want to state that I need my sleep. I need my sleep. If I don't want to crack up I need my sleep.'

'So do I. What do you think I did all day long? Loaf? Enjoy myself? You don't want me to go to bed with chicken dirt in my face and under my nails and everywhere. I worked just as hard as you. But I don't let myself go, that's all.'

Porten took the mirror into a firm grip, blisters or no blisters, and stood up. He held it under the bulb so that it caught the reflection of the dim light. Clarissa, kneeling on the suitcase which stood on the bed, began to take off the cream from her face. She sent a reconciliatory smile up at her husband, but he did not seem to notice it.

Suddenly she began to laugh. 'What's so funny?' he muttered. Clarissa could not stop laughing. Something had snapped in her and made her laugh until her sides ached and the tears streamed down her cheeks.

'You —' she said. 'You are so funny. You, in those idiotic woollies. Sears Roebuck pajamas! The farmer's delight! You, in those horrid drawers, holding that rococo mirror. Lord, are you funny! Mercy, are you funny!'

'So, I am funny,' Porten cried. 'But you don't know how funny you are. You, with your forty-five years and your goddamned schoolgirl complexion and cream smeared all over you. Sitting all night long in the dark with that young Jewish fellow and listening to his tirades and making eyes at him.'

Clarissa was still laughing. 'Don't be ridiculous, darling,' she said, all out of breath.

'I'll show you how funny I am,' Porten screamed. He gripped the mirror, felt its sharpness bite into his sores and, flooded by a keen pleasure, he smashed it to the floor. The

glass splintered and the silver leaves made a thin, plunking sound. Clarissa stopped laughing.

'Oh, Paul,' she said softly. 'You broke it. Why did you do it? You know what that mirror means to me.'

He knew it. It meant everything. It meant her whole life, all the plays, all the theaters, all the successes, all she had lost. It had the names of all her friends engraved in it; many of them were famous and some of them had not survived these years. Damn it, he knew it all and it made him desperate.

'Yes, I know what it means,' he roared. 'If it hadn't all those damned names scratched into it, we could sell it and get two hundred dollars for it. I took it to the pawnbroker. All he would give me for it would be its weight in silver. Six dollars and twenty-four cents. Now go and buy a farm for it! Damn your mirror. Damn your friends. Damn it all. Damn you, too! Damn you, damn you!'

Clarissa said nothing; she bent down and slowly began to pick up the pieces of glass.

'Watch out that you don't hurt yourself,' Porten said, feeling much better after his outburst. She suddenly looked all of her forty-five years. Her robe dragged on the floor, soiled with spots of grease paint which no laundering could take out.

'Oh, Paul, darling,' she said, and began to laugh again, 'oh, my darling — you should not have done it. You should not have come with me. You should have stayed over there — where you belong.'

BOUNDARY LINE

BY WARREN BECK

HEARING the faint plop of the evening *Journal* on the front step, Mr. Gifford set down his teacup, rose, said, 'Excuse me, my dear,' to Mrs. Gifford, and went to admit the world's day. In the light streaming outward from the open door he picked up the paper and rapidly unrolled it. His broad bony shoulders stooping and his gleaming white head inclined, he stood for a moment in the damp of the cloudy dusk to glance at the headlines.

Yes, there it was once more, the thing he braced himself against daily. Bad news again from England, more bombing of cities and more losses at sea. He stepped back in and closed the door quietly. Returning to the living room, he silently handed the paper to his wife. Mrs. Gifford's eyes skimmed over the large black letters; then she folded the paper and dropped it to the floor.

'Won't you have another cup of tea, William?' she said.

Without a word he picked up his cup, and brought it to the ministrations of her plump hands. He returned to his chair and set the filled cup down on the table untasted. Finally he spoke, seemingly to the floor.

'When are they going to get planes enough to stop those fellows?' he asked. 'And how are they going to, if this country doesn't help more than we're doing?'

Mrs. Gifford shook her head in companionable grief and bewilderment, her earrings glinting eloquently in the lamp-

light. She picked up her teacup again and took a long sip, and saw her husband follow her example. The news had struck her as painfully, but he had spoken first, so this time it was her turn to refrain and to change the subject.

'When you've finished your tea,' she said, 'I'll see that Veronica has put in the roast, and then how about a walk over through the park and around?'

Mr. Gifford nodded once over his raised cup, like a convalescent economical of speech and gesture. But when he went to lay out their coats, he knew he had got his balance again, and that now if his wife wanted to voice her melancholy, he in turn could be calm. Day by day they had fought the war in this fashion, and thus they would continue, he knew, as long as any habits held.

Neither of them was English; both their families had been in America for several generations. Though both were of predominantly English blood, each had some admixture — he a strain of French on his mother's side, and she a German grandfather, of whom lately they often remarked to each other that he had come here because he couldn't endure militaristic Germany. They had never been across the Atlantic, though they had sent their daughter to England and France on a summer tour with some of her college classmates. Neither had thought much about England in ordinary times, taking her and her empire for granted, like Shakespeare and the Episcopal Church and afternoon tea. Yet somehow they had always read the more serene of the modern English novels and had received their daughter's postcards that one summer with an undefined sense of hearing about people back home; and when Edward abdicated, they were disturbed by the vague threat of a veiled issue and gratified at its gentlemanly settlement, and when Chamberlain acknowledged he had been deceived, and England through him, the Giffords began to rearm in sentiment.

They were not alone. At the law office Mr. Gifford's younger partner agreed with him in principle; when Mr. Gifford called Hitler an upstart and an assassin, his partners replied that yes, he was a regular so-and-so for sure. The Giffords' friends who came to dinner discussed the war not

only with unanimity of opinion, but of phrase, and thereby increased each other's confidence that somehow jolly old England would muddle through again, if for no other reason than that so many of the nicest people were so cordially inclined toward her cause.

Yet day after day came the disquieting news. And day after day there next door to the Giffords were the Schwartzes. This was the first indubitably German family the Giffords had ever known as neighbors. They had moved into the house five years ago, apparently on a wave of prosperity set up as two sons and a daughter successively finished high school and went to work for wages, the boys in a garage, the girl as a department-store clerk. Mr. Schwartz himself was a factory foreman, evidently well paid. Not only the three young Schwartzes but their parents too were American-born, yet to the Giffords they seemed as foreign as if they had just immigrated. They were the only people of their class and kind in that neighborhood, and since they were obviously without any instinct for social adaptation, others besides the Giffords wondered what cloudy ambition had brought them and what reward they expected of mere residence on a certain street. They were fiercely industrious, they gave no evidence of light-heartedness even among themselves, their fixed expressions were sullen and dissatisfied, and as Mrs. Gifford put it, they had no handles, nothing to pick them up by. All the Giffords' early attempts at neighborly amenities rolled off the Schwartzes as though their habitual surliness were a kind of waterproofing.

Only once did Mr. Schwartz make any overture, and that turned out to be a matter of business.

'Gifford,' he had called over the hedge, in a tone half diffident, half imperative.

'Eh?' said Mr. Gifford, looking up while still kneeling at the edge of a flower bed. 'Ah, good afternoon, Mr. Schwartz.' He rose and walked toward the hedge. His neighbor's eye met his briefly and then dropped to the ground and roved back and forth over the vegetables while Mr. Schwartz spoke.

'I notice there's plenty of ground between these houses — must be ninety foot — and I was thinking about me buying a strip off your lot — say about twenty or thirty foot.'

Mr. Gifford's mouth opened and he stared at Mr. Schwartz, while Mr. Schwartz's eye glanced up and down a row of beets.

'I'm afraid I couldn't consider that, Mr. Schwartz,' he said at last.

'I'd pay you a fair price,' said Mr. Schwartz, with the air of making a liberal concession.

'No, I really couldn't consider it,' Mr. Gifford repeated. 'I'd like to let you have what you want, but — really, I couldn't.'

'I need some more room along here for my vegetables,' said Mr. Schwartz, almost aggrievedly, 'and you're not using the ground —'

'But I am using it — for lawn,' said Mr. Gifford patiently. 'If I sold you a strip, I'd have to bring my hedge closer to my house, and there wouldn't be enough lawn to make it look proper from the library windows.'

'Do you have to have that hedge?' asked Mr. Schwartz, argumentatively, as though only an unreasonable foible of Mr. Gifford's were holding up the deal.

'I prefer to have it,' Mr. Gifford said shortly. 'I like it.'

'But I need more room for my vegetables,' Mr. Schwartz insisted, as if offering an entirely new and overwhelming reason.

'Sorry, Mr. Schwartz,' said Mr. Gifford firmly, half turning away. 'It's out of the question.'

Mr. Schwartz leveled a scowling glance at him for a moment.

'I might have known that's the way you'd act about it,' he said bitterly.

'Oh, come now,' protested Mr. Gifford. 'You can scarcely blame a man for not selling if he doesn't want to. Put yourself in my place — would you sell me some of your land?'

But Mr. Schwartz had already turned away and did not answer. Thereafter he never greeted Mr. or Mrs. Gifford, and soon his clan was following his example. The two families settled down to the strained silence of an undefined truce. It was broken only by a tiff over damage repeatedly done the Giffords' flowers by the Schwartz boys' recklessly

thrown soft-ball in practice in which the burly brothers seemed at enmity and trying to knock each other over.

'Why couldn't you boys play somewhere else?' Mr. Gifford had finally suggested, as the younger fished out the ball from among the shattered delphiniums while the other looked on grimly over the hedge.

'We're practicing on our own lot,' the elder boy had growled.

'But you're not keeping the ball there,' Mr. Gifford retorted. 'You're always throwing it into our flower beds.'

'Oh, what of it?' the younger Schwartz joined in, and then pushed back through the hedge before adding, 'What's a few flowers?'

'If the flowers aren't yours, you've nothing to say about them,' Mr. Gifford had answered sharply. 'I've made a reasonable appeal to you, but if you feel this way about it, I'll have to forbid you to come on my property. There are laws against trespass and damage, you know.'

The Schwartz boys had supported their retreat with defiant guffaws, from the midst of which Mr. Gifford heard one flat derisive voice.

'Trespass, you know. He's a lawyer, you know. He must have went to college.'

The ball-playing was moved to the sidewalk and continued there, in spite of some protests from passers-by. And thereafter the boundary line between the two properties had the invisible potency and threat of an electrically charged wire. In the beginning it had always been the Schwartz eye which turned away first, fixed and hard, always the Schwartz back that bent first away from neighbors toward its task. Now the rite of a taboo was established; the Giffords as well as the Schwartzes gardened uncommunicatively, with cautious circumspection and bowed averted heads.

'William, I can't stand it,' Mrs. Gifford exclaimed one day, returning to the house, her firm full cheeks an even deeper pink than usual. 'It's like being made to practice some awful superstition. There we were, Mrs. Schwartz and I, not twenty feet from each other, with only that low hedge between us, and I cutting flowers and she weeding her vegetables, and neither of us saying a word to each other.'

Mr. Gifford took off his spectacles and smiled across the room at his wife.

'But, my dear,' he protested indulgently, 'how can it be otherwise? We and the Schwartzes actually haven't a word to say to each other. We've found that out.'

Mrs. Gifford shook her head so vigorously that her garden hat flapped against her ears.

'But we've never lived this way with neighbors before,' she said.

'No,' he agreed, 'but we've never had neighbors like these before. They're really different, my dear. We've done what we could to — to appease the Schwartzes, and it didn't work. We can't humiliate ourselves. Perhaps with things as they are we'd better let that hedge grow high.'

Mrs. Gifford sighed. 'Perhaps,' she agreed.

In another year the hedge had grown enough so that the Giffords could straighten up from their gardening without having to remember to keep eyes averted. The Schwartzes were frequently in their yard, mowing and clipping with a kind of furious hurry, chopping away the sod from the borders of their walks in a deep gash, jerking out any day-old weed that an abashed Nature sent up in their regimented vegetable rows. All this fanatical activity began to seem like a dramatized reproof to the Giffords' garden, with its winding flagstone paths grass-grown and crowded upon by supple unchecked flowers.

'I'm sure they don't approve of our garden, William,' Mrs. Gifford had said at last. 'They probably think it's slovenly. Or perhaps they think we don't know any better.'

Mr. Gifford took out his pipe and held it ready for the slight firm gestures he often made when he spoke his inner convictions.

'My dear, it's much more than that, I feel. They have their way of gardening, and hence to them it is *the* way, and our variance from their standard must be disquieting, even irritating. They must see that we want it this way and that we're pleased with it, and perhaps they wonder secretly what it is that we get out of it, but such speculation would be too close to open-mindedness for them to indulge in without

threat to their laborious pride. Instead they fall back upon the primitive way of hating us because we are different. That insulating hatred is one of the things that keep them as they are.'

'William,' said Mrs. Gifford pensively, 'do you suppose that perhaps in our way we're as narrow as they are?'

'Oh, I dare say we are,' he agreed. 'We're fairly set, and not much given to learning new tricks any more, are we, my dear? But there's this difference. We're addicted to our ways because they please us, and not just for their sake as habits. I mean, we value the end-product and not the means. It's a hard distinction to make, but I know it's there, it's real and quite important, and here's one plain evidence. Take people who live for happiness, and who achieve enough of it to know what it really is, and they may be quite conventional and given to routines, but only for themselves and for the sake of what they get out of living as they do; and they're willing to let anyone else have his different habits, make his different approach to happiness. Whereas the fellow who in spite of all his diligence in routines is not really happy and attains no genuine personal satisfactions—he's quite likely to be irritated by other ways of life which call his own further into question. So he rationalizes his jealousy of others who are happier by hating them for their variance from his rule of life, upon which he will crucify himself rather than admit he has made a less discriminating choice of habit patterns.'

'William, I believe you're right,' said Mrs. Gifford, feeling for the thousandth time an admiration of her husband's talent for judicious summing-up.

In the faith he had pronounced Mr. Gifford and his wife tried to live serenely despite the nearness of the Schwartzes and the diplomatic necessity of not recognizing them. 'That is just their way,' they thought, when on five-o'clock walks after tea they saw through unshaded windows the Schwartzes already hulking around their kitchen table for supper, the men in vests reaching abruptly among the bowls of food or bending low and feeding with both hands, the mother and daughter in aprons, and often one or the other coming from the stove with pan or kettle to replenish the bowls. 'That is

just their way,' the Giffords tried to tell themselves as the Schwartzes at work outside yelled at each other in a tone the Giffords had never before heard used between humans.

And the Giffords' own failure to live on neighborly terms with the Schwartzes seemed less significant to them, but inevitable, as they noticed that the Schwartzes became neighborly with no one else either, and had but few callers, all of them people whose speech like the Schwartzes' was loud, laconic, and ungrammatical, whose bearing was like the Schwartzes', rough, assertive, and self-conscious. Gradually therefore the Giffords resigned themselves to the accident which had set down next door to them such inflexibly foreign persons, and learned to shut their minds to the Schwartzes, as they would have shut out and forgotten inclement weather.

But then when Germany marched again and Poland was devastated, the Schwartzes could not be ignored and forgotten; they somehow crowded back toward the edge of the Giffords' consciousness and remained there, an itch, an irritant, almost a thorn. After a few weeks' discreet observation Mrs. Gifford told her husband that she could see a change in the Schwartzes. They looked even grimmer and more surly than usual, she thought, and they turned their heads aside even more quickly to avoid the necessity of recognizing neighbors who passed; yet at the same time they were louder than ever with their relatives, and extraordinarily talkative for such phlegmatic inarticulate people. Mr. Gifford himself then took the Schwartzes under observation, and his conclusion was that, as might be expected, they were reacting to world news by remembering they were Germans, so that they felt themselves a stubborn garrison on a foreign front, which after all was more or less the way they had always behaved, war or no war. Mrs. Gifford mused on this a moment with one of her infrequent frowns, and then said,

'The Schwartzes are the kind of people out of whom Nazis could be made, aren't they?'

'My dear, they *are* Nazis,' Mr. Gifford declared. 'They show how Nazis come to be. Anybody is a Nazi — potential at all times, active when he gets a chance to be — who lacks the satisfactions of intelligent self-possession, and a resultant

serenity and cordiality. Such fellows have to get themselves regimented to compensate for their confusion, and for their sense of inferiority insofar as they become conscious of others who are livelier and more urbane. We've had an outbreak of this morbid Germanism on the average of once a generation for the last four generations, my dear, and as I see it, the causes are not so much economic or political as psychological — psychopathic, in fact. The modern Germans — at least the ones who start the wars — can't stand the strain on *amour propre* of being outdistanced in the art of living by other nationalities. Their egoism and aloofness and solemn asininity are over-compensations. They've got over being intellectually hospitable, as when Frederick imported Voltaire; they've given up aping Gallic vivacity like the German in my French grammar who woke up the guests at the hotel by jumping over chairs, and said, "Je approng d'etre vifre, gomme le Francais." But since they can't be lively like the French, or poised like the English, they've determined to make the best — or the worst — of what they are, and to repudiate what they can't or won't become, and their method, the Nazi method, is a pathological symptom of maladjustment — they try to creep back into the womb of the race and the state.'

Mrs. Gifford looked at her husband in amazement and admiration.

'William,' she said, 'that makes more sense to me than all the books I've read about this crisis. In the end those writers bring you up against something implacable and inexplicable in the German character, and I think you've explained it.'

'Thank you, my dear,' said Mr. Gifford. 'I'm no expert, though. Perhaps I'm wrong. Perhaps I'm hipped. Perhaps it's all in my eye.'

'I don't think so, William,' she said.

Taking up this premise did not make the Giffords any more comfortable in mind. In fact, it only made them alert for further evidence of the unamenably foreign in the Schwartzes. Soon the Giffords agreed again that they had such evidence. Was it nothing but coincidence, they asked each other, that following close after Hitler's move into

Norway and Holland with the notorious assistance of fifth columns, there should have been a marked increase in comings and goings at the Schwartz house? Not only were the callers all obviously Germans like the Schwartzes, but among them were some new persons, especially one fellow with a large paunch and thick glasses, who greeted the Schwartzes very briskly and who was received and invited in with a deference all the more significant in that the Schwartzes had often let visitors stand on the front porch to talk to them. And now when relatives passing in their cars stopped and honked, and Mr. and Mrs. Schwartz lumbered out, they would stand with first one foot and then another on the running-board, bending their heads inward toward the car's occupants, and talking on and on in lowered voices.

'One thing I'm sure of, William,' remarked Mrs. Gifford. 'They're not just planning a family picnic.'

'But perhaps they are, my dear,' Mr. Gifford answered wryly. 'What is this whole fracas in Europe but a family picnic all over other people's estates?'

'William,' she said, 'I'm beginning to feel that maybe people of our kind are rather alone in the world. Think of all the irrational, brutally assertive folk everywhere. Maybe a tide is rising, maybe this gloom we live in now, this year, is the beginning of a long night.'

'My dear, we mustn't lose our nerve,' Mr. Gifford said soberly. 'Evolution isn't going to drop people like the English and pick up Hitler and his gang unless we abet by fear. We must hold on.'

Thereafter the Giffords did not risk disquieting each other by talking in a hopeless vein. Each one pondered the grave threat privately. And Mr. Gifford secretly began a measure of his own. He supposed he was undetected in it until one evening as he sat at his desk Mrs. Gifford came and laid down a list of numbers before him.

'Eh, my dear?' he said. 'What's this?'

'The licenses of the cars that stopped there today while you were at the office.'

She paused, and her husband looked up at her questioningly.

'I know you've been listing them, William,' she said. 'I thought I might as well attend to it for you while you weren't here.'

Mr. Gifford picked up the paper and stared at it.

'Thank you, my dear,' he said at last. 'I — I didn't want to alarm you about it, though. Perhaps all this is unnecessary, maybe even foolish, but . . .'

'No, William,' she said. 'We must keep our eyes and ears open. All the time. You should have let me help you, William.'

He took her hand and pressed it.

'My dear!' he said.

She held his hand a moment and then went on.

'There are three cars at the Schwartzes now. They've been there nearly half an hour.'

Mr. Gifford put the paper into a pigeonhole. Then suddenly he pushed back his chair and stood. He strode to the window and peered between the curtains. Then looking back at his wife, he cleared his throat.

'My dear, I've been wondering for some time whether I shouldn't — Whatever I can find out might be useful, some day. At least I should do what I can. Perhaps this is the time . . .'

'William, I think you should,' she replied.

He marched out of the room and into the front hallway, she following. He got into his overcoat. She reached up to the closet shelf.

'Here's your darker hat, William. And turn up your overcoat collar to cover your shirt.'

'I'll go out the back way,' he said.

She nodded and followed him closely again. She opened the back door for him.

'Be careful, William,' she whispered as he went out; then she closed the door behind him, went back into the living room, and picked up her knitting.

Mr. Gifford crossed the boundary line, through a slight gap in the hedge. He circled the Schwartz house carefully. As he had thought, they were all crowded into the big kitchen. He stepped close to the window and peered in

under the shade. Five men including Mr. Schwartz were seated around the table, playing cards. Each man had a glass and a bottle of beer before him, and at opposite corners of the table were plates of thick sandwiches. Mr. Gifford looked closer. Yes, cheese sandwiches. Near the stove sat Mrs. Schwartz and three other women, in rocking chairs, swinging steadily, speaking briefly and soberly back and forth. Two of the women had glasses of beer; Mrs. Schwartz and one other held large heavy cups and saucers. Mr. Gifford glanced at the stove; there sat a big coffee-pot.

One of the men banged a final card upon the table with a show of force as though driving a stake. There was a guttural rumble of remarks around the table as the dealer gathered the cards for a new hand. Mr. Gifford looked behind him quickly and then laid his ear against the window. The man who had slammed down the card was recounting with complete detail what cards he had held and when he had played each and with what result, as of a game the others had not seen, much less participated in. Mr. Gifford turned his head and looked into the room again. The other men were listening to the insistent narrator with fixed glances almost hostile. The dealer began to flip the cards around, the talker paused, each player bent his head and examined his cards as they came, clutching them up to his chest. Mrs. Schwartz was in sustained monologue now; Mr. Gifford put his ear to the window again and heard something about how she had done her pickles that fall.

He sighed and stepped back from the window. He found the path and went quickly to the sidewalk. There he took out card and pencil and copied the cars' license numbers. Then he straightened his shoulders and turned back his overcoat collar. He marched over to his own walk, up to his own house, and went in.

'Well, William!' said Mrs. Gifford, as he appeared in the living room, hat in hand.

'My dear, I think perhaps I let myself be carried away a bit,' he said. 'The men were playing cards and drinking beer, cheese sandwiches and coffee were served, and Mrs. Schwartz was holding forth about pickle-making. The short and simple annals of the poor Schwartzes, my dear.'

'The poor Schwartzes,' said Mrs. Gifford reflectively. 'Well, it's worth knowing, isn't it. It's some relief. If only we could be sure.'

'I'm afraid we can't be sure, my dear,' he said, as he wriggled out of his overcoat. 'I don't intend to be too sure. We'll go on keeping those license numbers. We'll keep our eyes and ears open.'

'I think that's right, William,' she agreed. 'And thank goodness we didn't sell them that strip of land.'

'We'll hold on to that, my dear,' Mr. Gifford declared. 'We'll never let them get any closer.'

(From *The Saturday Evening Post*)

FRENCHMAN'S SHIP

BY KAY BOYLE

THE story about the Frenchman began at the end of September, when the boarding school opened again and the girls started coming regularly to ride. There were perhaps half a dozen of them, slender young girls in jodhpurs, with ribbons tying back their hair, descending like a flock of smooth-throated, sweet-voiced birds upon the riding stables. Year after year they came like this at the changes of the seasons, calling names like Sylvia and Mary-Ann and Veronica after one another as they rode, with their soft hair flying, down the bridle paths of New Jersey in the autumn, and again in March and April and May. But this year the Frenchman was there, a man of thirty-four or five, with scars from the weather marked around his eyes and in the leather of his neck, and the look of romance on his flesh and in his eye.

All they knew of him was that a relief society had fitted him out with the shore clothes he wore and got him the job in the riding stables, and that his ship was being held for the duration on the Hudson's New York side. He did not belong to the stable as Manners and the other men who worked there did; he might simply have been passing through it in borrowed riding breeches, with a borrowed language on his tongue. Whenever it was he instead of the others who took the girls from the boarding school out and showed them how to slack the reins and take the fences, it

seemed he was doing it for just this once, and in some furious spirit of resentment because of what he had been before and what he was this afternoon in autumn. They would turn in their saddles to watch him coming — dark-browed, tough-jawed, with a nameless, almost sullen power in him, his glove's worn leather turned back on his rein hand as he came.

'There's this Frenchman come to work up to the academy with us,' Manners would say in slow, fumbling patience to the barman at the place next to the fire station. 'I've tried to get onto his name, but I can't get it yet,' he'd say, and his mouth would hang open in painful readiness for it, the Adam's apple jerking under the gray bristles in his neck, but none of the syllables would come.

'Well, call him Smith, call him anything,' the barman would say as he wiped the counter dry, 'but let's have the story.'

But for a while there wasn't any story; all summer there were just these few phrases that Manners remembered the Frenchman saying, and he would repeat them slowly, in baffled stupefaction, to the barman or to the men drinking beer, and they would stop talking for a moment about the gas rationing or synthetic rubber or the draft.

'He says he never heard of a ship could dishonor you the way a woman can,' Manners would say, as if seeking the sense of it across the bar. Or he'd say, 'This Frenchman, he was saying to me that when a country loses sight of the north and starts acting like a horse or a woman, then you're better off at a distance from her,' and for a minute or two the men standing there would see the foreigner or some portion of his past. They would see that if one part of the Frenchman's life was ships, then that must be the good part; and if the other side was horses, then horses were the wrong part, as frail and impermanent and vicious to him as women and his country must have been.

At first there was nothing said about the girl called Vivienne, because up until the end of September there wasn't much to say. Vivienne was sixteen that autumn, and this was her first year at the school. She had come down from Boston, where her people were good people, rich people,

whose substance had somehow accomplished, out of generations of decorum, her beauty and her wild, sweet blood. It was in September, when the afternoon riding lesson was done and the other girls had gone up the road on foot with their little black ribbons tied in their hair and their riding crops swinging, that she began staying behind at the stable to watch the Frenchman water the horses or groom them down or lay the bedding in. She did not stay long — perhaps no more than a quarter of an hour at first — and afterward a little longer, saying only a word or two in a low quick voice across the crib's wood to him, with her hair hanging soft and dark to her shoulders, and her eyes moving gravely on his face. There she would linger on the edge of whatever he might be doing, the black, suèdelike jodhpurs she wore going a little too tight at the knees for her now, and her legs as long and giddy-looking as a foal's. Sometimes she'd put red on her mouth, and sometimes she would forget to put it on, the way she'd forget to put the links in the cuffs of her riding shirt, and then she'd roll the silk sleeves of it up and let the slender, tanned arms show.

'It must be funny with no poison ivy over there in France,' she began the conversation the first or the second evening with him, and the Frenchman did not look up from what he was doing, but his voice was bitter when he spoke.

'There're other kinds of poisons over there, don't worry,' he said, and the sound of his accent was music and mystery in her ears.

'You mean poison sumac and poison oak — poisons like that?' she said.

The Frenchman was taking the burs from the horse's tail, and for any sign he gave, the girl leaning on the tooth-nibbled stall watching him in shyness and wonder might never have spoken to him.

But after a little while he said, 'I mean men — women and men,' and he stood erect for a moment and looked at her with hot, impatient eyes.

Manners had seen from the start that the Frenchman could handle horses; he could talk to the beasts in his own or any language, and the skin of their shoulders would ripple and

quiver for him, whatever tongue he spoke. When the door of the stable opened, the horses would turn their heads on their shoulders and look for him coming, and it may have been like this that the girls from the boarding school turned their heads in impatience and watched for him coming too. The Frenchman would let them ride before him, letting them play for a little with the fancy that it was they who led, but whichever direction they took was merely rehearsal for the way he would finally take them. When he spoke the word or gave the sign, the girls' knees pressed in marvelous urgency to their mounts' sides, their flesh as alive as the horses' to the sharp flick of his authority.

In the end, he would always take them up the Palisades path that ran high above the river, and he'd halt them there over the bright, clear avenue of water that lay motionless between the trunks of the trees. He never made any explanation to them; he never said, 'Just down there you can see it,' and he did not shield his eyes with his hand, seeking whatever it was that he had come that high to see. He merely sat there on his horse and looked down the river toward the city, and the spleen was wiped from his face for the time that he stopped there with them, looking through the haze of sun and distance to the other shore.

The explanation of why he came there might never have been given if the lame horse had not started to mend in October, and the Frenchman begun taking him out on the halter at the end of the day when the riding lessons were through. He would turn him back and forth in the yard at first, trotting him once or twice to see the leg's performance, and then he would cross the road with him and take him up the path through the birchwoods where the earth was gentle as moss beneath the foot. He went slowly, bending to see the horse's muscles flex in the hock, and as they walked up through the trees one late afternoon, the Frenchman saw that Vivienne, too, was walking there with them. She was coming along beside him in her black jodhpurs, her face averted a little in shyness from him, the throat's line pure in the open neck of the white silk shirt, and the riding crop she carried lashing softly at the underbrush they passed.

'When we come to a sassafras, I'll show it to you,' she said, as if this was what they had been saying. All about them, as they walked, the woods were silent, filled with the drought and hush of summer's end. 'There're three different leaves on it, one like a mitten with the thumb sticking out, and one like a willow leaf, sort of, and one shaped like a bird — you know, with its wings spread, flying. Maybe you've seen the berries. They're blue, but you mustn't eat them,' she said. Only the soft step of the horse behind them broke the quiet, and the girl shook her hair back, as if uneasily, from her shoulders and tried the conversation again. 'It's funny sassafras doesn't grow over there in France. Do you have lady's-slippers and dogwood? Do you have goldenrod?' she said.

'There's nothing grows over there any more,' he said with the same impatience in his voice. 'Not even the crops grow. For two years the grain has rotted just lying in the soil.'

'I'm majoring in French, you know,' the girl said quickly, and she lashed at the bush beside her with her crop. 'I want to learn to talk it.'

'Talk it?' said the Frenchman. 'Why talk it? It's the language they asked for the armistice in,' he said, his voice hard, quick, contemptuous.

'Not all of them asked for it,' the girl said, and she hit stubbornly and steadily at the underbrush. 'Lots of them are fighting still.'

'Sure, there're Frenchmen fighting,' he said, and when he halted in the path, the horse halted in obedience behind him. He took the flat bottle from the pocket on his hip, and he did not look at the girl as he drank. 'Sure,' he said in derision as he lowered the bottle and wiped off his mouth. 'Sure. You can see their pictures in the paper every day. They got nice uniforms on and they get invited all around New York. I wouldn't speak their language,' he said, and he held the flask of liquid toward her. 'Have a drink. It's brandy. It'll do you good,' he said.

'I don't like the smell of it,' said the girl, and she was thinking of the words he had said. Behind them, the horse lipped the just-turning foliage and churned it, dripping and fragrant in his mouth, to absinthe-colored foam. 'But if it's your lan-

guage,' the girl said, and she stood looking in stubborn, soft-eyed tenderness at the Frenchman's face. 'If it's your language, then you ought to go on talking it, so when you get back to your own people again you won't have forgotten how.'

'My people!' the Frenchman said. 'My people! I haven't any,' he said, and he took another short, quick jerk from the bottle. 'I'm through with my people. They laid down on me,' he said.

'But if you have a home over there, it's still there for you,' she said. 'I mean, if you have a — a wife, or something like that,' she said, and her breath came quickly, in trepidation that it might be true.

'A wife!' said the Frenchman, and he jammed the cork of the flask back with the cushion of his thumb. His mouth seemed ready to burst out laughing, the teeth showing white, the cheeks scarred in the exact facsimile of laughter, except that no sound of it came. He slipped the bottle back in his pocket, and the horse's head was suddenly jerked up on the halter strap as the Frenchman crossed the path to where the girl stood. 'So you think a man goes back, do you?' he said, and his fingers closed on the flesh of her arm. 'You think he goes back to a woman or a country?' he said, and the girl stood shaking her head in soft bewilderment at him.

'Yes,' she said, scarcely aloud, but her eyes did not falter. The Frenchman was so close to her that she could feel his breath upon her face. 'Yes,' she said. 'You go back. If you love them, you go back.'

'Even if they walk out on him, you think he goes back to them?' he said, and he swung around and started savagely up the bridle path, drawing the girl by the arm and the horse on the halter strap in cold, explicit fury with him.

For five minutes or more he drew them like this up the rising land in the woods with him, and when he had reached that place above the river to which he always led the way, he dropped her arm as if she had ceased to exist for him, and he let the horse go free. There he stood near the cliff's edge a little while in silence, his back against a tree trunk, looking down across the water to the other side.

'Look,' he said, and his voice had altered. 'There's my ship,' he said. 'You can see her funnels,' and without taking his eyes from the sight of it down the river, he reached one arm out to the girl and his hand found her shoulder and he drew her quietly and strongly back against him, so that she might see. 'There,' he said. 'You can see her. They haven't been able to get their hands on that much of France.' He leaned against the tree, his arm holding the girl close, neither in tenderness nor passion, but merely as witness before the fact of what remained. 'I'll go out of port when my ship goes,' he said. 'She's my country,' and they did not speak for a little while, their flesh close but impersonal, their eyes fixed on this symbol of his honor set somewhere in the Hudson's deepening haze.

'But what will you do?' the girl said softly to him in a moment. 'How will you bear all the time you have to wait? It's like being in school and waiting for Christmas or Easter to come,' she said.

'Do?' said the Frenchman, and he dropped his arm from around her, and his hand fumbled on his hip and brought out the bottle again. 'I'll have a drink,' he said. 'That makes the time pass.' He lifted the bottle and took another swallow. 'You take a drink and then you don't care much any more,' he said, and he turned his head to see where the horse had wandered. 'You take a drink, and then you're satisfied with the substitutes,' he said, and he put out his hand again and touched her hair with his fingers. 'A substitute for your country,' he said, and he stood there grinning at her, 'and a substitute for living, and even a substitute for what you just called "love."'

'When you're young, I don't think you want substitutes,' the girl said, and her eyes moved in wonder on every piece of his face. 'Because you were at the riding school, I haven't gone to the movies once. I mean, you were real, and nothing's ever been real before for me. This year I don't want holidays to come,' she said. 'I'll hate Christmas coming because I'll have to go away.'

The Frenchman looked at her in indecision a moment, and then he tossed the empty flask away. He took her by the

shoulder, holding her fiercely at arm's length an instant — breakable and slender and young in her white silk shirt, with her legs in the jodhpurs as foolish and helpless-looking as a foal's.

'I like you. I like the way you look. I like the way you talk,' he said, and she did not falter or tremble beneath his hand.

'If you wanted to kiss me, I would like you to,' she said, and the Frenchman stood holding her, with the thing beginning to alter in his face. 'Nobody has ever kissed me,' she said, and the Frenchman dropped his hand from her shoulder, and stepped back as abruptly from her as if some other presence had come up the path and stood between them there.

The first time Manners spoke about Vivienne to the barman and the men at the bar was after what took place on High Street one evening. He said the Frenchman had changed his ways and that, instead of sitting home at night, he'd started taking the bicycle out and riding into town.

'Every evening for the past three weeks,' Manners said, 'he'd come down Main Street on it and turn up High.'

'Probably meeting a Jane,' the barman said, and Manners shook his head slowly.

'I started watching out for him,' Manners said, 'and he never did anything different. He'd just set the bike against the curb, and then he'd stand a long time looking into one of the windows of the stores.' There weren't ships or anything like that in the window, Manners said, when the barman asked. The first night he saw him stop there, there were sweaters and skirts and colored handkerchiefs on show. 'The things changed around quite a bit in the window,' Manners said. 'It looked like the folks who owned the place took a lot of trouble with it. They'd put underwear and nightgowns in it one night, and the next time it would be something else. The only thing that didn't change very much was the girl,' he said, and he watched the foam swing slowly in his glass.

He said the Frenchman would get off the bicycle and stand

it up against the curb, and walk over and start talking to her, and sometimes he'd seem to be talking quietly to her, and other times he'd talk short and quick, as if he were laying down the law. 'Sometimes she'd be wearing a kind of red wool dress and a big red hat,' Manners said, 'and sometimes she'd have a party dress on, and sometimes she'd have trousers, and the nights when she'd be wearing something he hadn't seen before, he seemed to have more to say.' Manners picked up his glass of beer and drank a little from it. 'The night she was wearing nothing but the kind of white lace pants and the brasseer, he was pretty sore,' he said.

'Now, wait a minute,' said the barman. 'Let's get this straight. You mean to say some girl comes right down High Street to meet this Frenchman and she's got nothing on but a brasseer and a pair of white lace —'

'No,' said Manners slowly. 'This girl, this model like, she's up there inside the window. She couldn't walk down the street. She's made out of wax, or wood, or something like that, to you and me; but to him she must be something different. Maybe she looks like somebody he used to know somewheres else,' he said, and he stopped talking for a moment. 'And then last night this thing happened,' he said. 'This girl they call Vivienne, this girl from the boarding school, she came walking up High Street with her brother, and the Frenchman was standing there the way he'd been doing every night in spite of the weather, and they stopped there and started in talking to him. And after a while,' he said slowly, still trying to get to the heart of it, 'him and this girl's brother, they started in to fight.'

Vivienne's brother was up from camp on twenty-four-hours leave and he called for her at the boarding school on Saturday night, and he walked up High Street toward the movie house with her, wearing his khaki uniform, and his neat little cap on his head. It was dark, and the store windows were lit, and people were loitering a little because the night had moderated, and the girl opened her fur coat at the neck. She and her brother had come past the cut-rate drug-store, and they were passing the women's notion shop when the girl saw the Frenchman was halted there. He was wear-

ing riding breeches, and his jacket collar was turned up, and even with his back turned to them there was something singularly dissolute in the set of his shoulders, and his hands thrust into his pockets, as if he alone were derelict and out-cast among the safely and permanently established of the town.

'There's the Frenchman,' the girl said, and she felt her heart beat swiftly in her throat. 'There's the Frenchman we go riding with,' she said.

In the window before which he stood were stockings on elegantly turned legs, and satin slips and colored bandannas on display, but they were less than nothing, they served scarcely as background even for the wax model in the lace-trimmed underthings who sat on a stool under the bright electric glare. Her limbs and her face were as smooth as marble and one hand was raised, and the delicate, pointed fingers curved, as if to adjust the platinum wig that lay on her flawless brow. Her scarlet lips were slightly parted, and between them the teeth showed small and even as pearls; but her eyes were a harlot's — they were fixed on the Frenchman in bold blue insolence through the window's glass. It was only when the girl and her brother stood beside him that they saw he was talking to her under his breath, speaking in a fierce, bitter voice, as if in reproach or anger, to the wax figure sitting brazenly on show.

'Hello,' said Vivienne's brother, and he stood before the Frenchman and smiled his frank young smile. When he spoke, the Frenchman turned his head and looked at him a moment, looked slowly and uncertainly at him, as if returning a long and troubled way from wherever it was that he had been. His hair was in disorder, and the weathered skin of his neck was flushed, and his eyes moved beyond the brother and found Vivienne's face, and he swayed a little. 'Well, what do you think of her?' he said, and he jerked his chin toward the model in the window.

'I think she's beautiful,' she said, and the Frenchman drew his lips back, but still he did not smile.

'Lots of other people did too,' he said. 'That's what she wanted. She needed it the way you might need a drink or

something. If I wasn't there, she'd get it from somebody else. When I found out, I signed up and cleared out,' he said. 'I knew when I was through.'

'She's beautiful,' the girl said again, *and because of her or someone exactly like her*, she thought, *he didn't kiss me; because he knew someone like that once, he's faithful still, and he will always be.* 'Perhaps if you're as beautiful as that, it doesn't matter what you do,' she said, and her brother glanced uneasily at her.

'Look here,' he said. 'The show'll be beginning —'

'Yes,' said Vivienne. 'Yes, it will,' she said, and she stood looking into the Frenchman's face as if she could never look away.

'Women,' the Frenchman said, and he stood swaying a little and looking through the window at the model. 'I know all about women I want to know,' he said. He had his hands in his pockets still, and in the same low, almost lazy voice he began saying the words of abuse to her, pronouncing them in separate venom to the model seated in insolence on the other side of the glass. 'Men putting on uniforms to fight for women, fighting for a woman or a country!' he said, and now he began laughing the way the girl had seen him laugh before — without any sound of it being heard. He stood there, his lips shaped in derision for it, his eyes turned in stupor on them, and Vivienne's brother in his neat little uniform squared back from him and his fist swung forward and caught the Frenchman swiftly on the jaw.

Everything seemed to halt in the instant that his head jerked back. The people in the street ceased walking, the breath ceased coming; even the Frenchman paused for a moment, as if suspended, before he took his hands from the pockets of his riding breeches and the color poured dark into his face. But Vivienne stood between them now.

'Don't,' she said, 'oh, don't,' in a small, cold voice to the Frenchman, and her hand lay for an instant on the stuff of his open shirt, against the fury and venom of his breast. 'Look at your hands; oh, look at them!' she said in a soft but terrible voice to him, and the tears were running down her face. 'Look at the dirt on them! Look at your clothes, look

at your shoes!' she said in grief to him. 'Oh, look at yourself!' she cried. 'You don't belong to any country!' The tears were coming fast, like a child's tears, and she closed her fists tight in the tan fur of her coat. 'You can't fight. Don't try to,' she said in a quick, cold whisper to him. 'You haven't anything left to fight for,' she said.

The people had pressed in on them now, and Vivienne's brother drew her back on his arm.

'He's drunk,' he said, and the Frenchman made no move and gave no sign that he had heard. He lifted his two hands, as a reprimanded schoolboy might, and looked at the black-rimmed nails a little uncertainly. 'He's drunk,' Vivienne's brother said again, and the Frenchman fumbled his shirt in at the belt and smoothed his hands back on his hair. 'Come on, Vivienne,' her brother said, and the tears fell hotly down her face.

And then it was Manners who walked out from the people and who put his arm through the Frenchman's and led him quietly away.

The Christmas holidays came and went, and January passed, and nothing more about the Frenchman might ever have been said. Except that he walked into the bar with Manners one bleak February afternoon, and the two of them stood at the counter, a little apart from the others, and each had a glass of beer. The barman and the others had never laid eye on the Frenchman before, and it was only from the sound of the accent when he spoke that they knew this must be he. It may have been that there was some difference in him even then, for he didn't speak about women, as Manners had told them he did, and his hair seemed neatly done. If it hadn't been for the look of gravity that marked his face, thought the barman, he was giving and taking the talk about the possibility of gas rationing and the shortage of rubber not like a foreigner with his back up against them, but as easily as any native would.

'There isn't so much call for saddle horses this time of year,' the barman said by way of conversation, and he wiped the rings of wet from the wood.

The Frenchman leaned on his folded arms on the bar,

and after a moment he said quietly, 'I haven't been out for over a month with any of the boarding-school girls.'

'Well, first there was the holidays,' Manners said, as if to save him from the implications of it. 'And then there was the bad weather, and then the examinations beginning, and the war on top of that,' he said, and he ordered the Frenchman another glass of beer.

But before the barman had time to set it down before him, the street door was pulled quickly, almost wildly open, and the girl came in and stopped short in confusion an instant just inside the dimly lighted room. She was wearing the tan fur coat they had heard about before, and as the door eased to behind her, they saw her legs, thin and impatient as a filly's, cut dark as paper against the afternoon's white light.

'Listen,' she began saying through the anguish of having to take breath. 'Something's happened, something's happened,' she said. She was looking blindly toward the counter where they stood, and what she was saying might have been meant for any of them, and the young, despairing look given in supplication to any of them there. But they knew that she was speaking to the Frenchman and, as unequivocally as though she had spelled it out for them, they recognized the syllables of her name.

The Frenchman glanced at her once, and then he folded his arms and leaned on the bar again. 'I'm drunk,' he said in a quiet voice, and he looked straight at the beer before him. 'I'm drunk again,' he said in a quiet irony. 'You'd better not come too near.'

'If there's anything left you care about,' the girl cried out from the door, 'you've got to listen to me! If you're still a Frenchman or still a man, or if anything matters to you any more, you've got to come!' she cried, and her voice was shaking, and the tears were standing brilliant in her eyes. 'Your ship's on fire. Your ship's burning,' she said in desperation to him, and the Frenchman's face went as white as paper, but still he did not move. 'I've got a taxi at the corner. We can get there in twenty minutes,' she said, and the Frenchman pushed suddenly past the others and started toward the doorway. When he got to the girl he passed her, too, like a man

gone blind, and she caught the door as he let it go, and she ran out after him up the street.

In the taxi she told him that an aunt of hers down from Boston had telephoned from New York and asked her to come in and have lunch with her one day. And they'd fixed the date for Wednesday in the Chatham gardens. 'I think it was Wednesday we said we'd meet,' she kept on saying softly and breathlessly to him as they rode. And then when the telephone conversation was almost done, her aunt had said, 'You know, there's a ship burning on the Hudson. I can see the smoke from the hotel window,' or else she had said, 'You know, they turned in a thirty-five fire-alarm call this afternoon because that big French ship's on fire. They say half the city's population is down there looking on.'

'And I went running out of the school as if I'd gone crazy,' Vivienne said, her voice still breathless and unsteady, and the Frenchman rode on the seat beside her with his face turned in the direction in which the water would be. 'I ran all the way to the riding academy, and you weren't there, and the men there said you'd gone into town with Manners. So I got a taxi, and I tried three bars — I knew you'd be in a bar,' she said in soft defiance to him — 'but it wasn't until the third that you were standing there.'

'All right, I was in a bar,' said the Frenchman, his face turned in bitterness toward the window as they rode. 'I was in a bar, but I was sober. I've been staying sober ever since then — ever since that night,' he said. 'I've learned that much about substituting one thing for another. The next time someone hits me, I'm going to be able to hit back,' he said.

They were driving across the bridge now, and the Frenchman sat grim and tight-lipped, watching the smoke that lay along the farther shore. The taxi carried them as close to it as they could get, and the Frenchman jumped out and looked once at the crowd and at the boat beyond. In spite of the smoke and the people and the number of firemen working there, to the Frenchman it was nothing at all at first — it was a little mistake in the wiring, a breakdown in the insulation; it was something that would be adjusted in a minute or two. He ran across the street with that singular

confidence in him. But once the girl and the Frenchman were as far as the ropes where the police and the reporters stood, they could see that the great, tall ship was grievously, perhaps fatally burning.

For the Frenchman it was just a matter of pausing there a moment before going on board. But once he had stooped and gone under the rope, a policeman stopped him.

'I'm one of the crew,' the Frenchman said quickly, and because he thought at first that maybe it was his accent that kept the policeman from understanding, he kept repeating it to him. 'I'm one of the men off the ship,' he said, with a passion hot enough for anger. He said he'd worked nearly three years on her, and lame, halt or blind, he knew every inch of her, abovedecks and below. 'They've never been on her before, they don't know their way around!' he said, and he kept on saying it, believing still that in a minute they would let him swing up the hanging ladder on her flank, breathe as his own the density of smoke on deck and smoke below, and pass, accredited at last, down the smoldering stairs and hallways to her blazing heart. 'I'm one of the crew; I could do it in my sleep!' he said. 'You can't keep me off her! I could do it with my eyes put out! I'm one of the crew; that's my ship!' he kept saying, and 'Ah, France, France,' his despair may have found the words for the first time to cry aloud. 'You can't keep me from getting on and helping them out,' he said, but the policeman walked back to the ropes with him and, once there, the Frenchman stooped as a man moving in a dream, might have stooped, and passed in among the spectators to exile and banishment again.

When the crowd broke, the girl and the Frenchman crossed the avenue together and, as inevitably as if no other place of refuge offered, they went into the seamen's bar. The Frenchman led the way past the tables where the sightseers, come to the ship's demise as to a wake, sat drinking, leading her to some measure of quiet and obscurity in the recessed corner of the farthest wall. He did not speak after he had ordered the two drinks, and when the waiter set the two glasses down before them he did not start to drink. *And how can I speak now of how poison ivy grows or the shape of the sassafras*

leaves? the girl thought, sitting in numb despair beside him. *For now there must be the words for a woman to say, but I do not know what they are.*

In a moment the Frenchman lifted his glass and took a swallow from it.

'My boat's gone,' he said in a quiet voice, and his face was bleak. 'My boat's gone. I'm through.'

The waiter came a step nearer and his eyes sharpened on the Frenchman's face and then moved to the girl.

'He's French?' he said, and the girl looked up and nodded.

'That was his ship out there?' the waiter said, and when he had the answer he walked away.

'Maybe you think I'm a coward; maybe you think I'm a drunk, you and your brother,' the Frenchman said when the waiter was gone, and he looked without interest at the glass the girl pushed from her place to his. 'Maybe that's why I started staying sober. I don't know. But it's not love!' he cried out in impatience. 'Don't get the idea I'm talking about love!'

'I know,' said the girl, and she thought of the wax limbs and the platinum hair of the model in the window, and her voice was humble. 'Please,' she said. 'I know.'

'It was just you making me see myself, just once like that,' he said, and he looked at the nails of his hand a minute. 'They're clean,' he said, 'and my shirt's clean, and I'm sober, but my ship's gone and I'm through.'

But listen, listen, the girl's heart cried out in silence to him; *listen to the sound of love and the sound of reality speaking at last. Your ship's gone, and the model in the window, if you looked at her long enough, she would run to wax in the sun. But the other things are there, her heart cried out to him; they are there as clearly now as if nothing had ever stood between. Your country's there, and the woman with platinum hair, the wife or whatever she was, is somewhere.*

And then the other man, whom they had not seen cross the room and stop beside the table, pulled out the third chair and sat down and faced them casually.

'Salut,' he said in a low, easy voice to the Frenchman, and

he put out his hand. He was a youngish man, perhaps a seafaring man, with his dark shirt open at the neck and his cap worn on the side of his head. 'Frenchman to Frenchman, have a drink with me,' he said, and the two men shook hands. The waiter was lingering near the table. 'Bring us two brandies,' the man with the cap on said, and then he looked at the other Frenchman. 'Lost your boat?' he said quietly. 'Lost her out there through accident or sabotage?'

'Yes,' said the Frenchman, and they spoke their own language together.

'I've lost mine on purpose,' said the stranger. 'Docked from Marseille three days ago. I've skipped her. I'm going north tonight,' he said.

'North?' said the Frenchman, and the girl sat watching him. 'North?' he repeated, and nothing flickered in his face.

'You don't ask questions about it, you act,' said the other man in the same low casual voice. The waiter put the glasses of brandy on the table before them. 'That's all you're expected to do,' the stranger said.

'And then what?' said the Frenchman. He was leaning forward on the table now, and his eyes did not leave the other man's face.

'You take part in the show,' said the man with the cap. 'You cross the frontier and get into it.' He looked at the clock on the wall above them. 'Stay around a half hour and we'll move out together,' he said.

For a moment, no more words were spoken at the table, and then the two men — as if moved by an identical conviction or emotion — lifted their brandy glasses and touched them together as the simplest Frenchmen do before they drink, and each drank his hot little glass of brandy down.

That was the way it ended; it ended when the Frenchman turned to the girl beside him at the table and spoke, with the taste of English gone suddenly alien on his tongue.

'You'd better be starting back,' he said, as if speaking to a child who had wandered this far from home with him. 'We'll be clearing out soon, so you'd better not hang around.'

'Yes,' said the girl, and she stood up and looked at his face, but he and the stranger in the cap were talking together

again. 'Yes, I'll go back to school,' she said; and *Yes, yes*, she said in silence, *this is the way I wanted it to finish, this is the way it had to be.* *Yes, yes, yes*, she said, and she set her teeth hard against any of the broken or whimpering sounds of sorrow as she walked out alone through the tables, her hair as long as a little girl's on her shoulders, her hands in the pockets of her schoolgirl coat; and she did not look back at the door.

THE PLEASURES OF SOLITUDE

BY JOHN CHEEVER

ONE evening when Ellen Goodrich had just returned from the office to her room in Chelsea, she heard a light knock on her door. She knew no one in the city intimately; there was no one she could expect. She opened the door and found two small boys standing in the hallway. She supposed they were ten or eleven. Their clothing was thin and they were shaking with cold.

'Florence Valle live here?' one of them asked.

'I don't know anyone by that name,' Ellen said. 'Perhaps if you ask the landlady — she lives on the first floor.'

'We're looking for Florence Valle. She's his cousin,' the second boy said, pointing to his friend. 'She used to live here.'

'I'm very sorry,' Ellen said, 'but I don't know her.'

'Maybe she's moved,' he said. 'We walked all the way over here. . . .'

Ellen very seldom felt that she could afford pity and sympathy for other people, but the boys looked frightened and cold, and her desire to help them was stronger than her reserve. She noticed them staring beyond her to a dish of candy in the room. When she invited them to have a piece, they refused with a shy and elaborate politeness that made her want to take them in her arms. She suggested that they each take a piece of candy home and went into the room for the dish. They followed her.

'You got a nice place here, Miss.'

'Yuh, you got a nice place here.'

Their faces were thin and solemn and their voices were hoarse.

'Haven't you any overcoats, you boys?' she asked. 'Are you going around in the cold dressed like that?'

'We ain't got any overcoats, Miss.'

'I should think you'd take cold, walking around like that.'

'We ain't got any overcoats.'

They told her their names and ages when she asked for them, and said that they lived on the lower East Side. She had walked through the slums herself and she could imagine the squalor and neglect in which they must live. While she was talking with them, she realized that it was the first time in more than a year that she had allowed anyone other than the landlady to come into her room. Having the boys there pleased her and she kept asking them questions until she caught the tone of her own excited voice. She stopped abruptly. 'I guess you had better go now,' she said. 'I have some things to do.' They thanked her for the candy and backed out of the room. Altogether, the encounter left her feeling generous and happy.

Ellen was not a generous person. She lived in a Chelsea rooming house in order to bank as much of her salary as possible toward purchasing an annuity. It had always been difficult for her to find friends. During the ten years she had lived in New York she had suffered a great deal from loneliness, but this suffering was forgotten now because of the care with which she arranged her solitude. She could be unmerciful with herself and others. Her mother had once written asking if she would help her younger brother with a loan. 'I think it will be better,' Ellen replied, 'if Harold experiences a little hardship. It is only in knowing hardship that he can understand the value of money. I don't pretend to be poor, but the little I have in the bank was put by at a great sacrifice and I have no intention of lending it to Harold when we all know that he could have done as well himself if he tried. I think he owes it to you to do more than I have

done, for after all you and Father spent more on his education than you spent on mine.' She was twenty-eight at the time.

After the boys had gone that night, Ellen changed from her dress into a house coat and cooked her supper. The cold wind rattled the windows and made her appreciate the warm, light room. She washed the dishes and sat down to read a rental-library book. This was the way she spent most of her evenings, and she was proud of the fact that she was no longer restless and lonely. But her mind kept returning to the boys. She saw their thin, solemn faces, and when she thought of them walking in the cold she was filled with sadness and pity. Her uneventful life led her to attach significance to the few irregular things that happened to her. There was some purpose, she felt, some reason for this accidental meeting.

A week later, at the same hour, there was a knock on the door and she found the boys in the hallway again.

'We were walking by.'

'We thought we'd come to see you.'

'Well, I'm very glad you stopped,' Ellen said, and realized that her voice could be heard by the other tenants whose doors opened into the hallway. There was nothing wrong in what she was doing, but at the same time she didn't want the other tenants to know that she was asking strange boys into her room, so she waited until she had closed the door after them before she spoke again. 'I'm very glad you stopped,' she repeated. She invited them to sit down. Then she thought of giving them a drink of Coca-Cola, but this seemed a little too forward. They told her they were Italian, and she asked them if they knew how to make a veal *parmigiana*, something she had always wanted to learn. They didn't know, but they told her about other Italian dishes. One of the boys, the older, seemed interested in some ornaments on Ellen's dresser and she showed them to him. The younger boy took a cigarette end from his pocket and lighted it.

'Aren't you too young to smoke?' Ellen asked.

He looked at his friend and they both giggled. Ellen colored. The looks they exchanged and their laughter

frightened her. 'Those are called maracas,' she said nervously, pointing to a pair of painted maracas that hung on the wall. 'I bought them when I went for a Caribbean cruise in 1933. They use them in orchestras in the Caribbean.'

The incident of the cigarette seemed to have made the boys feel more at ease. Ellen might have asked them to leave, but she hesitated. The younger boy put out his cigarette in her pin tray and she watched him without saying anything. She was enjoying herself in a way she could not quite understand. They told her stories about their families, about their sisters, stories that were sly and lewd and that she should have stopped them from telling. At the end of half an hour she asked them to leave. They had been gone for some time before she discovered that her purse was missing.

If they had been in the room then, she might have murdered them. She took hold of the back of a chair and held it rigidly until her arms and her shoulders ached. 'They don't have to steal!' she cried. 'They don't have to steal! They don't have to!' She threw herself onto the bed and wept for a long time. When she sat up, she composed a discourse on honesty and imagined herself delivering it to them. She thought of calling the police, but when she tried to describe what had happened as if she were talking to the police, it sounded unconvincing and even suspicious. She went into the bathroom and washed her face with a cold cloth. 'They don't have to steal,' she said. 'They don't have to steal. I would have given them money if they need money.' She walked the floor, talking angrily to herself.

In the morning, Ellen decided to forget about the boys; it was better to lose the fifteen or twenty dollars that had been in her purse than to lose her peace of mind. Usually she could forget things that troubled her, but this time it was not so easy. In the back of her mind was the feeling she had somehow made a mistake that threatened her whole way of living. A few nights later, on a Wednesday, someone knocked on the door again. She opened it and found the two boys standing in the corridor.

She should have been prepared. She had rehearsed often enough the things she wanted to say, but now, when she tried

to speak, she could think of nothing. 'Come in here,' she said finally. 'Come in here, both of you. I want to speak to you.' They followed her into the room. 'You don't have to steal,' she said. 'You ought to know that you don't have to steal.' Her voice had risen and she was trembling so that she had to lean against the wall. 'If you need money, if you really need money, there are honest ways of getting it. You stole my purse. When you were here last time.'

'We didn't steal nothing, Miss.'

'We ain't thieves.'

'Well, there's no use in standing here arguing about it,' she said. 'Get out.'

'Give us five dollars, Miss.'

'Get out,' Ellen said. 'Get out of here before I call a policeman!'

They backed out of the room and she closed and locked the door and listened to them going down the hall. That night she dreamed about them. She could not remember the details of the dream clearly, but when she woke up she was depressed and frightened. Her sleep was troubled for the rest of that week. On Friday she felt that she was coming down with a cold and got permission to leave the office at noon. She picked up a book at a rental library and bought some groceries for dinner.

In spite of her illness, she enjoyed her solitude more that afternoon than she had for some time. She read until dusk. Before turning on the light, she went to the window to draw the shade. A swift snow was falling slantwise between her window and the back yards. She bathed and went to bed at seven, slightly feverish. She was half asleep when she heard them knocking on the door. She remembered that she had forgotten to put the latch down. They talked for a while in the hall, knocked again, and then pushed the door open. When they saw her lying on the bed, they went over and stared at her.

'You sick, Miss?'

'Please leave me alone,' she said weakly. 'Please get out.'

'We want some money, Miss.'

'Can't you see that I'm sick?' she said. It was an effort for her to talk. 'Please get out. I haven't any money.'

One of them saw her purse on the table. He went to it, removed the change purse, and started to take out the bills. She got out of bed and struck him, but he already had the money in his hand. She tried to get it away from him, but he was stronger than she; he was able to free his hand, and both boys ran out of the room and down the hall. She stood in the doorway shouting, 'Mrs. Duval, Mrs. Duval!' There was no answer, and she threw herself on the bed, too sick and tired to cry. Ten minutes later the landlady knocked on the door and asked what the matter was. Ellen told her she thought she had heard some strange men in the corridor and that the lock on the front door should be fixed.

The next morning, Ellen decided to move. It was not easy for her, but she was desperate. One of the girls in her office recommended a rooming house on East Thirty-Seventh Street, and Ellen went there that night and engaged a place. She took her possessions over the following night in a taxi. The new room was not as pleasant as the one she had left, but she tried hard to make it seem familiar. She felt that in a way she was beginning a new life.

She walked to the rooming house the next night from the office. It was raining hard, and as she turned off Madison Avenue onto Thirty-Seventh Street she saw them standing in front of the house staring up at the windows. The rain was cold and the boys were without hats and coats. She walked down to Thirty-Fourth Street and ate her dinner in a restaurant there. It was eight o'clock before she started back, and they had gone. She went to her room, set her umbrella in a saucer, and changed from her wet dress into her house coat. Someone knocked on the door and she opened it and they were standing there.

'How did you know I was living here?'

'The lady in the other place told us.'

'For once and for all, get out. Leave me alone, leave me alone, can't you?' She took her umbrella and struck the younger one on the shoulders with all her strength. He fell to his knees and then to the floor and she continued to beat him while the other began shrieking, 'Help! Police! Police!' so that his voice could be heard in the street.

THE DREAM OF ANGELO ZARA

BY GUIDO D'AGOSTINO

UNFORTUNATELY for Angelo Zara the dream happened on Saturday night, and on Sunday there was no work and nothing to do but talk about it. Unfortunately he had to tell it to Matteo (Big Mouth) Grossi, who lived downstairs in the same building. But most unfortunate of all was the fact that he wasn't built for a dream of such terrific and far-reaching proportions.

In the morning when Angelo Zara awoke in his furnished room on the top floor of the tenement building on Bleeker Street he was seized with a violent trembling sensation. He realized that he had actually been in the Villa Torlonia and what had happened had happened right before his very eyes and every word and gesture that had taken place was just as clear in his mind as the tips of his toes sticking out from under the bed sheet. He wanted to get up right away and rush downstairs to see his friend Matteo Grossi, the brick-layer; but then he remembered it was Sunday, and on Sunday Matteo had a passion for sleeping late. Once when Matteo's kid accidentally shot off his cap pistol before going to church, Matteo had leaped up out of the bed in a frenzy and held the child screaming out of the window. Angelo Zara did not approve of this kind of violence, but after all a friend was a friend, and who was the man without some failing in one way or another? Just the same he didn't rush downstairs. He sat in his little room under the tenement

roof, dressing slowly and going over every angle of the miraculous dream. Now and then his fingers would pause on a button and his features would light with an ecstatic glow mingled with bewilderment. He couldn't believe that such a dream had actually happened to him.

At fifteen minutes after nine, dressed in a clean shirt and wearing his good pants and his black Sunday shoes, he knocked on the door of Matteo Grossi's flat. There came the shuffling slippered footsteps of Mathilda Grossi and the door opened. '*Bon giorno, compare Angelo,*' Mathilda greeted, stepping to one side for him to enter.

'Matteol' Angelo said in a hushed voice, 'He is up, no?'

'Ma, sure,' Mathilda smiled.

Angelo followed her through the foyer and into the flat. In the bathroom he found Matteo shaving. One side of his face was lathered and the other side was already finished, but there still remained the cleft of his chin, and this was the most difficult part of all. Angelo Zara sat down on the edge of the bathtub and waited. He held his hands nervously in his lap, lost in the excitement of thoughts which packed his brain. As Matteo Grossi gave a last finishing stroke with the razor and reached for a towel, he blurted, 'Last night, Matteo! Mussolini! He die. In the Villa Torlonia he kick the bucket!'

The towel fell from Matteo Grossi's hands. His square rugged face gaped in amazement. 'Where you hear this?'

'No place,' Angelo Zara answered. 'Was there me. Plain. Joost like I stand in front you now. In that big room with the automatico bed that go down in the cellar when they have the airs raid.'

Matteo Grossi picked up the towel again. 'Bah, was joost a dream.'

'Sure,' Angelo said, growing excited. 'Sure was joost a dream. But such a dream like never before I have in my life. Ma, plain! Plain like Jesu Cristo, you face. Mussolini he there on the bed. He gonna die and I watch. On his face is a big soomprise. Like he never believe he gonna die like this. Great big Mussolini gonna die joost like anybody else. He no can onderstand —'

'Was the pizza you eat last night,' Matteo said. 'The pizza and sleep is a bad combinash. Is like worms in the stomach.' Nonetheless a change had come into his voice. He put on his shirt and walked out of the bathroom and through the living room and into the kitchen and sat down at the table. Angelo followed and sat across the table from him, while Mathilda set out an extra cup and poured coffee. Matteo tasted the coffee. He picked up a loaf of bread, broke off a chunk and handed the loaf to Angelo. 'Was joost you and Mussolini there?' he asked.

'Joost Il Duce and myself,' Angelo Zara replied. He made a movement with his hand to indicate the vast silence of the scene. 'On the fireplace from the marble de Carrara was the clock. Solid gold! And the hands silver. And could hear, ticka-tocka, ticka-tocka, ticka-tocka. When Mussolini he see me there he look in soomprise and he say, "Who you?"'

Mathilda moved over from the stove, staring at him as if he'd lost his mind. She was about to say something but her husband waved her out of the kitchen. '*Sangue de la Madonna*, how many time I tell you when man talk politic no mix yourself up?' He turned to the table again. 'And watch you say, Angelo, when Mussolini ask, who you?'

'What was I gonna tell him?' Angelo said. 'I come to America from twenty years now and I press in the pants factory. What I was, gonna lie? Was the man gonna live maybe five minutes and I was gonna make up the storia about be rich or something like that! I tell the truth.' He hunched his shoulders, undecided, wondering if maybe he'd said the wrong thing.

Matteo Grossi scratched his head disapprovingly. 'Could say you was foreman in the factory. Was no too big lie, because last years the boss he proomise you that. Is no good tell politish like Mussolini the truth. He only believe half watch you say.' He let out a deep breath. 'If was only me there —' He stared at Angelo as if the rare opportunities of life always came to the wrong people. 'Then what happen?'

'Then what happen happen the most curioose thing like you will never believe,' Angelo Zara went on. 'From the window on the garden come the moon very bright and I can

seen him in the bed better from before even. But is no the Mussolini like you see in the paper and in the moonpitch. Is an old man with the face green like cheese and with the black line under the eyes. He get up lilla bit in the bed and he say, "Is true, Angelo, you have good life in America? Is true all the things what they say? Is true everybody have the chance there like everybody else?"'

'Yeah, yeah —'

'And then more curioose than before even,' Angelo said. 'Mussolini he fall back on the bed with big —' exhaling a deep breath to indicate a sigh. 'He close his eyes and then he open them again. Is choke and is the pain inside I can see. But joost the same he talk. "Angelo," he say, "si I give you a job with my governmento, three thousand lire for month, you stay here with me?"' He crossed his hands over his chest. '*Su mia madre!* I swear. He say that to me.'

'And watch you say?' Matteo Grossi exclaimed hanging onto every word, pushing his coffee cup aside.

'I say, no.'

'Goddam fool!' Matteo Grossi shouted. 'Is salario like a general. More. Badoglio he never make so much money.'

'But I no wanna go back to Italy,' Angelo Zara said. 'I like here. I satisfy. What the hell I know I gonna find over there. Maybe two days Mussolini like me no more and I get the castor olio. Oh no. I no wants that propzish. Is no for me. Maybe for you is all right.'

'Go to hell Il Duce,' Matteo Grossi said. 'Without contract I no trust him from here across the table. But three thousand lire! You say no too fast. If was me I make him come up to five thousand before I say no. Make you look more big. And after that?'

'Was nothing,' Angelo answered. 'Then he die. And was terrible to look. Stink in the room like never I smell before. And on the face was the expresh like somebody who have no more friend and no care what happen no more —'

'And finish,' Matteo Grossi said.

'Finish,' Angelo Zara added with a sigh. 'But such a dream, and so plain like this coffee now.'

For a few minutes Matteo Grossi was silent. Then his eyes

spread like two peeled potatoes and he jumped up from the table. 'Is a dream for Ignazio Ferro. Come on, we see what Ignazio Ferro say.' Without letting Angelo finish his coffee he grabbed him by the arm and hurried him out of the flat in search of Ignazio Ferro, the shoemaker.

Walking along Bleeker Street in the quiet Sunday morning sunlight. Matteo Grossi became more and more enamored of the dream. 'Imagine, Mussolini with the automatic bed!' he laughed. 'And the clock go ticka-tocka, ticka-tocka, and he die joost like any poor salamambitch you and me. Ho ho! And he wants make you general for five thousand lire for month.' He wagged his head. 'Where that salamangonia, Ignazio? Wait we tell that to him. He study dreams. I betch this mean something like never we can imagine —'

'Was no five thousand lire,' Angelo Zara corrected. 'Was only three thousand. And was joost a job, no general, like you say.'

'The same differenza,' Matteo Grossi exclaimed with a vague gesture. He stopped suddenly. 'Salamambitch! Like that Mussolini he spend the money from the poor people what pay the tax! For what? Watch you know how to do in the governmento?' Then he grinned and continued walking. 'Ticka-tocka, ticka-tocka! Was me I say, Goddam right, America foist-class place. Where in Italia I can have house with the hot and cold water and the toilet inside, and the Forda like what I got here? All right, I not got the gas no more, but joost the same I got the Forda.'

Ahead, on the corner, they spied Ignazio Ferro. His squat rotund figure was propped against a lamp post and he was chewing a toothpick and twirling the ends of his huge iron-gray mustache. Angelo started to hurry toward him, but Matteo Grossi held him back. 'Wait. Angelo! Leave me talk. If you tell him you spoil everything. Is no dream for you this kind dream.'

'But was my dream!' Angelo Zara exclaimed. His small shriveled face assumed a hurt expression. 'Was happen to me, not you. Why you mix up in my dream? Why you no leave me alone?'

'All right, is your dream. But for the part where Mussolini he give you the job, that belongs to me. That you let me tell, yes?'

'All right,' Angelo agreed. 'Joost that lilla part.'

However, when they came up to Ignazio Ferro, Matteo Grossi planted his huge bricklayer's body in front of the shoemaker and before Angelo could open his mouth to draw a breath, he said. 'Watch you think, Ignazio? Last night Mussolini he die.'

'Please, Matteo,' Angelo begged. 'Was you have this dream or was me?'

'Never mind,' Matteo Grossi said. 'Is a dream like this no belong one man. Is pooblic property. We in America here. Everything for everybody.'

Thrusting Angelo Zara aside he told the shoemaker the dream from beginning to end, pointing it up here and there, giving it the little artistic touches. Angelo Zara listened, tears beginning to glitter. His voice was a squeak, his entreaties futile against the booming thunderous speech of Matteo (Big Mouth) Grossi. 'And salamangonio,' Matteo finished off, 'in front my eyes he was dead. And was a stink in the room like one million rotten sardines. And his facel Was no more the face of a man! Was the face of the devil who have lose his best wife.'

As Matteo Grossi's words died away, even Angelo stood with his mouth open, as if he'd been hearing the dream for the first time. The shoemaker continued to pick his teeth in silence. Both Angelo Zara and Matteo Grossi waited breathless for his verdict. But in the matter of dreams, Ignazio Ferro didn't slap together verdicts like he slapped heels on a pair of shoes. He had to turn the dream over in his mind, give it proper consideration. Waiting for him to speak, Angelo thought it only right to set him straight on the ownership of the dream. 'Was like Matteo say, but was my dream, Ignazio. And was —'

Ignazio Ferro didn't answer. He simply removed the toothpick from his mouth and gave him a look. That was all. The rest of the sentence died on Angelo's lips.

'Is a dream with big significanza,' Ignazio Ferro said finally.

'Very big. Is a dream I have to speculate.' He glanced up at Matteo Grossi, at the same time pensively twirling the end of his mustache. 'You sure was no Count Ciano in the room there?'

Angelo Zara shook his head vigorously. Matteo said, 'Sure we sure. Ciano is no a cockroach he can hide in the floor.'

'Very big significanza,' the shoemaker repeated, his voice low and mysterious. He half closed his eyes and spread out his hand before him. 'Is mean the finish for Mussolini. Is mean the finish for Il Fascismo, like I have been say for ten years. Is miracolo, this dream!'

Angelo Zara listened out of a haze. The shoemaker's words became like music, like the sound of a muted heavenly voice in his ears. He, Angelo Zara, had dreamed a miracle — a dream that would make him the envy of the whole neighborhood.

'Seel' Matteo Grossi exclaimed, slapping him on the shoulder. 'See what I tell you! Is no for you this kind dream. Is too big.' He turned abruptly from Angelo and locked arms with the shoemaker. 'We wake up Amalfio. We get Alfredo and Beppo. Salamangonia miracolo this dream we must tell the whole world. We get the priest too.'

The shoemaker stiffened. 'No the priest! For the kids and for confess the women the priest all right. But for the dream is need specialize study. No priest.'

'Then, no priest,' Matteo Grossi said.

They started along the street, walking arm in arm. Angelo Zara followed along. They kept talking about the dream and when he tried to interfere neither of them would listen. He could feel his dream slipping further and further away from him. It was hopeless to mutter, 'Was my dream! Was me talk with Mussolini! Was me the last there before he die!'

Matteo Grossi and the shoemaker turned into Thompson Street and Angelo Zara fell a little behind. But he could hear Ignazio Ferro saying, 'Five thousand lire! *Mannagia l'-America!* Is no the king so much! But if was me that was there —'

Near the corner they turned from the sidewalk and went down a few steps to the door of Amalfio Testoni's pizzeria.

It was early and Amalfio wasn't dressed yet. He opened the door in his nightshirt, rubbing his eyes, grumbling in annoyance. But he allowed them to enter. As they went inside they were joined by Alfredo, the butcher, who lived in the building next door.

'Wine!' Ignazio Ferro shouted to Amalfio. 'Fillemup the glasses with wine. Is a miracolo happen today.'

'You crazy,' Amalfio said. 'Is Sunday today. No wine before one o'clock say the law.'

'Go to hell the law,' Matteo Grossi said. 'You fillemup the glasses and we tell you something like never before you have hear in you life.'

'No joke?'

'Jokel' Ignazio Ferro said. 'With the miracolo he wants play joke now.'

Amalfio hesitated. He ambled over to the door and glanced furtively outside before bolting it. Then he hurried to draw a pitcher of wine from one of the barrels setting on wooden horses at the far end of the pizzeria.

Angelo sat down with the others. The most important place at the head of the long plank table was taken by Ignazio Ferro. On his right sat Matteo Grossi and on his left Alfredo, the butcher. When Amalfio returned with the wine and glasses, Angelo saw his opportunity and blurted, 'Last night, Amalfio. I have dream . . .'

'Angelol' Ignazio Ferro shouted, his eyes popping from their sockets, his mustache bristling. 'Is you the specialist for the dreams, or is me?'

'Whatsamatter with you, Angelo,' Matteo Grossi said.

'I don't care,' Angelo Zara cried. The words choked him, but he had to get them out. 'Was my dream. Why for everybody gotta take my dream?'

'Foolish, stupid,' Ignazio Ferro said. 'Anybody can have the dream. Even the jackass with the sick head. But to onderstand the dreams! Ah, that is something else. For that I have read two book. You have read these book too?'

'No. But joost the same —'

'Then keep quiet.'

Amalfio poured the wine, his sleepy eyes now alive with

wonderment as he gazed from the shoemaker to Alfredo, the butcher, who sat with his mouth open. Ignazio Ferro pounded the table for silence and began. 'Last night in the Villa Torlonia, Mussolini he kick the bucket —'

Angelo Zara rose quietly from the table and moved to the door. Nobody paid any attention. As he slipped the bolt and went outside he could hear startled amazement and the two new voices echo in a breath, 'Where you hear this?'

He climbed up the basement steps and onto the sidewalk again. It was no use. He had been cheated. Fate had played a trick on him. It had given him a dream and he wasn't big enough to carry it. He walked along slowly, filled with a growing consciousness of his utter insignificance. Glancing up he saw Beppo, the baker in Amalfio's pizzeria, hurrying toward him. He wanted to cross over to the other side of the street, but it was too late. Beppo accosted him. 'Whatsamatter? Why Amalfio open the pizzeria? What happen?'

Angelo Zara shrugged his shoulders and moved on. He had it on the tip of his tongue, but it was no use. The dream was gone. It didn't belong to him any more. He continued to walk along lost in a surge of depressing thoughts.

Some time later, reaching the park at Washington Square, he sat down on one of the benches. All around him birds were chirping and there were kids playing at the fountain and on the sidewalk a pigeon hopped along with its chest all puffed out. He began to feel better. When the comfortable happy face of Flannegan the cop greeted him, he smiled. 'Meesta Flannegan,' he said. 'Last night Mussolini he is dead.'

'Ye've been dreaming,' Flannegan grinned.

'Me?' Angelo Zara said in astonishment. 'Is too big only for me. Was five other men have this dream too!'

SAMUEL BLANE

BY MURRAY DYER

IT WAS the morning of December 8, 1941. While in history that date will go down as the morning after Pearl Harbor, there are a few to whom it will go down also as the desperate and despairing end, not perhaps of their faith, but certainly of the work which had given their faith its substance.

That morning I thought particularly of Samuel Blane — so strongly that it almost seemed as if part of me actually could see him, so many miles away. He was sitting at his breakfast table. From his chair he could look through the windows of the dining room down the slope of the hill on which the residential section of the city stood, to the harbor, and beyond, across the Bay of Osaka to the mountains which rose like a blue smudge to meet the horizon. And the morning, I think, was beautiful, as only morning in winter in the Far East can be beautiful; but Samuel Blane was not aware of it. In his hand was a letter from his son Tom, a letter that I knew had been written many weeks before. Samuel Blane had just finished reading it. I thought of him appraising the years of his endeavor; and I wondered if he would admit that he did not know whether his work had been worth while. True, Kuno would have been a murderer but for him; Hondo had been possessed of an evil spirit and he had cured him; Tsuji was now professor of economics at an imperial university. 'But it was my money,' Blane would have

to say, 'which paid for his study.' Three men, and three men only, would come back clearly into Samuel Blane's mind as he sat appraising the forty years of his service. Samuel Blane was lonely, and alone, in the darkness of his own Gethsemane.

Samuel Blane was old enough to be my father. I never really knew him. And yet I know him very well. All through my childhood he came and went as regularly as the seasons. He and my father and another missionary named Ffoulkes were the three most important adults in my young life. And yet none of them paid any attention to me. All three of them had come out to Japan in the early, very early, nineteen-hundreds. My father was from Montreal. Ffoulkes (to this day I do not know his first name: he was always called 'Mr. Ffoulkes,' or 'Ffoulkes') was an Englishman. Samuel Blane was from Kansas. I believe only if you are an advertising agent or a missionary will you come across such a strange assortment as my father, Ffoulkes, and Samuel Blane.

My father called himself 'interdenominational,' which covers a multitude of sins. Ffoulkes was an Englishman who had, in his family's eyes, 'gone wrong.' Born and bred to the life of either a country gentleman or a colonial administrator, he had been caught up at Oxford in the fervor of a religious movement which, while the Empire adjusted its shoulders under the White Man's Burden, preached the necessity of saving the souls of those not fortunate enough to be English by birth. As a result he had signed up for life as a missionary in Japan and was head of the group of missionaries to which my father belonged. Samuel Blane was a Southern Methodist.

In the early nineteen-hundreds, when these three men found themselves in Japan, the wheel of life was hanging for a brief moment almost motionless. We know now that the forces getting ready to spin it, and spin it madly, were gathering impetus. But for a child, and for a missionary, and for a business man those early years of the nineteen-hundreds were supreme. Security was in each tick of the clock, each mouthful of porridge at breakfast, each session of family

prayers at night, each comfortable laying of a tired head on a white pillow while outside the window, rising and falling with the wind, the Buddhist temple bells boomed softly and timelessly.

All three men, my father, Ffoulkes, and Samuel Blane, were very busy men. They saved souls, they held conventions which taught other Japanese to save souls, they gave 'Bible readings' and held prayer meetings, they distributed tracts and pamphlets without end; they were the slaves of one idea: the world was soon going to come to an end and the souls they had saved would be their reward for the things they had given up. Make no mistake about it, these three men, and many others like them, were not unintelligent. All three of them had given up good positions, good money, good futures to get the Japanese into heaven. This of course kept them very busy. So, what with meetings and pamphlets and conventions, together with Bible readings, I did not see much of my father except at breakfast and supper. In the earliest years of my life I had to find my own amusement. And, since in the town where my father was stationed, there were only two other 'foreigners,' things that the average boy or girl would hardly have noticed assumed huge importance.

The periodical visits of Samuel Blane were among these. For six years my father worked in a district over which Samuel Blane had supervision. And for six years, at least four times a year, he came to stay with us. For days I looked forward to his coming. Instead of going to bed immediately after supper, I was allowed to sit in the living room and play one game of chess. At breakfast I heard stories about his boyhood on a farm in Kansas; how the molasses in the cellar froze stiff, and his brother went down to get some of it for buckwheat cakes and left the spigot in the barrel turned on, simply because it was so cold he couldn't turn it off. When the thaw came of course the Blanes had lost their molasses. 'And say,' said Samuel Blane, winding up that story, 'did Dave find out all about what cold weather does to liquids? Dad took him out in the woodshed and paddled it right into him. Yes, sir.'

Mr. Ffoulkes was staying with us that week-end as it hap-

pened, and he listened to the story with amazement. When it was finished he barked: 'I say, Blane, d'you mean your father beat your brother for not turning the spigot off when it was so cold he couldn't move it?'

'Sure he did,' said Blane, in his gusto at remembering the details pouring his milk into the sugar bowl instead of over his porridge. 'You've got to learn you don't forget things when it's fifteen degrees below zero. Dad didn't thrash him because he couldn't turn the spigot off. He thrashed him because he forgot to tell any of us he'd left it on.'

'You're pouring your milk into the sugar bowl,' said Ffoulkes acidly at this point, and the resultant confusion stopped any more stories at that meal about the farm in Kansas.

Still, although these visits left brilliant pictures in my mind which I could go off by myself and think about during long summer afternoons when there was no one to play with, there was a gap in those early days which was filled when Samuel Blane began bringing his son Tom along with him on his trips. Tom was about my age, and after the first afternoon we found we could get along.

The first visit by the two of them coincided with Ffoulkes' presence. In addition two more missionaries were down, so the house was pretty full. The cause was a full-blown Revival which was to be started in the town. The fact that Tom was coming this time with Mr. Blane, and that a Revival campaign was to be undertaken which would last at least a week, was almost too much for me. I kept wondering why both things had to happen together. Why couldn't they be spaced out when there was so little to look forward to anyway?

Friday came (for some reason Revivals always started on a week-end), and with it Tom and Mr. Blane. The Revival campaign was to start that night at seven-thirty. Samuel Blane arrived at three. Ffoulkes, my father, and the other two missionaries had been waiting for Blane so they could all go together into my father's study and hold their own private prayer meeting for the success of the week's services. My mother was busy with a thousand things: the food for supper, the sheets for the beds, the towels for the washstands. So naturally Tom and I had to shift for ourselves.

We went into the garden and stood looking at each other, doubtfully and askance, as small boys have looked at each other since the world began.

'How much muscle've you got?' Tom said suddenly, opening the conversation. This I immediately resented for, since it was my home ground, it was obviously my business to speak first. I looked him over for a minute and then said, belligerently: 'More'n you have, so shut up.'

Tom looked at me for a few seconds and then said quietly: 'I guess we better fight.'

'I don't know how to,' I responded. 'Do you know?'

'Not very well,' he confessed. 'But I'm learning. I've had two fights with Roy already.' Roy, I knew, was his considerably older brother. 'Well,' I suggested, 'suppose you teach me all you know about fighting and then we'll fight?'

'All right,' Tom agreed. 'Shall we start now?'

'Yes,' I said. 'They've gone into father's study to pray and that means we won't have supper till six-thirty.'

For the next hour I learned 'fighting' and finally surprised Tom by saying that it didn't seem nearly as good as jiu-jitsu. This was the beginning of a firm and steady friendship. Tom knew nothing about jiu-jitsu and I, in the long afternoons which I spent alone, had found out I could wander down the street to a police school where jiu-jitsu was taught. The policemen were very kind to me and used to let me come in and watch. And every now and again they would call me out on to the floor and show me how to throw a man over my shoulder or fling him on his back across my hip. When Tom left at the end of the week he was planning how best to get Roy into a fight so that he could throw him across the floor with the jiu-jitsu hold which I had taught him. Meanwhile on this particular afternoon we grew tired of fighting and 'judo' by five o'clock, and wandered back to the house through the garden, wondering how much longer before supper. We passed under the windows of my father's study and stopped to listen.

Both of us had heard prayer meetings like this one before. We were no mean judges and our critical knowledge was based on having heard the extemporaneous prayers of some

pretty good men. We listened for a while in silence. My father's voice rose and fell in rolling cadences: 'Pour out, O Lord, Thy spirit upon the souls who will gather before the mercy seat tonight.' . . . A few minutes later Ffoulkes was praying: 'O Lord, we will not leave this room until we have Thy assurance of victory. Come down in power, manifest Thyself in glory, pour out upon Thy servants, gathered here, the oil of Thine anointing that we may go forth to victory in Thy name.' . . .

Tom and I withdrew from the window. We believed in those days in the actual and not the figurative meaning of words. 'How long,' I said, 'd'you think before they know God's going to give them the victory?' This was no blasphemous question. It was serious and all-important. And Tom knew it was. For one thing, on its answer hung our supper. 'I don't know,' said Tom, 'but the meeting starts at half-past seven.' 'You mean,' I asked, 'they've got to know before then?' 'Yes,' said Tom simply. 'I forgot that,' I said. And we went in to wash our hands and get ready to eat.

In my youth one of the most important things in my life was The River. It came down out of the green, pine-clad mountains which marched around the city to the north, in a series of white, glistening cataracts. Where it flowed through the valley it was deep and wide, quiet and satisfying. My ambition was to get big enough to throw a stone all the way across it. My father couldn't. Neither could Ffoulkes. But Samuel Blane could do it. At least he had done it — once. And by so much I decided that baseball was a game worth playing, for before making the throw that put the stone on the other side, Mr. Blane had said he used to play baseball and was a pitcher on his team at college. His third try had put him over.

Sometimes we would picnic by The River. Sometimes we would just wander out to it after breakfast and before lunch. Sometimes, usually after Sunday dinner, we walked out on a circular route that, along some part, took in The River somewhere where it flowed through the valley. Strangely, I never saw The River except when it was blue. In summer it was a

warm, friendly, quivering blue. In the depth of winter it was a chill, hard, steel-blue. But it was always blue. Never gray, never dirty, never troubled.

Soon after I had got to know Tom I found another amusement, carpentering. I had managed to get hold of a saw. I used a hammer that belonged to my father. And I was allowed to borrow his chisel and screwdriver. I could get nails any time I wanted them by dropping in at the carpenter's shop up the street. In summer, old Ushikami, the carpenter, a towel round his head, a coolie coat over his shoulders, a white cloth about his loins, and his legs bare to the ankles, used to like me to stop by and pass the time of day with him. Glistening with sweat in a temperature of ninety-eight degrees in the shade, he would stop pulling his saw through a beam that was to become part of a house, take out his absurdly small-bowled tobacco pipe (enough for three puffs), light it and ask me how things were going. Ushikami and I were great friends. And I have always loved the smell of wood shavings since those days. Ushikami showed me how to make my first boat. A clumsy affair but very wonderful. I made it in his shop but with my tools. And it was a Monday in April when it was launched. Of course in The River. Ffoulkes and Mr. Blane happened to be staying over the week-end. Monday morning we all went for a walk and naturally it was to The River, for I was carrying my boat.

All the dusty way to The River I kept thinking to myself just where I would launch it. My father, Mr. Blane, and Ffoulkes had had some business matters to talk over on the way down so they had walked together, just ahead of my mother and me. But as we crossed the rough, uneven, grassy ground that bordered The River they finished.

'Well,' my father called gaily, 'where's your boat, Sonny?'

'Yes,' said Ffoulkes, 'put her into the water and let's see how she sails.' Mr. Blane said nothing. But I remember he looked at me and grinned. I had a string tied to the stern. I was afraid to sail her without it. She might get lost in the current. As I stooped down to put her into the water I heard Ffoulkes. 'I say, John' — this was to my father — 'she looks as though she'll capsizes.'

My father called, 'She's going to turn over.' 'No, she isn't,' I shouted back. Those were days of faith.

I held her in the water and took my hands off slowly. If she was going to turn over I wanted the failure to be my secret. But she didn't turn over — then. She floated. And I took my hands away and pushed her out into the current and stood up. Ffoulkes was the first to comment. 'Bravo!' he shouted. 'That's capital. Capital.'

For the first time in my life I really liked him. We all stood watching while my boat bounced over the little, breeze-lifted waves to the middle of The River. Then Ffoulkes spoke again. 'I say, why don't you take the string off and let her go?' Because, I told him, my liking fading as quickly as it had come into existence, I wanted my boat back. 'Nonsense,' Ffoulkes laughed. 'The river gets narrower lower down. We could get it back for you there if it got away in the current. But it won't.'

'Why not?' I asked. 'Because,' he said, 'we can take care of it with stones. If we throw stones beyond it the waves will wash it back to the shore.'

I considered that idea and was inclined to reject it when my father added his support for Ffoulkes. Mr. Blane said nothing, although I remember that once again he looked at me. But this time he didn't grin. He was just watching.

I cut the string. And my ship was on her own. Ffoulkes now took over. 'We'll let her get into the middle of the stream,' he said, 'and then we'll drive her back. We used to do this when I was a boy in Sussex on the Arun. Splendid fun we had too.'

They began throwing stones, my father and Ffoulkes. And very soon it was clear that they were not going to have things all their own way. The current was going to have something to say. 'We'll have to throw them nearer,' said Ffoulkes breathlessly, his face beaming. 'You'll hit her,' I said anxiously. 'Oh, no, I hope not,' said Ffoulkes, putting his shoulder behind the biggest stone he could find. I can still see that stone, turning lazily in the sunlight before it fell. It swamped my boat. For a minute I thought she might come through. But no. She rocked dangerously and then cap-

sized. I walked forward a little so that I should be ahead of the men where none of them could see my face.

'I say,' said Ffoulkes after the thunder of the splash had died down. I heard my mother remark quietly that it seemed to her a very careless piece of work on his part. Ffoulkes spoke again, to me. 'Well, I'm sorry. But you can make another all right. As a matter of fact you'll make a better one. A boat shouldn't capsize like that. But now she's turned over we can't leave her. We'd better sink her.' And he began throwing stones again, this time to hit. My father looked at me with a friendly grin. 'It's a goner,' he said. 'How about it? Shall we sink her?' And I nodded. And again Samuel Blane said nothing but only looked at me. A week later, from Kobe, came a package from him which, when I opened it, was, and still is, the most beautiful model of a two-masted schooner I have ever seen in my life.

When I look back on it I think that what I know now of Democracy came from Samuel Blane. He never talked about it. But he was instinct with it. I doubt if he ever thought much about it either. It was part of his code, although he wouldn't have understood what you meant by the word 'code.' I remember playing chess with him one day. He was a really good chess player and when he couldn't play with my father, and always on my own account at least once each visit, he played with me. He taught me how to castle. The first time I saw him do it I protested. I didn't know you could castle. And I'd got him for once, through his carelessness, into a nasty corner. His castling got him out and I knew that, once out, with his skill I'd never get the game. But he insisted castling was legitimate, called my mother over to ask her if it wasn't, said it was too bad I hadn't known it, but that ignorance of the law was no excuse. And he won the game.

For a minute I could hear what Ffoulkes would have said if he'd been there. 'I say, Blane, you know the boy didn't know you could castle. Bit unsporting, don't you think? Take the game like that?' Then I remembered The River, and my boat, and the way Samuel Blane had looked at me then. He looked at me the same way now. And suddenly I

understood. Chess was a game. And it had rules. And you kept the rules. Just as, if you made promises you kept them. Or, if you had debts you paid them. My boat, which Ffoulkes had sunk, was something about which no rules had been formulated. Therefore it was something about which the final decision was mine. But because I was just a boy, Ffoulkes considered I had no particular right to be consulted. To some extent my father held a similar point of view. Of all the five of us on the river bank that day, Samuel Blane was the only one who felt that as an individual — a very small, immature individual — I still had a right to make my own decisions in a matter that solely affected me.

I began to see less of Samuel Blane after this. For one thing, I was sent away to school. For another, he went home on furlough — home to a Kansas I had never seen but in which, nevertheless, I had lived. A Kansas dotted with farm-houses set in vast oceans of prairie grass through which Indians crawled or galloped and over which, periodically, huge, devastating prairie fires raced; prairie fires in which men like Samuel Blane saved their homes by setting backfires. A Kansas where men walked with revolvers strapped to their sides, revolvers which they whipped out whenever they insulted each other, which was regularly.

It was a very jumbled picture I had painted, pieced together in my own way out of all the many odds and ends of talk by Samuel Blane to which I had listened for so many years. When he came back I looked at him with a certain reverence. Here was a man who lived much more dangerously than my father did. The years Samuel Blane lived in Japan, I was sure, were the only ones when he was safe.

On his return he brought me a set of chess men. We christened it that night. It was my last game of chess with him. From that time on our paths did not cross again until many years later when I saw him at the summer resort of Karuizawa. By that time I had finished school and college and had already lived through one war. And for one summer I was back amid surroundings which were part of me whether I would or no.

It was nearly the end of August and I was sitting in the grandstand at the baseball field. It was a hot, brilliant afternoon. Slowly the seats filled. A group of missionaries came in, some with their wives. They were well dressed and neat, but the cut and style of their clothes set them apart. Most of the women wore half-length sleeves, some full length, and their shoes were serviceable rather than smart. They sat down next to some members of the diplomatic colony in Tokyo. The men in this second group were in white suits which they could afford to have laundered every day. They had on silk socks. And the women carried expensive sun parasols, while on the hot, still air about them hung the faint but unmistakable scent of a French perfume. Their arms were bare to the shoulders and their dresses had come from Shanghai or the shops on the French ships which called at Kobe and Yokohama. Men in some of the oil and importing firms straggled in, nodding to the legation and embassy people.

Ten miles away, its bare, brown shoulder humped against a cloudless sky, the volcano Asama smoked lazily, a low, green-clad ridge running across the foreground in front of it.

It was the day of the annual baseball match between the missionaries and nonmissionaries. Saints against the Sinners some called it. Surprisingly enough the Saints often won.

I was sitting halfway up the stand when I saw Samuel Blane again. I started in surprise. In a straw hat, black alpaca coat and striped white trousers, he ambled into the stand with a big, folded sun umbrella in one hand. He sat down amidst the banter of friends around him just as the game began.

It went as any game might go, neck and neck right up to the ninth inning. A certain amount of pleasure was derived from the fact that the Bishop, who presided over Samuel Blane's missionary activities played for the Sinners. They, a man short at the last minute, had persuaded him to put on a catcher's glove again, as he had done several times before in his life to very good advantage.

As I sat there that afternoon it was hard to think that a world was breaking up under our eyes. Out on the field

everything looked and seemed as it had for twenty-five years past. True, Froulkes was dead, but he had never come to the grandstand unless it was a cricket match. My father had taken over his administrative duties. Samuel Blane was older but he scarcely looked it. And the grandstand had a roof that needed patching and a hole in the wire up near the eaves. True also, I was no longer one of the boys who hung on the flanks of the seats, hoping to find the balls which fouled over the top of the grandstand into the tall grasses behind, a service which meant a penny in your pocket for every ball recovered. But I could close my eyes and still see the lanterns decorating the streets at New Year's, and I could close my ears and still hear the pounding of the mallets making rice cakes.

The game was nearly over by the time I had finished looking backward. It was the second half of the ninth inning, the Sinners batting, two out and the Bishop at bat. The count against him was two and three. The score was nine to eight for the Saints, but there was a man on third.

There was a hush over the field that only an American could understand. Then Blane lifted his voice as he saw Cartwright, who was a Congregationalist, preparing to pitch. 'It's whole hog or nothing, Brother,' he shouted. And the grandstand roared. The Bishop looked round directly at Blane, and the stand roared again, for Blane was holding up his fingers to Cartwright in a sign calling for a hot one straight over the plate, and 'whole hog or none' was the Bishop's private battle cry upon every occasion. If it was money to run the mission, he wanted all he asked for or none. If it was a soul to be 'saved,' he wanted it saved in the strictest Southern Methodist manner or else postponed until this could be accomplished. Now, with the count two and three, and the Bishop batting against his colleagues, Blane had lifted the battle cry against him. And the Bishop was a little annoyed. To give the stand time to quiet down, Cartwright shot the ball to third, and Waterman, a tea exporter, thumbed his nose at him.

As the ball came back the Bishop called out to Blane: 'Our Brother in the stand asks for a sign; let him remember

the evil and adulterous generation which earlier asked for a sign and no sign was given unto it.'

Blane waved his umbrella. 'Hallelujah, Brother,' he said. 'Now let's see you smack it.'

The stand shouted again and a voice yelled: 'Boys, let's praise the Bishop with hymn number 210: "Glorious things of thee are spoken."' '

Cartwright held up his hand for silence while, behind the home plate, the umpire, an Episcopalian, waved the stand down to their seats. Again Cartwright got ready to pitch. Suddenly from between the tall grasses at the far end of the field along the path came a rickshaw. Not an unusual sight and we all saw it; the rickshaw-man loping easily along, behind him, leaning against the cushion, upright, not a passenger but a huge, rectangular, black trunk. Samuel Blane saw it too and lifted up his voice again.

'Brother,' he yelled, and we all knew he meant his Bishop, 'there comes your coffin.'

Again the stand howled. And we knew the Saints had won. Cartwright wouldn't even need to pitch the last ball; he could just lob it, for the Bishop's nerve had gone.

With the stand still shouting, Cartwright slammed a curve over the plate. The Bishop fanned, and it was all over. As the Bishop walked in, Blane walked out, his face wreathed in good-natured smiles, his eyes laughing behind his spectacles. 'Well, Brother,' he boomed for good measure, remembering the Bishop's scriptural quote, 'that was a mighty good breeze while it lasted, but remember Mark 4, verse 39: "And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm."' ' But the Bishop just pushed past and walked into the locker room.

Slowly the crowd began to thin. The daylight faded. The sun set. Asama, the volcano, stood out, black and smoking, against a cloudless sky, quiet now and with banked fires. Even so, none trusted her. For none knew when she would erupt again. Just as none knew when the world would erupt again so suddenly into madness. Yet on that evening there was, in the evening light, the stillness that some say precedes the storm. A thrush fluted from a hedge and a lark rushed skyward singing. Soon the day would be over. And not this

day only, but my father's day, Ffoulke's day, Blane's day. My day?

'I don't know,' I said as I walked home. But it was; my day too. Those years can never come back.

It was the morning of December 8, 1941. I thought particularly of Samuel Blane — so strongly that it almost seemed as if part of me actually could see him that lonely morning, so many miles away. He was sitting at his breakfast table. In his hand was a letter from his son Tom, a letter that I knew had been written many weeks before. ' . . . I got my wings yesterday. Everybody over here says we'll be fighting Japan before long. You'd better come on home. After all, you've been trying for forty years to give them a break. It's too late now. The job's got to be done another way. . . . '

It's too late now. The job's got to be done another way.

Samuel Blane was lonely, and alone.

THE BEAR¹

BY WILLIAM FAULKNER

HE WAS ten. But it had already begun, long before that day when at last he wrote his age in two figures and he saw for the first time the camp where his father and Major de Spain and old General Compson and the others spent two weeks each November and two weeks again each June. He had already inherited then, without ever having seen it, the tremendous bear with one trap-ruined foot which, in an area almost a hundred miles deep, had earned for itself a name, a definite designation like a living man.

He had listened to it for years: the long legend of corn-cribs rifled, of shotes and grown pigs and even calves carried bodily into the woods and devoured, of traps and deadfalls overthrown and dogs mangled and slain, and shotgun and even rifle charges delivered at point-blank range and with no more effect than so many peas blown through a tube by a boy — a corridor of wreckage and destruction beginning back before he was born, through which sped, not fast but rather with the ruthless and irresistible deliberation of a locomotive, the shaggy tremendous shape.

It ran in his knowledge before ever he saw it. It looked and towered in his dreams before he even saw the unaxed woods where it left its crooked print, shaggy, huge, red-eyed, not malevolent but just big — too big for the dogs which tried

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to bay it, for the horses which tried to ride it down, for the men and the bullets they fired into it, too big for the very country which was its constricting scope. He seemed to see it entire with a child's complete divination before he ever laid eyes on either — the doomed wilderness whose edges were being constantly and punily gnawed at by men with axes and plows who feared it because it was wilderness, men myriad and nameless even to one another in the land where the old bear had earned a name, through which ran not even a mortal animal but an anachronism, indomitable and invincible, out of an old dead time, a phantom, epitome and apotheosis of the old wild life at which the puny humans swarmed and hacked in a fury of abhorrence and fear, like pygmies about the ankles of a drowsing elephant; the old bear solitary, indomitable and alone, widowed, childless and absolved of mortality — old Priam reft of his old wife and having outlived all his sons.

Until he was ten, each November he would watch the wagon containing the dogs and the bedding and food and guns and his father and Tennie's Jim, the Negro, and Sam Fathers, the Indian, son of a slave woman and a Chickasaw chief, depart on the road to town, to Jefferson, where Major de Spain and the others would join them. To the boy, at seven and eight and nine, they were not going into the Big Bottom to hunt bear and deer, but to keep yearly rendezvous with the bear which they did not even intend to kill. Two weeks later they would return, with no trophy, no head and skin. He had not expected it. He had not even been afraid it would be in the wagon. He believed that even after he was ten and his father would let him go too, for those two November weeks, he would merely make another one, along with his father and Major de Spain and General Compson and the others, the dogs which feared to bay it and the rifles and shotguns which failed even to bleed it, in the yearly pageant of the old bear's furious immortality.

Then he heard the dogs. It was in the second week of his first time in the camp. He stood with Sam Fathers against a big oak beside the faint crossing where they had stood each dawn for nine days now, hearing the dogs. He

had heard them once before, one morning last week — a murmur, sourceless, echoing through the wet woods, swelling presently into separate voices which he could recognize and call by name. He had raised and cocked the gun as Sam told him and stood motionless again while the uproar, the invisible course, swept up and past and faded; it seemed to him that he could actually see the deer, the buck, blond, smoke-colored, elongated with speed, fleeing, vanishing, the woods, the gray solitude, still ringing even when the cries of the dogs had died away.

‘Now let the hammers down,’ Sam said.

‘You knew they were not coming here too,’ he said.

‘Yes,’ Sam said. ‘I want you to learn how to do when you didn’t shoot. It’s after the chance for the bear or the deer has done already come and gone that men and dogs get killed.’

‘Anyway,’ he said, ‘it was just a deer.’

Then on the tenth morning he heard the dogs again. And he readied the too-long, too-heavy gun as Sam had taught him, before Sam even spoke. But this time it was no deer, no ringing chorus of dogs running strong on a free scent, but a moiling yapping an octave too high, with something more than indecision and even abjectness in it, not even moving very fast, taking a long time to pass completely out of hearing, leaving even then somewhere in the air that echo, thin, slightly hysterical, abject, almost grieving, with no sense of a fleeing, unseen, smoke-colored, grass-eating shape ahead of it, and Sam, who had taught him first of all to cock the gun and take position where he could see everywhere and then never move again, had himself moved up beside him; he could hear Sam breathing at his shoulder and he could see the arched curve of the old man’s inhaling nostrils.

‘Hah,’ Sam said. ‘Not even running. Walking.’

‘Old Ben!’ the boy said. ‘But up here!’ he cried. ‘Way up here!’

‘He do it every year,’ Sam said. ‘Once. Maybe to see who in camp this time, if he can shoot or not. Whether we got the dog yet that can bay and hold him. He’ll take them to the river, then he’ll send them back home. We may as well go back, too; see how they look when they come back to camp.’

When they reached the camp the hounds were already there, ten of them crouching back under the kitchen, the boy and Sam squatting to peer back into the obscurity where they huddled, quiet, the eyes luminous, glowing at them and vanishing, and no sound, only that effluvium of something more than dog, stronger than dog and not just animal, just beast, because still there had been nothing in front of that abject and almost painful yapping save the solitude, the wilderness, so that when the eleventh hound came in at noon and with all the others watching — even old Uncle Ash, who called himself first a cook — Sam daubed the tattered ear and the raked shoulder with turpentine and axle grease, to the boy it was still no living creature, but the wilderness which, leaning for the moment down, had patted lightly once the hound's temerity.

'Just like a man,' Sam said. 'Just like folks. Put off as long as she could having to be brave, knowing all the time that sooner or later she would have to be brave once to keep on living with herself, and knowing all the time beforehand what was going to happen to her when she done it.'

That afternoon, himself on the one-eyed wagon mule which did not mind the smell of blood nor, as they told him, of bear, and with Sam on the other one, they rode for more than three hours through the rapid, shortening winter day. They followed no path, no trail even that he could see; almost at once they were in a country which he had never seen before. Then he knew why Sam had made him ride the mule which would not spook. The sound one stopped short and tried to whirl and bolt even as Sam got down, blowing its breath, jerking and wrenching at the rein while Sam held it, coaxing it forward with his voice, since he could not risk tying it, drawing it forward while the boy got down from the marred one.

Then, standing beside Sam in the gloom of the dying afternoon, he looked down at the rotted overturned log, gutted and scored with claw marks and, in the wet earth beside it, the print of the enormous warped two-toed foot. He knew now what he had smelled when he peered under the kitchen where the dogs huddled. He realized for the first time that

the bear which had run in his listening and loomed in his dreams since before he could remember to the contrary, and which, therefore, must have existed in the listening and dreams of his father and Major de Spain and even old General Compson, too, before they began to remember in their turn, was a mortal animal, and that if they had departed for the camp each November without any actual hope of bringing its trophy back, it was not because it could not be slain, but because so far they had had no actual hope to.

‘Tomorrow,’ he said.

‘We’ll try tomorrow,’ Sam said. ‘We ain’t got the dog yet.’

‘We’ve got eleven. They ran him this morning.’

‘It won’t need but one,’ Sam said. ‘He ain’t here. Maybe he ain’t nowhere. The only other way will be for him to run by accident over somebody that has a gun.’

‘That wouldn’t be me,’ the boy said. ‘It will be Walter or Major or —’

‘It might,’ Sam said. ‘You watch close in the morning. Because he’s smart. That’s how come he has lived this long. If he gets hemmed up and has to pick out somebody to run over, he will pick out you.’

‘How?’ the boy said. ‘How will he know —’ He ceased. ‘You mean he already knows me, that I ain’t never been here before, ain’t had time to find out yet whether I —’ He ceased again, looking at Sam, the old man whose face revealed nothing until it smiled. He said humbly, not even amazed, ‘It was me he was watching. I don’t reckon he did need to come but once.’

The next morning they left the camp three hours before daylight. They rode this time because it was too far to walk, even the dogs in the wagon; again the first gray light found him in a place which he had never seen before, where Sam had placed him and told him to stay and then departed. With the gun which was too big for him, which did not even belong to him, but to Major de Spain, and which he had fired only once — at a stump on the first day, to learn the recoil and how to reload it — he stood against a gum tree beside a little bayou whose black still water crept without

movement out of a canebrake and crossed a small clearing and into cane again, where, invisible, a bird — the big woodpecker called Lord-to-God by Negroes — clattered at a dead limb.

It was a stand like any other, dissimilar only in incidentals to the one where he had stood each morning for ten days; a territory new to him, yet no less familiar than that other one which, after almost two weeks, he had come to believe he knew a little — the same solitude, the same loneliness through which human beings had merely passed without altering it, leaving no mark, no scar, which looked exactly as it must have looked when the first ancestor of Sam Fathers' Chickasaw predecessors crept into it and looked about, club or stone axe or bone arrow drawn and poised; different only because, squatting at the edge of the kitchen, he smelled the hounds huddled and cringing beneath it and saw the raked ear and shoulder of the one who, Sam said, had had to be brave once in order to live with herself, and saw yesterday in the earth beside the gutted log the print of the living foot.

He heard no dogs at all. He never did hear them. He only heard the drumming of the woodpecker stop short off and knew that the bear was looking at him. He never saw it. He did not know whether it was in front of him or behind him. He did not move, holding the useless gun, which he had not even had warning to cock and which even now he did not cock, tasting in his saliva that taint as of brass which he knew now because he had smelled it when he peered under the kitchen at the huddled dogs.

Then it was gone. As abruptly as it had ceased, the woodpecker's dry, monotonous clatter set up again, and after a while he even believed he could hear the dogs — a murmur, scarce a sound even, which he had probably been hearing for some time before he even remarked it, drifting into hearing and then out again, dying away. They came nowhere near him. If it was a bear they ran, it was another bear. It was Sam himself who came out of the cane and crossed the bayou, followed by the injured bitch of yesterday. She was almost at heel, like a bird dog, making no sound. She came and crouched against his leg, trembling, staring off into the cane

'I didn't see him,' he said. 'I didn't, Sam!'

'I know it,' Sam said. 'He done the looking. You didn't hear him neither, did you?'

'No,' the boy said. 'I —'

'He's smart,' Sam said. 'Too smart.' He looked down at the hound, trembling faintly and steadily against the boy's knee. From the raked shoulder a few drops of fresh blood oozed and clung. 'Too big. We ain't got the dog yet. But maybe someday. Maybe not next time. But someday.'

So I must see him, he thought. I must look at him. Otherwise, it seemed to him that it would go on like this forever, as it had gone on with his father and Major de Spain, who was older than his father, and even with old General Compson, who had been old enough to be a brigade commander in 1865. Otherwise, it would go on so forever, next time and next time, after and after and after. It seemed to him that he could see the two of them, himself and the bear, shadowy in the limbo from which time emerged, becoming time; the old bear absolved of mortality and himself partaking, sharing a little of it, enough of it. And he knew now what he had smelled in the huddled dogs and tasted in his saliva. He recognized fear. *So I will have to see him, he thought, without dread or even hope. I will have to look at him.*

It was in June of the next year. He was eleven. They were in camp again, celebrating Major de Spain's and General Compson's birthdays. Although the one had been born in September and the other in the depth of winter and in another decade, they had met for two weeks to fish and shoot squirrels and turkey and run coons and wildcats with the dogs at night. That is, he and Boon Hoggenbeck and the Negroes fished and shot squirrels and ran the coons and cats, because the proved hunters, not only Major de Spain and old General Compson, who spent those two weeks sitting in a rocking chair before a tremendous iron pot of Brunswick stew, stirring and tasting, with old Ash to quarrel with about how he was making it and Tennie's Jim to pour whiskey from the demijohn into the tin dipper from which he drank it, but even the boy's father and Walter Ewell, who were still

young enough, scorned such, other than shooting the wild gobblers with pistols for wagers on their marksmanship.

Or, that is, his father and the others believed he was hunting squirrels. Until the third day he thought that Sam Fathers believed that too. Each morning he would leave the camp right after breakfast. He had his own gun now, a Christmas present. He went back to the tree beside the little bayou where he had stood that morning. Using the compass which old General Compson had given him, he ranged from that point; he was teaching himself to be a better-than-fair woodsman without knowing he was doing it. On the second day he even found the gutted log where he had first seen the crooked print. It was almost completely crumbled now, healing with unbelievable speed, a passionate and almost visible relinquishment, back into the earth from which the tree had grown.

He ranged the summer woods now, green with gloom; if anything, actually dimmer than in November's gray dissolution, where, even at noon, the sun fell only in intermittent dappling upon the earth, which never completely dried out and which crawled with snakes — moccasins and water snakes and rattlers, themselves the color of the dappled gloom, so that he would not always see them until they moved, returning later and later, first day, second day, passing in the twilight of the third evening the little log pen enclosing the log stable where Sam was putting up the horses for the night.

'You ain't looked right yet,' Sam said.

He stopped. For a moment he didn't answer. Then he said peacefully, in a peaceful rushing burst as when a boy's miniature dam in a little brook gives way, 'All right. But how? I went to the bayou. I even found that log again. I —'

'I reckon that was all right. Likely he's been watching you. You never saw his foot?'

'I,' the boy said — 'I didn't — I never thought —'

'It's the gun,' Sam said. He stood beside the fence, motionless — the old man, the Indian, in the battered faded overalls and the frayed five-cent straw hat which in the Negro's race had been the badge of his enslavement and was now the regalia of his freedom. The camp — the clearing, the house.

the barn and its tiny lot with which Major de Spain in his turn had scratched punily and evanescently at the wilderness — faded in the dusk, back into the immemorial darkness of the woods. *The gun*, the boy thought. *The gun*.

'Be scared,' Sam said. 'You can't help that. But don't be afraid. Ain't nothing in the woods going to hurt you unless you corner it, or it smells that you are afraid. A bear or a deer, too, has got to be scared of a coward the same as a brave man has got to be.'

The gun, the boy thought.

'You will have to choose,' Sam said.

He left the camp before daylight, long before Uncle Ash would wake in his quilts on the kitchen floor and start the fire for breakfast. He had only the compass and a stick for snakes. He could go almost a mile before he would begin to need the compass. He sat on a log, the invisible compass in his invisible hand, while the secret night sounds, fallen still at his movements, scurried again and then ceased for good, and the owls ceased and gave over to the waking of day birds, and he could see the compass. Then he went fast yet still quietly; he was becoming better and better as a woodsman, still without having yet realized it.

He jumped a doe and a fawn at sunrise, walked them out of the bed, close enough to see them — the crash of undergrowth, the white scut, the fawn scudding behind her faster than he had believed it could run. He was hunting right, upwind, as Sam had taught him; not that it mattered now. He had left the gun; of his own will and relinquishment he had accepted not a gambit, not a choice, but a condition in which not only the bear's heretofore inviolable anonymity but all the old rules and balances of hunter and hunted had been abrogated. He would not even be afraid, not even in the moment when the fear would take him completely — blood, skin, bowels, bones, memory from the long time before it became his memory — all save that thin, clear, quenchless, immortal lucidity which alone differed him from this bear and from all the other bear and deer he would ever kill in the humility and pride of his skill and endurance, to which Sam had spoken when he leaned in the twilight on the lot fence yesterday.

By noon he was far beyond the little bayou, farther into the new and alien country than he had ever been. He was traveling now not only by the compass but by the old, heavy, biscuit-thick silver watch which had belonged to his grandfather. When he stopped at last, it was for the first time since he had risen from the log at dawn when he could see the compass. It was far enough. He had left the camp nine hours ago; nine hours from now, dark would have already been an hour old. But he didn't think that. He thought, *All right. Yes. But what?* and stood for a moment, alien and small in the green and topless solitude, answering his own question before it had formed and ceased. It was the watch, the compass, the stick — the three lifeless mechanicals with which for nine hours he had fended the wilderness off; he hung the watch and compass carefully on a bush and leaned the stick beside them and relinquished completely to it.

He had not been going very fast for the last two or three hours. He went no faster now, since distance would not matter even if he could have gone fast. And he was trying to keep a bearing on the tree where he had left the compass, trying to complete a circle which would bring him back to it or at least intersect itself, since direction would not matter now either. But the tree was not there, and he did as Sam had schooled him — made the next circle in the opposite direction, so that the two patterns would bisect somewhere, but crossing no print of his own feet, finding the tree at last, but in the wrong place — no bush, no compass, no watch — and the tree not even the tree, because there was a down log beside it and he did what Sam Fathers had told him was the next thing and the last.

As he sat down on the log he saw the crooked print — the warped, tremendous, two-toed indentation which, even as he watched it, filled with water. As he looked up, the wilderness coalesced, solidified — the glade, the tree he sought, the bush, the watch and the compass glinting where a ray of sunlight touched them. Then he saw the bear. It did not emerge, appear; it was just there, immobile, solid, fixed in the hot dappling of the green and windless noon, not as big

as he had dreamed it, but as big as he had expected it, bigger, dimensionless against the dappled obscurity, looking at him where he sat quietly on the log and looked back at it.

Then it moved. It made no sound. It did not hurry. It crossed the glade, walking for an instant into the full glare of the sun; when it reached the other side it stopped again and looked back at him across one shoulder while his quiet breathing inhaled and exhaled three times.

Then it was gone. It didn't walk into the woods, the undergrowth. It faded, sank back into the wilderness as he had watched a fish, a huge old bass, sink and vanish back into the dark depths of its pool without even any movement of its fins.

He thought, *It will be next fall*. But it was not next fall, nor the next nor the next. He was fourteen then. He had killed his buck, and Sam Fathers had marked his face with the hot blood, and in the next year he killed a bear. But even before that accolade he had become as competent in the woods as many grown men with the same experience; by his fourteenth year he was a better woodsman than most grown men with more. There was no territory within thirty miles of the camp that he did not know — bayou, ridge, brake, landmark tree and path. He could have led anyone to any point in it without deviation, and brought them out again. He knew game trails that even Sam Fathers did not know; in his thirteenth year he found a buck's bedding place, and unbeknown to his father he borrowed Walter Ewell's rifle and lay in wait at dawn and killed the buck when it walked back to the bed, as Sam had told him how the old Chickasaw fathers did.

But not the old bear, although by now he knew its footprint better than he did his own, and not only the crooked one. He could see any one of the three sound ones and distinguish it from any other, and not only by its size. There were other bears within those thirty miles which left tracks almost as large, but this was more than that. If Sam Fathers had been his mentor and the back-yard rabbits and squirrels at home his kindergarten, then the wilderness the old bear

ran was his college, the old male bear itself, so long unwifed and childless as to have become its own ungendered progenitor, was his alma mater. But he never saw it.

He could find the crooked print now almost whenever he liked, fifteen or ten or five miles, or sometimes nearer the camp than that. Twice while on stand during the three years he heard the dogs strike its trail by accident; on the second time they jumped it seemingly, the voices high, abject, almost human in hysteria, as on that first morning two years ago. But not the bear itself. He would remember that noon three years ago, the glade, himself and the bear fixed during that moment in the windless and dappled blaze, and it would seem to him that it had never happened, that he had dreamed that too. But it had happened. They had looked at each other, they had emerged from the wilderness old as earth, synchronized to that instant by something more than the blood that moved the flesh and bones which bore them, and touched, pledged something, affirmed something more lasting than the frail web of bones and flesh which any accident could obliterate.

Then he saw it again. Because of the very fact that he thought of nothing else, he had forgotten to look for it. He was still-hunting with Walter Ewell's rifle. He saw it cross the end of a long blow-down, a corridor where a tornado had swept, rushing through rather than over the tangle of trunks and branches as a locomotive would have, faster than he had ever believed it could move, almost as fast as a deer even, because a deer would have spent most of that time in the air, faster than he could bring the rifle sights up to it, so that he believed the reason he never let off the shot was that he was still behind it, had never caught up with it. And now he knew what had been wrong during all the three years. He sat on a log, shaking and trembling as if he had never seen the woods before nor anything that ran them, wondering with incredulous amazement how he could have forgotten the very thing which Sam Fathers had told him and which the bear itself had proved the next day and had now returned after three years to reaffirm.

And he now knew what Sam Fathers had meant about the

right dog, a dog in which size would mean less than nothing. So when he returned alone in April — school was out then, so that the sons of farmers could help with the land's planting, and at last his father had granted him permission, on his promise to be back in four days — he had the dog. It was his own, a mongrel of the sort called by Negroes a fyce, a ratter, itself not much bigger than a rat and possessing that bravery which had long since stopped being courage and had become foolhardiness.

It did not take four days. Alone again, he found the trail on the first morning. It was not a stalk; it was an ambush. He timed the meeting almost as if it were an appointment with a human being. Himself holding the fyce muffled in a feed sack and Sam Fathers with two of the hounds on a piece of plowline rope, they lay down wind of the trail at dawn of the second morning. They were so close that the bear turned without even running, as if in surprised amazement at the shrill and frantic uproar of the released fyce, turning at bay against the trunk of a tree, on its hind feet; it seemed to the boy that it would never stop rising, taller and taller, and even the two hounds seemed to take a sort of desperate and despairing courage from the fyce, following it as it went in.

Then he realized that the fyce was actually not going to stop. He flung, threw the gun away, and ran; when he overtook and grasped the frantically pinwheeling little dog, it seemed to him that he was directly under the bear.

He could smell it, strong and hot and rank. Sprawling, he looked up to where it loomed and towered over him like a cloudburst and colored like a thunderclap, quite familiar, peacefully and even lucidly familiar, until he remembered: This was the way he had used to dream about it. Then it was gone. He didn't see it go. He knelt, holding the frantic fyce with both hands, hearing the abased wailing of the hounds drawing farther and farther away, until Sam came up. He carried the gun. He laid it down quietly beside the boy and stood looking down at him.

'You've done seed him twice now with a gun in your hands,' he said. 'This time you couldn't have missed him.'

The boy rose. He still held the fyce. Even in his arms and

clear of the ground, it yapped frantically, straining and surging after the fading uproar of the two hounds like a tangle of wire springs. He was panting a little, but he was neither shaking nor trembling now.

'Neither could you!' he said. 'You had the gun! Neither did you!'

'And you didn't shoot,' his father said. 'How close were you?'

'I don't know, sir,' he said. 'There was a big wood tick inside his right hind leg. I saw that. But I didn't have the gun then.'

'But you didn't shoot when you had the gun,' his father said. 'Why?'

But he didn't answer, and his father didn't wait for him to, rising and crossing the room, across the pelt of the bear which the boy had killed two years ago and the larger one which his father had killed before he was born, to the book-case beneath the mounted head of the boy's first buck. It was the room which his father called the office, from which all the plantation business was transacted; in it for the fourteen years of his life he had heard the best of all talking. Major de Spain would be there and sometimes old General Compson, and Walter Ewell and Boon Hoggenbeck and Sam Fathers and Tennie's Jim, too, because they, too, were hunters, knew the woods and what ran them.

He would hear it, not talking himself but listening — the wilderness, the big woods, bigger and older than any recorded document of white man fatuous enough to believe he had bought any fragment of it or Indian ruthless enough to pretend that any fragment of it had been his to convey. It was of the men, not white nor black nor red, but men, hunters with the will and hardihood to endure and the humility and skill to survive, and the dogs and the bear and deer juxtaposed and relieved against it, ordered and compelled by and within the wilderness in the ancient and unremitting contest by the ancient and immitigable rules which voided all regrets and brooked no quarter, the voices quiet and weighty and deliberate for retrospection and recollection and exact

remembering, while he squatted in the blazing firelight as Tennie's Jim squatted, who stirred only to put more wood on the fire and to pass the bottle from one glass to another. Because the bottle was always present, so that after a while it seemed to him that those fierce instants of heart and brain and courage and wiliness and speed were concentrated and distilled into that brown liquor which not women, not boys and children, but only hunters drank, drinking not of the blood they had spilled but some condensation of the wild immortal spirit, drinking it moderately, humbly even, not with the pagan's base hope of acquiring thereby the virtues of cunning and strength and speed, but in salute to them.

His father returned with the book and sat down again and opened it. 'Listen,' he said. He read the five stanzas aloud, his voice quiet and deliberate in the room where there was no fire now because it was already spring. Then he looked up. The boy watched him. 'All right,' his father said. 'Listen.' He read again, but only the second stanza this time, to the end of it, the last two lines, and closed the book and put it on the table beside him. "'She cannot fade, though thou hast not thy bliss, for ever wilt thou love, and she be fair,'" he said.

'He's talking about a girl,' the boy said.

'He had to talk about something,' his father said. Then he said, 'He was talking about truth. Truth doesn't change. Truth is one thing. It covers all things which touch the heart — honor and pride and pity and justice and courage and love. Do you see now?'

He didn't know. Somehow it was simpler than that. There was an old bear, fierce and ruthless, not merely just to stay alive, but with the fierce pride of liberty and freedom, proud enough of that liberty and freedom to see it threatened without fear or even alarm; nay, who at times even seemed deliberately to put that freedom and liberty in jeopardy in order to savor them, to remind his old strong bones and flesh to keep supple and quick to defend and preserve them. There was an old man, son of a Negro slave and an Indian king, inheritor on the one side of the long chronicle of a people who had learned humility through suffering, and

pride through the endurance which survived the suffering and injustice, and on the other side, the chronicle of a people even longer in the land than the first, yet who no longer existed in the land at all save in the solitary brotherhood of an old Negro's alien blood and the wild and invincible spirit of an old bear. There was a boy who wished to learn humility and pride in order to become skillful and worthy in the woods, who suddenly found himself becoming so skillful so rapidly that he feared he would never become worthy because he had not learned humility and pride, although he had tried to, until one day and as suddenly he discovered that an old man who could not have defined either had led him, as though by the hand, to that point where an old bear and a little mongrel dog showed him that, by possessing one thing other, he would possess them both.

And a little dog, nameless and mongrel and many-fathered, grown, yet weighing less than six pounds, saying as if to itself, 'I can't be dangerous, because there's nothing much smaller than I am; I can't be fierce, because they would call it just noise; I can't be humble, because I'm already too close to the ground to genuflect; I can't be proud, because I wouldn't be near enough to it for anyone to know who was casting that shadow, and I don't even know that I'm not going to heaven, because they have already decided that I don't possess an immortal soul. So all I can be is brave. But it's all right. I can be that, even if they still call it just noise.'

That was all. It was simple, much simpler than somebody talking in a book about a youth and a girl he would never need to grieve over, because he could never approach any nearer her and would never have to get any farther away. He had heard about a bear, and finally got big enough to trail it, and he trailed it four years and at last met it with a gun in his hands and he didn't shoot. Because a little dog — But he could have shot long before the little dog covered the twenty yards to where the bear waited, and Sam Fathers could have shot at any time during that interminable minute while Old Ben stood on his hind feet over them. He stopped. His father was watching him gravely across the spring-rife twilight of the room; when he spoke, his words were as quiet

as the twilight, too, not loud, because they did not need to be because they would last. 'Courage, and honor, and pride,' his father said, 'and pity, and love of justice and of liberty. They all touch the heart, and what the heart holds to becomes truth, as far as we know truth. Do you see now?'

Sam, and Old Ben, and Nip, he thought. And himself too. He had been all right too. His father had said so. 'Yes, sir,' he said.

BEGINNING OF WISDOM¹

BY RACHEL FIELD

ORA LARRABIE stayed still as long as she could hold the wonder to herself. Ever since yesterday it had warmed her from the inside out, like a glowing coal, and now, because of it, she had waked before any other sleeper in the tent stirred. It would not do to disturb them, especially Vida May and Loretta, sleeping one on either side. Loretta was twelve and took things easy, but Vida May seemed more than fourteen because she was so long and stringy and worried-looking. Even in her sleep she breathed quickly, anxiously, as if there were never enough time for catching up. But Ora was used to that.

She was eight, sandy and freckled, like Ma's little sister Rilla, who had died back home in Oklahoma long before they had come out west to California. The spit and image of Rilla, Ma always said, and that look would come in her eyes — the look she kept for talking about when she was young and courting, and they lived in a real house by the creek with willows. It made Ora feel important to know she resembled someone who was dead and gone. When the teacher had chosen her to recite at the Christmas exercises last winter, Ma had been pleased and proud.

'What did I tell you, Pa?' she'd said. 'Ora's smart, same's Rilla was. She'll get on if'n we can just give her opportunities.'

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'Opportunities,' Ed had grunted over his beans and coffee. 'I could sure do with a few myself.'

Morning had come. It waited just outside the tent flap, like an angel on tiptoe that you might surprise if you hurried. Through the tent flap the pale light deepened to pulsing rose.

Cautiously Ora inched herself up and stared about the tent and the familiar humped shapes. Pa breathed heavily beside Ma in the folding camp bed. The baby scarcely showed at all in the orange crate within easy reach of Ma's hand. On the mattress opposite she could see the three boys sprawled — Ed's feet poked out of the covers, Frank face down on his crossed arms, and Jason curled like a tow-headed squirrel between them.

'I've got to get out of here,' Ora decided, 'or I'm like to let out a whoop and wake the whole lot. Mustn't do that.'

Silent as a fish she slid from between the sleepers, felt along a row of pegs, and found her dress. A button caught in her hair, and she was careful to dislodge it without disturbing the curlers Vida May had helped her fix last night. Her hands counted them over to make sure not one had come loose. They were all firm and in place, nine smooth little knobs, like buds that waited to burst into unaccustomed beauty. To touch them was reassurance that she had not dreamed about the invitation to Hester Burt's party.

The baby whimpered, and Ma reached out to him in her sleep as Ora ducked under the canvas to meet the morning. Her eyes blinked and widened at the brightness, and Judy, the halfway fox terrier, tied to the tent post, licked and pawed Ora's bare legs in frantic greeting.

'Down, Judy, down!' she cautioned in a whisper and, untying the rope, let the dog take her down the dirt path between the other tents. Judy capered and pulled and flattened her brown and white body to the ground in anticipation of freedom. Dogs must be kept tied fast in camp. That was a rule which mustn't be broken. Judy bore up under it better than some. She was a good dog, only mean once — that time she had had the puppies that they couldn't keep.

The government camp was not yet roused to activity, but

here and there a thread of smoke pushed out of a black arm of pipe from some tent. Over by the outdoor washtubs next to the nearest Sanitary Unit a woman was busy with clothes, and another woman was fetching a pail of water. Except for them the streets of tents were deserted. Even the American flag by the entrance hadn't been run up yet.

How good the air felt, like cold water, as she breathed it in, the sun warm and friendly as a hand laid on her shoulders.

'Why, hello, sis!' Old Man Blodgett hailed Ora from the row of corrugated tin houses by the gates. 'Up kind of early for Saturday morning.' Under his scraggly mustache he smiled, and Ora smiled back.

'I'm invited to a party,' she told him, 'this afternoon from four to six. Over to the Burt ranch,' she added.

'Well, now, you don't say.' He looked as surprised as she had expected him to. 'Going to a party. My, I sure wish't I'd get me an invite. Going to have root beer and cake and ice cream maybe?'

'Maybe.' Ora nodded and clung fast to the rope that was taut under Judy's straining. 'You see I've got a friend —'

An oil truck thundered heavily by on the asphalt road, the metal chain clanking a warning between the enormous solid tires. The driver in blue jeans leaned out over the wheel and waved a greeting. Ora and Old Man Blodgett waved back and watched the truck grow to a dark speck down the long, gray stretch. Lots of trucks went by without a sign. It gave you a warm feeling when they waved, even if the man's hand only made a blur in passing. Ora wished the driver had stopped to ask the way; then she could have told him about the party.

She left Old Man Blodgett to his patch of garden and crossed the road, with Judy still nosing ahead. The graveled edges felt gritty to her bare feet, but she was glad she hadn't taken a chance wearing her shoes. Jason had helped her clean them with an oily rag last night till they looked almost good as new. Jason knew what to do about everything. He was always rigging up something to save time or trouble.

going to invent all kinds of machines when he grew up. Ma said he must get it from her Uncle Clem, who'd made the first balloon ascension and got crippled when it tangled in a tree. Jason came next ahead of Ora and everyone thought they were twins. He'd promised her the loan of his Mexican jumping beans to take to the party.

She found the hole in the barbed wire and crawled through without damage to her dress or hair. Looking back across the road, she could see the camp better than when she had been in the midst of it. There was the big silver-gray water tank on its scaffold keeping guard over the familiar buildings — the long, shedlike washrooms and recreation hall, the white clapboard clinic, the co-operative store with the gas pump in front, the office and house where the manager lived. There were the rows of tin houses with their tiny gardens, and the tents stretching out behind, all shades of gray and khaki canvas.

How small they looked from a little way off, like the paper cones Ora had seen set over young melon plants to protect them from the sun. Maybe from up in an airplane the tents looked like that and you wouldn't guess folks were living inside them. Maybe that was how the government camp looked to God, except that He saw everything. God must know about the party, but she would thank Him anyway; only, she'd wait for a prettier spot, not so near the road.

All about her, new green was pushing up between the brittle, ghostlike stalks of last year's grass. They scratched her feet and legs as she crossed to the field beyond, a wide expanse, blue as an inland lake with wild lupin. Ora untied Judy's rope and let the dog run before her, ears up and white tail flashing wigwags in joyous signals. There was another fence to climb through before she stood knee-high in thickset bloom. All about her the lupin moved softly, lightly under the mounting sun, purple-blue shading to white at the tips that rose like little pointing church steeples.

'Thank you, God,' Ora whispered, and her words might have been part of the sound the bees were making all about her. 'Thanks a million.'

Then she flung herself down with her face on her folded arms.

For a whole week now she had known about Hester Burt's party, yet she had had to seem not to know. In the school-room, she must not show that it mattered if she was left out. Ora had come to be rather good at that in the last year. She wouldn't have minded much, except that it was going to be Hester Burt's party and Hester had never looked at her as if she were a curiosity. Right from the first day of school she'd smiled across the aisle and been friendly.

But all that past week it had been different. Hester had acted, not mean or mad, just stiff and quiet. She went out of her way to be busy if Ora came by, and when she did look up Ora had seen that her eyes were big and worried, the way they got if she didn't know the answers when the teacher called her name. It had made a kind of chill between them, and every day from Monday on it had grown worse.

'What's come over you, Ora?' Ma had asked by the middle of the week. 'You don't act right and you look peaked. Better tell me if you need the nurse over to the clinic to dose you up.'

'No, Ma, no,' Ora had protested. 'I don't need no dosing up. I'm fine.'

'You sure don't look it,' Ma had sighed.

Miss Jocelyn, the third-grade teacher, had also noticed Ora's behavior. She asked no questions, but she must have had her own suspicions, for she hadn't scolded when Ora lost her place in reading or failed the easiest arithmetic problems. At recess time on Thursday she had kept her in after the rest left the schoolroom.

'I'm afraid I can't give you a gold star this week,' she had told Ora regretfully. 'I'm sorry, because you haven't missed one for any week this term. Well, never mind, you'll probably make it up next month. You may decorate the blackboard now if you want to. But be careful with the red chalk. You know, it always gets used up so fast.'

Ora felt grateful to Miss Jocelyn for letting her stay in with the chalk box. She loved to be chosen to decorate the blackboard. But that day her heart wasn't behind her fingers

pushing the reds and yellows and greens and blues over the smooth surface. Always, when Ora had her choice of subject, she drew the same thing — a house of substantial proportions set among trees and flowers.

There was nothing flimsy about Ora's blackboard houses. They were ample, two-storied affairs with green blinds and the biggest chimneys the supply of red chalk would allow. Smoke curled up in thick, blue rings, and her roofs were solidly filled in. Sometimes she made picket fences with hollyhocks behind, and sometimes it was a green lawn sprinkled with yellow dots for dandelions. Her trees were always generously laden with oranges and lemons. As she worked, Ora would feel herself a part of the house. With her back to the schoolroom she could shut out everything except what her mind and hand created.

But the spell didn't take her that day. Her eyes would keep wandering out to the play yard. She couldn't make the blackboard house seem real.

'A peanut hunt —' She heard the magic words in excited whispers as the girls trooped in and took their seats: 'Four kinds of cake.' 'Prizes —'

On Friday she moved doggedly through the hours, waiting for the closing bell to sound. She had given up acting as if she didn't know what all the whisperings were about; she had given up counting on a miracle. Across the aisle Hester Burt was exchanging secret nods and looks with this one and that. Her brown curls lay soft about her warm cheeks and her eyes still avoided Ora, all except once, and then Ora saw that they were still puzzled and unhappy.

'You wouldn't ever do it, Hester —' Ora caught the words as Ruth Norton said them on the way to the play yard. 'Your mother'd give you Hail Columbia. You know we're not supposed to speak to them out of school.'

'I don't care; it's my party —'

'I dare you tol' That had been Florence Dennis, her giggle rising shrill.

'Well, my grandma wouldn't mind, and she's giving me the party. . . . Don't forget to come the way I said. There's

going to be a prize for the best one — I mean, the funniest —' Hester's voice was swallowed up in more whispers and giggles.

The round-faced schoolroom clock had never moved its metal hands so slowly on any Friday afternoon. But three o'clock came, and the third-graders tumbled out into the sunshine. The fifth- and sixth-graders jostled their way out, and the first- and second-graders dropped their books and papers and got in everyone's path. Outside, the big yellow buses waited, empty of cargo, and along the road a line of parked cars waited, with mothers at the wheel. It was then that the unbelievable thing had happened. Ora saw Hester Burt turn back and make straight for her.

'You come,' she had breathed quickly into Ora's ear. 'You come, too.'

'To the party — ?' Ora's throat had gone tight and dry.

'From four to six —' She had heard that much before an onrush of older girls and boys had swept her and Hester apart. Hester had been trying to tell her something else, but no matter, the miracle had happened.

But when she reached their tent she had found words. They had tumbled out of her like popcorn exploding in one of those glass boxes on little carts. Ma hadn't been so pleased over anything since they'd left Oklahoma. She stood holding the baby, smiling at Pa across the tent.

'The Burt Ranch,' he had repeated slowly. 'Sure, I know where that is. Been by it plenty of times. They raise apricots and walnuts. I got gas enough to get you there and back.'

Only Vida May had ventured any skepticism. 'I wouldn't go if'n I was Ora,' she had said knowingly. 'Sounds funny to me.'

'Vida May Larrabie, you hush up!' Ma had turned indignant eyes upon her oldest daughter. 'What's wrong about Ora getting asked to a party?'

'I didn't say there was anything wrong, Ma; I just said I wouldn't take a chance. There's bound to be a string to it somewhere.'

Ma had silenced Vida May's doubts with another wither-

ing glance. 'Ora's going to that party and, what's more, she's going in the best we can contrive.'

Ma rose to emergencies like yeast. The length of turkey-red cotton she was saving to line a quilt could be pressed into service for a dress, and there was the tatting collar and plaid sash the three girls all took turns borrowing. Jason offered the blue-jay wings to spruce up Loretta's brown felt hat, and down at the workrooms they had contributed thread and buttons and plenty of advice. The very last thing Ora had seen the night before had been Ma sewing away for dear life under the tent light. . . .

Ora and Judy were late for breakfast. But there was mush left in the kettle and Ma had saved some of the canned milk especially for Ora. 'Eat all you can,' she advised. 'You'll need something to hold you together till the party.'

In spite of the warning Ora couldn't seem to set her mind on food. By afternoon her body tingled from a vigorous session in the washrooms under Vida May's supervision; the roots of her hair ached from being tugged into curls. But the family viewed her with awed silence, as if she were about to be initiated into some secret order.

'Come on, now; time to get going.'

Pa had the old car started. It stood before the tent, the engine throbbing, while all the Larrabies gathered to watch the departure.

'Now then.' Ma tweaked the freshly ironed plaid sash into a more spirited bow.

The turkey-red dress had been made plenty long and full, so it could do double duty for Loretta on occasion. The tatting collar was a little on the ample side, too, but the gold-washed brooch that Vida May had found in a filling station restroom held it firmly in place. The pin part was broken, but Ma had sewed it on, and the green glass stone that looked almost exactly like an emerald showed up well.

'Here —' Loretta handed over her brown felt hat, resplendent with the blue-jay wings. 'Don't put it on till you get there.'

Ora held it tenderly on her lap and smiled her thanks at

Jason, who had found the dead blue jay and cured the feathers, almost as neatly as if he'd been a taxidermist, everyone had said. The wings felt softer than silk to her fingers and they shone bluer than anything under the sun.

'Don't she look a picture, Pa?' Ma had beamed and pushed a moist strand of hair out of her eyes before she shifted the baby to her other arm and held him higher to see the departure. 'You got the handkerchief I ironed out for you?'

'Yes, Ma.' Ora smiled solemnly and produced it, with Jason's jumping beans knotted fast in one corner.

'Well,' Pa said again, 'let's go.'

Other eyes were watching, and hands waved all along the way.

'Seems like they all know I'm going,' Ora breathed as she waved back.

Pa maneuvered the car into the open space by the store and gas pump, past the office and gate, before he relaxed in the seat. Once they swung out into the highway and joined the stream of traffic he pulled down his hat and began to chew his tobacco.

'She's doing all right for her age,' he told Ora as they chugged along at twenty-five. 'Ed's always kicking 'bout how her valves need grinding. I tell him I wouldn't wonder but mine do, too. Costs money to get 'em fixed, like everything does in this world.'

'Yes, Pa,' Ora answered.

'Well, it's something to keep going, times being what they are and all. Trouble is it don't get you nowhere to keep going if someone else beats you to the jobs.'

'Yes, Pa,' Ora said.

Three, four, five cars went by in shining succession. Pa squinted at their disappearing brightness.

'My, it sure beats all how they can go — fifty, sixty, seventy miles just nothing if they step on it. Seems like there's always somebody going somewheres or coming back from somewheres else. . . . Look; those folks have come from Arkansas. Bet they're heading for Santa Paula, where the lemon pickers are on strike. Maybe we'd ought to try our luck over there, but ever since that rock caught me —'

'Slow down, Pa.' Ora touched his arm and pointed. 'We're most there.'

A mile or so farther on a dirt road there were big gates, and a painted sign that read: 'Rancho Eldora. Private road. Trespassers will be legally prosecuted by order of G. N. Burt, owner.'

Pa brought the car to a stop, but he didn't turn in. 'Guess I'd better leave you off here,' he decided. 'Might not be any good place to turn round when we get inside. It don't look to be very much of a walk. I'll be back here round six. Take your time.'

It was farther than it looked from the main road to the house, but the way was shaded from the glare by eucalyptus trees that edged the acres of apricots and walnuts on either side. Walking like that was almost like wading through the sun-flecked waters of a brown brook. Ora grew dizzy if she didn't look up sometimes to find the blue sky between the long, loosely hung leaves that rattled against one another in the spring air. It was good to be walking that last stretch by herself; good to feel the reassuring stir of the jumping beans in her handkerchief. The warmth of her hands made them lively. She liked the unexpected jerks and quivers they gave through the cotton.

She must be the first guest, she decided, because there were no cars parked in the driveway. She had hoped Hester would be about, but there wasn't a sign of her. The house stood white and ample before her, like those she loved to draw. She hesitated at the steps that led to the vine-covered porch, and she heard the voices.

'Mamma, look!' Ora recognized the one that belonged to Hester's mother. 'Do you see what I see coming up the path?'

'Yes, daughter,' another voice answered. 'Maybe it's the rig she's got on, but I don't seem to recognize the child.'

'Of course you don't! She's one of them, from the migratory camp. If Hester's asked her here after what I said —'

'Now, now, don't get excited, Emmy. What's one child more at a party?'

'It's not that, Mamma; it's her deliberately disobeying me.'

I've told Hester, and her father's told her, she mustn't have anything to do with them outside of school. I might have known she was up to something like this, the way she acted when I tried to talk her out of this "tacky party" idea. I'm going right out and send that child back where she came from —'

'Wait.' The other voice broke in. 'You're not going to do anything of the kind. Punish Hester afterward, but anyone she asked is going to stay.'

'But, Mamma, you know how George and all of us feel about these migratories. It's bad enough having them swarm all over, dirty and shiftless and God knows what else, raising the taxes and overrunning the schools, without Hester taking up with them.'

'You can't put a barbed-wire fence round Hester's heart — just remember that, Emmy.'

The voices were going on behind the windows, but Ora heard nothing more. Her ears were ringing dully and she could hardly see where her feet were taking her as she stumbled away from the house. Her throat felt tight, and way inside of her something pressed chill and hard like an ice cube. Now she knew why Hester had looked worried. Of course, she knew how people who lived in houses felt about people who didn't; people who came looking for work in old cars. They kept different looks and voices for you and always found out if you lived in a tent and had too many brothers and sisters.

She found a bench under a pepper tree and hid as far back in the shade as she could, trying to think what to do. Pa wouldn't be back for two hours. She could wait down by the sign, only all the cars coming to the party would have to turn in there and everyone would see her. She could never face school on Monday and all the jokes and questions. Maybe if she went out on the main road and started walking toward the camp she might thumb a ride back. But Pa would wait and wait, and Ma and the rest would have to know it had all been a mistake. They had been so proud and pleased about her going, especially Ma. And then there was Hester.

She knew for certain now that Hester Burt was her friend. She'd proved it going against her mother to ask her, and she'd be punished afterward, sure as fate. If Ora stayed away, then Hester would think she hadn't wanted to come and that would be worst of all.

Cars were thick in the driveway now. The air was full of honkings and voices. She waited till the lawn was full of moving figures before she came slowly out of hiding.

She found herself suddenly the center of a noisy group. What with her recent struggle against tears and the sun being in her eyes she stood there blinking her bewilderment. For a moment she felt confused, as if she were part of a circus parade or a motion-picture show. She recognized the voices and features of her schoolmates, yet each of them had been transformed into a stranger. Dilapidated sweaters and jeans; torn lace and faded gingham of outlandish pattern, hats minus crowns or weighed down with hideous flowers, were all milling dizzily about her as she stared.

'Hi, Nan!' Millie Robbins was shrilling. 'Come here and see Ora! She's got everything but the kitchen stove on her.' 'Gee, I'll say!'

Hands were poking her with curious and admiring interest. She stood stiff and uncomfortable in their midst, not knowing whether to be embarrassed or pleased by the unaccustomed cordiality.

'Feathers, too! Oh, boy!' Billy Whitcomb came toward her like a rusty crow, in black, with a crushed-in high hat tilted sideways over his freckles. He poked a cane at her hat and let out one of his best two-finger-in-the-mouth whistles. 'Some tacky party, all right.'

Ora caught at the words as they went by. A 'tacky party.' Hester's mother had called it that, too. That must have been what Hester had tried to tell her yesterday on the way out of school. She ought to have listened better, but all she had thought of then had been the wonder of being asked. A party had always meant the best you had, on your back and on your plate.

'Didn't I tell you so?' Hester was coming toward her in a dress of her mother's with obviously new and unnecessary

patches plastered all over it. 'Didn't I say Ora'd be a good sport if I asked her?'

Ora met Hester's eyes. They shone with approval as she took in every detail of the costume. Ora put her hand to her throat to try to ease the tightness just above the sewed-on brooch. She tried to smile back as if she'd dressed that way on purpose. But all she really wanted was to run and run and never stop till she got back to the camp. It had been bad enough before, hearing what Hester's mother had said behind the window, but this was worse, because every time they laughed and praised her for looking tacky she was betraying Ma and the rest.

'Some hat!' Jo and Jerry Black snatched it from her head as they dashed by in suits of flour sacking with red bandannas flapping. They chased it all over the lawn as if it were a football. Ora rescued it at last, but not before a lot of the soft small feathers had been scattered and the wing tips broken.

'I mustn't let on,' Ora told herself between clenched teeth. 'Not to Hester here and not to the folks when I get back.'

They were all especially nice to her that afternoon. No one passed remarks about living in a tent, or eating mush three times a day, or any of the jokes she'd come to expect. She found the most peanuts in the hunt without half trying, and the potato race would have been easy to win if she'd wanted to. When it came to pinning the donkey's tail on blindfolded she made no effort, though she'd thought it would be fun.

'No, thank you, ma'am, I'd just as soon look on,' she answered when Hester's grandmother urged her to try. 'How near is it to six o'clock, please?'

'Why, child, it's just past five. There's a whole hour yet and the refreshments. You're enjoying yourself, aren't you?'

'Yes, thank you,' Ora lied valiantly. 'But I got to keep track of the time. My Pa's awful particular about waiting, and we live a good ways off.'

Ora turned away when she saw Hester's mother coming in

that direction. She hadn't said anything yet about her being there. But there was always a chance she might speak out in spite of what the old lady had said.

'Now it's time to vote on the prizes for the tackiest costume,' Hester announced importantly. 'Grandma's going to sit over there behind the screen, and everybody has to go up, one at a time, and whisper the name. She'll mark it down on paper and count up who gets the most votes. You mustn't say me, because people don't get prizes at their own parties.'

Ora took her place at the end of the long, wriggling line that moved forward in single file. The party had reached its peak, and excitement ran high. The very room seemed charged with it, only she felt no answering quiver under the turkey-red dress folds. 'Please, God,' she prayed desperately, while the suppressed giggles and whispers went on about her and sounds of activity came from the dining-room across the hall. 'Please, God, make it a tie if You can.'

It was her turn to go behind the screen, but, before she could say the name she had chosen, Hester's grandmother reached out, all smiles, and took her by the hand. 'Makes no difference who you choose, child'—she spoke up loud enough for them all to hear—'you've got twice as many votes as anyone else. You win the prize all right, and here it is.'

They were all clapping and shouting about her, looking on enviously. Then there was a hush while Hester put the package into her hands. Her fingers went numb so she could hardly feel the softness of the white tissue paper and the pink ribbon bow that tied it.

'Open it, open it!' they clamored.

'I picked it out all myself,' Hester was saying. 'I sure wish I had one just like it for my room.'

'Now, don't tease her,' the old lady was saying. 'Let her open it when she's a mind to. You want to show your folks how it looks all wrapped up, don't you?'

Ora nodded without looking up. She dared not raise her eyes in gratefulness or trust herself to make a sound.

'Well, come on; refreshments are ready!' The summons came not a moment too soon, and Ora was mercifully forgotten in the rush for places about the decorated table.

The spoon weighed heavy in her fingers and the ice cream wavered before her like a blurred rainbow as she tried to eat her way through. But it might just as well have been beans and corn bread.

'No, thank you, ma'am,' she answered Hester's grandmother, who urged more upon her; 'I've had a great plenty.'

'*Pop. Pop. Pop.*' The fringed crackers began to crackle and paper caps appeared, to perch at crazy angles. Jimmy Thomas pulled hers for her, and there was a purple dunce cap inside, with a little slip of folded paper that read: 'It's a wise fool that never gets fooled twice.' Ora wished it had been a real fortune, the kind that said you'd be rich and happy if you bewared of someone dark and jealous. Vida May had found one like that once in a half-empty box of taffy thrown out of a car.

'Now everybody keep still while Hester makes a wish and blows out the candles. There's eight and one to grow on!'

For a long moment the clear points of orange flame scarcely stirred above the smooth white frosting with its pink sugar roses. Little reflected sparks of brightness caught in all the watching eyes and then were snuffed out. Hester fell back in her chair triumphant, and an answering breath of relief went round the table. She would have her wish, even if it wasn't really her birthday till the middle of next week. The party was safely over now; already it was crumbling like the cake under the knife's uncompromising blade.

Ora's piece held a pink sugar rose and a citron leaf that had escaped mutilation. She nibbled round the edges and managed to tie it in another corner of the handkerchief with the jumping beans.

'Well, good-bye, I've got to be going.' Ora slipped over to Hester as they left the table. 'Thanks a lot for asking me to your party. I —'

She was glad that someone turned on the radio just then and spared her having to say she'd had a lovely time. But Hester didn't seem to notice the omission.

'Good-bye,' she said. 'I'm glad you won the prize.' She gave a quick look to make sure her mother was in the kitchen

before she put her arm around Ora and followed her to the door.

'Wait, child, wait!' The old lady was hurrying down the driveway after her, waving something. Late, long fingers of afternoon sunlight made her glasses shine and lit up the edges of her white, parted hair. 'Here's some leftover cookies and candy. I expect you've got brothers and sisters could make use of a few? How many of you are there?'

Ora hesitated. It wouldn't do to act too eager. Ma always said you mustn't let on you didn't have plenty of everything. You had to be careful when people asked questions, even kind ones, because sometimes it got back to the investigators and made trouble. But she couldn't very well hurt Hester's grandmother.

'Thank you, ma'am,' she said, and, remembering a favorite phrase of Pa's, she added, 'There's quite a snarl of us young ones.'

Once the house was out of sight she breathed more easily. She could see the flashing of cars through the tree trunks as she came nearer the road, but no sign of Pa by the gates. There would be time to do what she had made up her mind must be done.

A ditch lay between the road and the fenced-in acres of fruit and walnut trees. It had been deepened by the rains. Mud and dank grass and debris filled it in matted confusion. Ora marked a great ball of tumbleweed and began to climb down toward it, bracing her feet as well as she could in the drying clay. She kept the prize package in the crook of her arm till she was safely down. Then she took it in both hands and turned it round and round. The paper was smooth and white without a wrinkle on it anywhere, and the pink ribbon stood up stiff and beautiful, the way it never did after a second or third tying.

Vida May wouldn't have hesitated. She'd have hunched up one shoulder and grinned and said, 'Well, I put one over on those stiff-necks, all right!' After all, a prize was a prize, even if the joke was on you. Hester had picked it out herself. She had been glad Ora had won it, and that made it

not quite fair to Hester if she didn't even look inside the box.

'You could say you won the peanut hunt or the donkey pinning — ' The words came dry and scratchy, as if the very weeds were tempting her.

'But the folks would be sure to find out,' Ora stood up to herself in the bottom of the ditch. 'I couldn't ever fool them if I fetched it back, and if Ma thought I looked funny she'd feel bad, real bad. I couldn't hurt Ma's feelings like that. But I guess there's no harm if I take one look.'

The ribbon yielded to her fingers with voluptuous softness; the whispering tissue paper parted to show a china vase like no other she had ever seen. The white, tapering fingers of a lady's hand clasped the part meant to hold flowers, and, as if that were not enough, little gold-flecked sprigs had been scattered over the smooth surface. Ora half expected to feel them growing, so real they seemed in their painted bloom — the roses so pink, the forget-me-nots so blue. She made sure she had not missed a single leaf or bud. She clasped her own square fingers over the delicate china ones to fix the position in her mind forever.

'It won't hurt if I keep the ribbon,' she decided, as she fitted the cover on the box.

When she scrambled up the bank again there was no sign of white paper. Already it was turning the color of the clay that would keep her secret, of the tumbleweed that would hide her shame.

Even with the sun in her eyes she made out the high-bodied car a long way off. Pa drew up and helped her in. Neither of them said much till he had the car back on the other side of the highway and their faces were set toward camp.

'Well,' he said, 'have a good time? What's in the bag?'

'Cookies and candy. Want some, Pa? Or a peanut — I found most a whole pocketful in the peanut hunt.'

'No, thanks; I'll stick to my quid. Guess the kids and Ma'll be able to help you out, though.'

It felt good to settle back beside him and not have to make up things to say for a while. The low sun was warm at their

backs, and the shadow of the car kept pace with them, like a dark, mechanical scarecrow on wheels. Ora could make out the shape of their shoulders and heads — Pa's old hat and his hands on the steering wheel; her own smaller shape, with Loretta's hat perched stiffly on top. She slipped it off and held it in her lap. She hoped the blue-jay feathers wouldn't look as battered as she remembered. But it wasn't any use pretending that they would ever be the same.

Pa looked down at her lap and chuckled. 'You all must 'a' had a high old time, from the looks of that hat!'

Ora let it go at that and went on stroking the feathers that would never be stiff and shining again.

The wild-flower fields were coming in sight, with the highway cutting between. On either side they stretched, clear to the mountains, which were purple now and mottled with cloud shadows. The lupin was turning purple, too, in the late light. But that made no difference. It was a pure wonder any way you looked at it.

'Pretty, all right.' Pa slowed down. 'Sight for sore eyes.'

Ora drew a long breath before she answered. 'My, but there's a lot,' she said. 'Lots more'n a vase could hold, isn't there, Pa?'

She stayed quiet after that for such a long time that even Pa noticed it.

'You act all in,' he said. 'Well, sociability can be awful hard work sometimes.'

'Yes, Pa,' Ora agreed, and edged closer to him on the seat.

A PARTNERSHIP WITH DEATH

BY VARDIS FISHER

EUNICE looked at me across the table and said: 'I've a corking idea for a novel. I'd like to know what you think of it.'

The three of us were sitting in a small club, drinking bad Saratoga cocktails. They contained too much bitters and poor vermouth. I emptied my glass and said: 'All right, let's have it.'

'It's not at all like anything I've ever done,' she said.

Eunice Ward was a novelist, but unlike many women who write books she was not masculine in her habits and tastes. She was small and dark and shapely; and it had always seemed to me a bit incongruous that such a petite woman should write such huge tomes. None of her novels, of which there had been a half-dozen, ran under six hundred pages, and they were big gawky amorphous things like the works of Dreiser. You would expect a small and shy and introverted person like Eunice to write books no bigger than Robert Nathan's. She didn't weigh a hundred pounds, and everything about her, including her gestures, was delicate.

'Tell him,' her husband said. 'I've heard this story a thousand times but I guess I can stand it again.'

Paul Ward was professor of economics on a famous Eastern campus. He was a big Viking of a man with fierce blue eyes and a way of snorting as if to blow obstacles out of his path. In all respects he was unlike his wife. Paul was lusty and lean

and broad, and as extroverted as they come. Psychology, I had learned long ago, he held in withering contempt.

'Well,' said Eunice, opening wide her dark eyes and looking as if the story slightly terrified her, 'it's strange but it's true. I mean it really happened. I knew the woman. I still know her — but perhaps not so well as Paul does.' She looked at Paul when she said that and I thought her eyes accused him.

'You mean she's still alive.'

'Her kind never dies,' said Paul. 'It's the husbands who die. Out in Idaho don't you have a Lady Bluebeard?'

'Oh yes, indeed — and a very notorious one.'

'How many husbands did she kill?'

'She was convicted for only one murder, I think, but it's generally assumed that she laid away a half-dozen or so.'

'Why drag in that case?' Eunice asked Paul. 'This woman did not kill her husbands. They just died.'

'How many?'

'Four.'

'Four husbands died on her? It sounds as if you have a story there.'

'It's a wonderful story.'

I realized at once that it had taken hold of her. Authors write most of their stories as a job, but now and then they fall upon one that they must write because they cannot forget it or because in some way it seems to offer an interpretation of themselves.

'This woman,' said Eunice gravely, 'is a good woman.'

'She just had bad luck,' said Paul dryly.

'She's a good woman,' said Eunice. 'She's sweet and generous and kind — just the sort who should have babies and make a home.'

'Didn't she have any babies?'

'No, she couldn't.'

'Did she blame the husbands? Women often do.'

'Sometimes the husbands are to blame. There are sterile men, you know.'

'Yes, of course. But four in a row, do you think?'

'Hardly. This woman was the sterile one in this case.'

'I didn't mean to interrupt,' I said. 'Go on with the story.'

'Well, the woman has married again. When I learned she had married the fifth time I began to think about her and wonder how she felt. That — that's the story.'

'I don't believe it,' said Paul. 'This one will die and she'll marry a sixth one.' Paul looked around him and I saw his gaze dwelling on a very luscious blonde.

'How old is this woman now?'

'About forty. She was young when she married the first time — only fifteen, I think.'

'Does that have anything to do with the case?'

'Eunice insists she's a good woman,' said Paul. 'She loves good women. If this one lost four husbands in twenty-five years, that's not so bad as four in twenty years.'

To me the case seemed a little ridiculous. 'How many years of marriage were allotted to each?' Eunice's glance rebuked me. 'You have here,' I went on hastily, 'a psychological story. It's an almost incredible story to begin with. Now if each husband had about the same number of years —'

'As a matter of fact, they did.'

'Then that makes it all the more incredible. You mean each had about five or six years? How long a time passed after the death of each before she married again?'

'Not long,' said Paul. 'She was always on the job.'

'Never mind that,' said Eunice impatiently. 'I'm interested in how she feels now. What is her attitude toward her fifth husband going to be? It seems to me that is the heart of the story.'

'That's right. Well, you do have a story there.'

'It is all laid out for me up to the fifth marriage. From there on out I'm on my own. The meat of the story is what happens in the fifth marriage.'

'Or the tenth,' said Paul, and emptied his drink.

'It has swell possibilities. I'd like to know what the fifth husband thinks.'

'Yes,' said Paul. 'What does that poor bastard *feel*? I'd say it's his story.'

'It could be,' Eunice admitted. 'Should it be his story or her story?'

'Doesn't that depend on the two persons? Which is the more important, the more sensitive? Let's have more about this woman and this husband. How old is he?'

'In his forties.'

'Then she's not the kind who marries men younger than herself.'

'One of them was. He just happened to be.'

'Is this fifth husband intelligent?'

'He's a lot like Paul,' said Eunice.

'Draw your own conclusion,' said Paul. In a very obvious way he was interested in a young blonde standing at the bar.

'Tell me about the woman first. She must be attractive.'

'In a way. She's the warm and motherly sort that a lot of men go for. She's a little stout now but not unattractively so. She's very healthy and has a very fair skin.'

'How intelligent?'

'Average. She's a high-school graduate.'

'Are you sure she didn't poison these four men?'

Eunice's black eyes flashed. 'Of course not. And for the purpose of my book she certainly did not.'

I turned to Paul. 'How well do you know this woman?'

'I've seen her a lot of times.'

'You think —'

'Oh, hell, no. There's no murder in the case.'

'Well,' I said, 'let's have another drink and proceed.' We had another round, and a second and a third, and I could see the effect of them in Paul's eyes; but there was no change in Eunice except that she talked a little more freely. She sketched in the background. This much-married woman — whom we shall call Jane — appeared to be a very average and lovable sort that men liked and trusted. Her four husbands had been average men. One of them had been killed in an automobile accident. One had died of cancer of the liver, and one of a bad heart weakened by childhood rheumatism. Eunice did not know what the fourth had died of but it was some common ailment.

'The one younger than Jane,' I asked curiously, 'what did he die of?'

'He was killed,' said Paul. 'He was drunk.'

'Was his wife with him?'

'No.'

'Well, I guess I'll have to assume that the woman didn't murder any of them. In writing this story are you going to tell about her life with the first four?'

'Just sketch it in. That's not important.'

'It might be. Four husbands ought to make something interesting of any woman. Which one did she love most and why?'

'She loves all men,' said Paul. 'She's that kind.'

'The story,' said Eunice a little impatiently, 'is about the fifth marriage.'

'That's right,' Paul said. 'What happens to the poor bastard? Does he die too?'

'Does he die too?' asked Eunice, looking at me. 'Won't Jane expect him to die?'

'Oh, not at once. He should have five or six years.'

'But as the end of that time approaches, how will Jane feel? Won't she be afraid she will lose him?'

'You see,' said Paul wearily, 'Eunice must find some significance in this. She's not content to let people marry and die. To die or not to die, that's the point.'

'I begin to feel a lot of sympathy for the fifth husband. What's his name?'

'Osberg,' said Paul. 'He's a Dane.'

'Suppose you let Osberg live to be ninety,' I said to Eunice. 'Would that spoil your story?'

'That's one kind of story. Is that the biggest story?'

'You see!' cried Paul triumphantly. 'She doesn't mind killing Osberg to get a big story.'

Eunice shrugged. Her husband didn't take her career very seriously. I've never known any husband of a woman author who did not seem to be on the defensive against her.

'You have written psychological novels,' Eunice said to me. 'How would you work this story out?'

'Do you want me to be serious?'

'If you can be.' There was somber mirth in her dark eyes when she added: 'Don't let the wanton slaughter of husbands outrage your ego. The story is the thing. One of the great Russians should have done it — or a Frenchman.'

'Well, this woman Jane is healthy, attractive, womanly, and childless. Has she had any lovers during her married life?' The response to the question startled me. Paul kicked me under the table.

'I couldn't imagine it,' said Eunice tartly. 'Four —'

'But she is barren,' I said, avoiding Paul's eyes. 'There's a problem in psychology — especially with women of average intelligence. I've known such women. They're pretty easy with their favors. It's not because they are wanton. The frustrated maternal hunger in them turns to the grown-up boys. Furthermore, you admit that Jane is healthy and vivid and that men go for her.'

'Even if she had lovers, what does that have to do with it?'

Paul kicked me again under the table. Had he been one of Jane's lovers? I knew the big handsome cuss was death on women — and especially giddy women who measure men in the breadth of their shoulders and the line of their jaw.

'You're going to make this the woman's story, aren't you? Now if she was naturally the easy sort when young, her terrible mortality in husbands would make her all the more approachable, wouldn't it?'

'It might work the other way.'

'Maybe, with a woman like you.'

I intended that remark to be innocent but I thought I saw Eunice catch her breath. She looked at me and in her black eyes there was, at least for an instant, the naked meaning of her if I had had the power to read it. Paul turned away and was looking at a couple dancing. I ordered another round of drinks.

'Well, let's skip the erotic life.' An idea came to me. 'Let's dance,' I said.

Eunice was an excellent dancer but a little stiff. I suppose most women are who write books — and most men too. While we danced I had intended to talk to her, free of Paul's caustic interruptions and kicks under the table; but almost at once I observed that she was watching her husband. He did not know it, and probably would not have cared if he had known. Several couples were dancing and I became aware of Eunice's intent gaze on her husband when she began to

lead me. I became curious about her motive, and I observed next that Paul was staring, in the bold and unashamed way of extroverts, at the blonde. Then I understood that Eunice was maneuvering the dance so that she could watch her husband.

'About this story,' I said, looking down across her dark lashes and noting the direction of her gaze. 'As I understand it, you want to write a novel about Jane's attitude toward her fifth husband. It could be a swell story. Does she mother him to death and constantly watch over him, or does she — ?'

'What?' asked Eunice, looking up.

'What else could she do?'

'I don't know.'

'She might want him to die.' At once I felt a change in her. She stiffened and raised a hand to do something with her hair.

'Why did you say that?' she asked, and there was such passion in her voice that I was startled.

'Well, she might. If you want a psychological story —'

The music stopped and we returned to the table. Paul had gone over to the bar and was standing there with his back to us. He was a handsome figure of a man — two hundred pounds of firm meat and bone without a bit of fat on him. When I turned to Eunice I caught her looking at the blonde.

'She probably would want him to die,' I said. 'The possibilities there are enormous. She has had four husbands who have died, and in consequence she has developed an attitude toward the men she marries. Not fatalism, you think? It could be that but it could be something subtler. It could be —'

'What?' asked Eunice. She was again in superb control of herself. Her voice was casual and her eyes were an inscrutable black.

'It could be a kind of subconscious and satanic artistry. After four, the woman has come to accept the death of her husband as inevitable. Death has become the fixed pattern of her life. She finds a part of her meaning in it — and the

ways in which she finds that meaning make the story. I mean that she, so vitally alive, has entered a kind of strange partnership with death. Or don't you think so?

'I like to hear you talk,' Eunice said calmly. 'Go on.'

When the music started up, Paul headed straight for the blonde. A few moments later he was dancing with her. They were both good dancers and they made a handsome pair.

'Shall we dance or talk about the story?'

'I like to hear you talk.'

'I'm a little drunk,' I said. 'I'm afraid I'm not talking very well. Suppose we pursue that possibility. Jane, a good woman, could never consciously wish for the death of her husband. Could she? But subconsciously she could plot it. Naturally, after a few years she would expect him to die because all the others had died; and if he didn't die she would be confused. I suppose that, having lost four husbands, she has become rather self-pitying and neurotic, hasn't she? Life is cruel for her through no fault of her own. But she is a brave and self-sacrificing and uncomplaining woman. She has learned to feed on the tragic. That's the meaning of her life and she couldn't very well reconcile herself to a husband who threatened to outlive her.

'I once knew a woman who lost all her babies. One after another died in infancy. After four or five — I don't remember how many — had died, the woman came to be regarded as a very tragic person. She thought of herself that way too and learned to thrive on misfortune. For her it was all a part of God's wise and inscrutable plan. She got a lot of attention and sympathy that she would have never got if her babies had lived. In fact, she reached the point where she fully expected the next one to die, and spoke of its death as something imminent and inevitable. Even more than that. As soon as the infant was born she began to search it for signs of sickness; and right from the start she told the neighbors how ailing it was and fondly dwelt on all the imaginary symptoms.

'There's a story like the one you have in mind. This devout and superstitious woman never for a moment blamed herself or wondered about syphilis or anything else. Nor

did her neighbors. It was God's doings and that's all there was to it. But persons try to turn even misfortune into an advantage and she did; and she became the best-known and most talked of woman in her county. She loved all the pity and attention and the way she was singled out for very special discussion.

'Now suppose her sixth child, say, had lived. Would the mother have had a nervous breakdown? I suspect she would have had. If all the grave attention of her neighbors had been suspended, what meaning would her life have had then? It would be like making a new start after emotional bankruptcy. She would no longer have been the one woman in the county singled out by God for a special and mysterious dispensation. She would no longer have had a very particular destiny. If a child or two had lived and romped about in health, this woman might easily have gone insane.

'Because, after all, Eunice, we are interested in attention and sympathy and in being set apart. We are so hungry for those things that some people contrive misfortune in order to get them. That's the psychology of the cripple who becomes the brave and cheerful person in his community; of the wife who gets the attention of her husband and doctors by becoming neurotically ill; of the tantrum child who throws himself on the floor. That's the psychology of a Hitler, bedeviled by feelings of physical and social inferiority, who sets out on mass murder to make the whole world pay attention to him. It's a terrible thing in human beings but it is there — and in varying degrees it is in all of us.

'It must be in this woman Jane. But how can she bring about the death of her husband in order to keep the rôle as the tragic wife? Have you figured that out?'

'No,' said Eunice in a low voice. 'I guess I hadn't thought of the story that way.'

Paul had finished the dance and returned to the bar and I went over to fetch him. When he sat at the table I said:

'We have this novel doped out. We've decided that Jane cannot live happily unless her fifth husband dies; but she's a virtuous woman. She can't poison him or shoot him. She has to bring about his death in a way that will leave her conscience clear. How can she do it? Is he a neurotic man?'

'Hell, no,' Paul said.

'Then she can't drive him into chronic illness. Besides, a neurotic illness often hangs on to the snow-white years. Could there be an accident? Jane does tender and thoughtful things to preserve her husband, but all the while, unknown to her, they are calculated to finish him off. Could she make some change in the house so he would fall and break his neck?'

'I'm afraid,' said Paul, 'she is going to have a hell of a time getting rid of him.'

I looked at Eunice. She was watching me closely but she did not speak.

'I have it,' I said. 'Jane is a patriotic woman. We're at war. She persuades her husband to enlist.'

'A lot of soldiers will come back,' Paul said.

'Well, we'll put him in the most dangerous service — in aviation, of course. The chances are against him there.'

'We must be sure to kill him,' Paul said. 'If we don't, Eunice will have to rewrite her damned story.'

I became aware that Eunice was upset. She rose abruptly and asked me to dance; and when we were on the floor, she said:

'Did you have to say that?'

'What?'

'About aviation. Didn't you know that Paul has enlisted in aviation?'

'Lord, no! Really, has he? In the combat part?'

'Yes.'

I looked around for Paul. He was dancing again with the blonde. When Eunice looked up at me I saw tears in her eyes.

'I tried to keep him from enlisting,' she said.

'Of course you did.'

'College teachers don't have to go. He was deferred.'

'Yes, of course.'

'When he insisted, I tried to get him to enter a non-combat division.'

'Of course you did,' I said. Then suddenly a thought came to me and I dropped the subject.

(From *The New Yorker*)

WHAT DO YOU SEE, DEAR ENID?

BY GRACE FLANDRAU

THE Isle of Man is a very small fragment of the British Commonwealth of Nations and a place you never hear much about. Even before the war you seldom heard about it or saw anybody who had been there, and although, during the past year or two, I have often asked some person recently arrived from Britain for news of the island, not one of them knew the place or could say more than that it was said to be full of concentration camps and German prisoners.

But in our family there was always talk of the Isle of Man — the nostalgic, twilight talk children love to listen to. I must have been about twelve years old when I first went there. I was in school in France at the time, and my parents in America irrelevantly decreed that I should be sent to pay a visit to connections of the family on the Isle of Man.

It was, fortunately, winter when I went there, for in summertime it used to be visited by whooping hordes of tourists from the industrial cities of England, who overran it and obliterated temporarily everything that was native and unique. All the real islanders left if they could, or went into hiding until winter came and their small green island became its own mist-hung, storm-blown, goblin-haunted, charming self.

The members of the Manx family into which I was so unexpectedly precipitated were all, or so it seemed to me then, vaguely and equally old. There were six of them, three brothers and three sisters, all unmarried and actually ranging in age from about twenty-five to nearly forty.

To be deposited alone among strangers and adults might have been rather frightening to a little girl, but I immediately felt at home with these gentle and fantastic people. Their stodgy Victorian provincialism and untrammelled Celtic lunacy were instantly familiar and understandable to me, just as the better fairy tales, which are compounded of this same mixture of magic and homely fact, are familiar and understandable to children.

The tall, gray stone house I went to live in stood on the water's edge, its face toward the wild winds and storms or the ecstatic gray-blue calms of the Irish Sea. On the point of land which made the bay lay the dark, medieval ruins of Peel Castle, built where Saint Patrick himself is said to have put up the first Christian chapel. It was a notably lyric scene in which to set a house full of Victorian litter and stuffiness — a bedlam of mahogany and plush and Italian statuary and copies of painted masterpieces framed in alarmingly bright gilt. Deep carpets sucked all sound from your footsteps; gas-lights whistled in ornate chandeliers; coal fires burned red as roses in all the dim rooms, from which curtains in superimposed layers of velvet, silk, and lace shut out the brief northern daylight. And the warm, breathed-over air, rich with smells of brass polish, upholstery, coal dust, illuminating gas, and Nottingham lace induced a cozy somnolence.

The fact that there was nothing anybody had to do must have been one of the things that made the place especially understandable and agreeable to a child. The three brothers were not engaged in any business and, as none of the brothers and sisters was married, there were few family responsibilities. The house swarmed with rosy maids, whose excessive leisure was mostly spent in the fire-lit basement kitchen, drinking tea.

Miss Ellen was the oldest of the sisters. Her small sad face wore a look of authentic saintliness and, following the Victorian pattern, she was an invalid. She sat all day in the upstairs drawing room by a window that overlooked the sea, so small, so fragile, that she seemed to rest on her deep chair as light as a fallen leaf. Her gray eyes, always turned to the gray horizon, were so emptied and dreamy that

it was as if the essence of Miss Ellen were being drawn out and away to that pure, luminous distance where sky and water met.

But Miss Ellen was not the one who had second sight. That was Miss Enid. She was the dark, Druidic one. If the others were Celtic, Enid was pre-Celtic, descended straight from the unknown race of half-magic people whose wise men were the Druids and who, we are told, occupied this island before the Celts. Miss Enid's sallow face was not pretty, but it was lighted by dark eyes too magnificently big and brilliant for so uncompromising a spinster. All day, every day, in mist or storm, Miss Enid walked. In shapeless tweeds, the mist webbed in her hair, she passed through the deep, wooded glens and over the gorse-covered mountain slopes like something blown before the wind.

The youngest sister, the beauty, the pet, was Miss Dorothea, red-haired, blue-eyed, and with a taste for frills and ribbon bows. It was said that the Manx novelist, Hall Caine, drew one of his most famous heroines after her, but the family did not like Hall Caine and never read him. Their disapproval came from the fact that he was so well known in the outside world that he had brought some attention to the island. It made them feel he could not be quite a gentleman. Dorothea was the one who should have been courted and loved, should have married and produced children. Her failure to do so had left her flighty and foolish and in some way absent from herself.

I do not know what doom of celibacy hung upon that family. William, the oldest, whose only career was being head of the family, was a mild saint, like Ellen. The dark, lusty, handsome middle brother, James, drank his nights away in the taverns and slept most of the day. Edward, the youngest, was a scholar and antiquarian, spoke Celtic, and lost himself in the history and legends of his island, which he preferred to call Mona, as the poets do.

To me, coming to them from frugal France, it was the fabulous eating in that household, or rather the fabulous meals set forth and not eaten, that filled me most with won-

der. In a sepulchral dining room muffled in blood-red drapes, four of the five daily repasts were served. Any one of these would have made six or eight of the kind I was used to. For dinner there were *two* soups always, one thick, one thin, then a huge fish poached whole, then a boiled leg of mutton, then a roast of beef, then a dish of game, then puddings, tarts, a savory — all of it washed down with claret and soda water. The food served at tea would have fed every girl in my Paris school, and tea was followed by supper, and supper by a late meal said to be characteristic of the island, consisting chiefly of claret and huge onions roasted black upon the open coals.

Tea I found indescribably enjoyable. It was served upstairs in Miss Ellen's sitting room, and, as James did not rise until late afternoon, it was the first meal at which the whole family were together. Gray twilight was soft in the room and the flush of the fire shone rosily through the thin cups. And the low-toned island voices were pleasant to the ear.

'Did you say Mother was all in blue, dear Enid?'

'All in blue, except, of course, the flowers.' Enid, as often happened, had met their deceased mother on the stairs when she returned from her walk.

'Ah, yes. Roses.' Dorothea sighed and smiled anxiously. 'She must have been so lovely! I would give anything if I, too, could see, but I never can. No matter how hard I try, I can never see.'

For it was only Miss Enid who 'saw.' Also, their mother was not the only one who returned. Sometimes it was dear Papa, though I fancy they found his shade a trifle oppressive. He had been, while on earth, I afterward learned, one of those complete Victorian patriarchs whose baleful effect upon the families they tyrannized is still, doubtless, underestimated. At any rate, he was seldom spoken of. It was Grandfather they liked to talk about. He was a man of many exploits and they especially liked to dwell upon his experience with one of the island's most formidable goblins. One evening he had spent an hour or two at the tavern near Glen Ellin, as was his custom, and had mounted his horse to return home. But on entering the moon-shadowed glen, he became aware of hollow hoofbeats behind him. Fearful, he

turned to look, and what he beheld turned his blood to ice. It was none other than the Cutty Sark, mounted and in hot pursuit. Grandfather put spurs to his horse and managed, though by the narrowest of margins, to outdistance the goblin and reach home in safety.

More frequently, however, the talk would be of Uncle Henry, of whom they were very fond and proud. He had been an eminent classicist, so imbued with Greek that he often absently addressed the tradespeople of Peel in the language of Aeschylus and Homer. When he finally founded a school for boys, he himself taught the Greek and Latin. Not long after this, however, Uncle Henry fell victim to a strange idea. He became convinced that his head was made of glass. This in itself would not have mattered, they felt, if he had not insisted on putting it in the cupboard with the other glasses.

'It is quite awkward,' Miss Enid explained, 'to teach Greek with your head on a shelf in the china closet.'

Moreover, he was determined that the cupboard door should be as nearly closed as possible. He had to hold the book outside, of course, and, although he could see through the pane of the glass door, the arrangement did not work very well. The pupils didn't take it right; they even played tricks, and it ended by his losing quite a few of them. The family did not seem to find it strange that Uncle Henry should have had this unusual attitude toward his own head. The point to them was that, because of it, he was almost forced to close the school, or would have been but for a lucky circumstance.

There have always been in the Isle of Man certain medicine women or seeresses, known as herb women. Not surprisingly, my childhood hosts were great believers in this strange sisterhood, one of whom, they told me, had been called in to minister to Uncle Henry. And she cured him, not by means of herbs and potions but by what seemed to the family a miracle of ingenuity. She filled a basin of water with small stones and unexpectedly dashed it all over Uncle Henry's head. When he found that the stones didn't break his head he was able to believe that it was *not* made of glass.

This dénouement was highly satisfactory to me. But other stories about Uncle Henry were not, especially the story of the church in Kirk Michael parish. Some years before, this church had suddenly been found to be haunted. Amid flickerings of sulphuric lights, a strange form was seen to float in and out of locked windows and even through the walls. It was Uncle Henry who finally succeeded in exorcising the ghost. Robed in a sheet, he seated himself on the church steps at midnight and proceeded to eat sugar out of a silver basin, and so broke the spell.

'But why did he eat sugar, Miss Enid?' I asked.

'To drive away the ghost, my child.'

'But why should that drive it away? And how had Uncle Henry known it would?' My questions seemed to the family unnecessary and irrelevant.

At any rate, ghosts and goblins, some of which had been seen by Miss Enid herself, played a considerable part in the family reminiscences, and the ease and familiarity with which they were spoken of robbed them of all terror. At night, when I climbed the little ladder into the enormous four-poster bed and, smothered under a red eiderdown pouf, watched the red coals breathe and crumble on the hearth, and listened to the long swing and rhythm of the sea, I was not afraid. Instead, the tea-time talk came back, pleasantly illumined with wonder, but without any touch of fear.

Some afternoons the conversation would pass, with no sense of transition at all, to the most ordinary topics, oftenest to politics in England and the doings of the reigning family, for whom, in quite the English manner, this family had the deepest affection and respect. The casual manner of this change put everything on the same footing; the shades of their deceased parents and the newly baptized royal infant, a minister of the Crown and the Cutty Sark, all existed in the same normal dimension of being.

The intensity of the family mood was never broken from the outside. In the time I spent there I never laid eyes on anyone but them. They went nowhere, received no one. I gathered, indeed, that there was a certain suspiciousness, especially on Miss Dorothea's part, a sense of enemies abroad

on the island, people who spied or concocted plots. No child was ever asked in to keep me company and none was needed. I was content, and when finally I was taken away I had the feeling of having left home behind.

Many years passed, and at last I went back to the island. Three of the family, Miss Ellen and the two older brothers, had died. The others had moved away from the sea into a country house well hidden in a lovely private park.

I often went out there for tea. It was set forth with remembered lavishness on the dining-room table — all the jellied meats, the game, the *pâtés*, the Westphalian hams, the prawns and cucumbers and bowls of clotted cream, along with the more usual dishes, unwanted and untasted but part of some large gesture it was necessary for them to make.

When it was over we would sit around the fire in the drawing room. Long windows framed deep vistas of trees and green lawns, faintly blurred with mist or the fine, drifting November rain. And oftener than before, Enid, the Druidic sister, would be silent, her great, shining eyes fixed on the fire.

‘What do you see, dear Enid?’ Dorothea would ask. ‘Tell us, what do you see in the fire?’ Then she would whisper to me, ‘We are frightened by what Enid sees in the fire. This time it’s about our dear brother Edward.’

Edward seemed robust enough to me, although he had receded several centuries farther back into the past. But Enid had seen in the fire that he was soon to die. And prophecy or coincidence, die he did not long afterward.

Now, of course, the small island is very much in the path of war, and I am superstitious enough to hope Enid is reading only good omens in her fire.

TIME'S END

BY ROBERT GIBBONS

THAT year the high river in early July took a good part of the corn crop. We have a saying: 'The river gets one crop in three.' We expect a high river. But we didn't look for the unseasonal rains of August and September. We looked for bright hot days of blue and sun, full of clouds blown up like heaped baskets of cotton, and still hot nights when a sheet to keep mosquitoes off is too much covering. But in that year the rains came in July, and in August, and in September. It was the third bad year for cotton.

The seed sprouted in the opened boll. The sheeptail locks were beaten out of the bolls until the crop lay on the ground, matted with the dirt of the ground and matted with bits of stalk and drying leaves. It was a sorry crop — the cotton gone all to weed first, and then the little fruit of it lying, yellow-mouldy, on the ground when the sun came out again in October.

It was like the end of a time. Especially to me was it like the end of a time. For I felt that I knew when the time had begun to end. It began to end ten years before, when Granddaddy Lipscomb died. It began to end because he had been patriarch to all of us — white and black. He had been the grand old gentleman of Lipscomb's Beat; and he had done all the things that the enlegended gentleman of the Southland is supposed to do. And he had done something more: he had lived out his days upon the land, praying to his atheistic in-

wardness that the day of the land would return in his own time, and knowing, as he prayed, that the day was far. When he died, the time that he had fashioned began to end. The family spread like the beads of a broken necklace; and the Negroes spread in the same way.

Even old Mub's many-generationed family disintegrated, though for a time she struggled to hold them there on the land. Old Mub was the oldest Negro in Lipscomb's Beat; and, after the death of Granddaddy, old Mub was the oldest of all — white and black.

Ramon was the first of old Mub's to leave the farm. I didn't blame him. There was little hope of increase on any acre of the plantation, certainly none at all on the lower end, near the river, where Mub had been for seventy years. So when Ramon left I couldn't blame him. But old Mub did. She hitched up a mule to her one-horse wagon, took her shotgun, and went into town, hunting Ramon. She found him at the fertilizer plant, where he had got a job; and she brought him home, back to the land.

Mub didn't go after Ramon the second time. She didn't go after Damon, nor Lena, nor Robelia — nor any of the others. Finally they were all gone — all except Glow. And Glow was the oldest of the 'chilluns.' She was the mother of Ramon and Damon. She herself was an old woman, though she would never, it seemed, be as old as Mub.

In the tenth year after Granddaddy died, old Mub and Glow were still on the place. The year was one of rains and sorry crops. It was the year when the time of Granddaddy Lipscomb, running down at last, came toward a beaten, washed, and moulded end.

Yet, even as men who sit up with the dead have thoughts very distant from death, so, in that autumn sorriness, we didn't think always about the things lost. There was no way to quit. Year after year the earth grew warm; there was seed to drop. And there was always something in certain men that would not let them rest from seeing the ground grow green, from hoping against the rain or for it, from laboring in the sun and gathering whatever harvest came.

So we decided to turn the whole of the homeland into

pasture, except for the part that would grow corn, and decided to do our cotton farming on the Granmere place just on the edge of town. We rented this cotton land under a long lease. It was some of the best in the county. It was rich red-brown dirt, the kind that grows fields heavy-white with long sheeptail locks of cotton. We moved all the tenants except Mub and Glow up to the Granmere place. November went by, and most of December. Still my father had not moved old Mub. I knew that he was waiting because he didn't know how to tell old Mub. And I waited for the day when he would tell me to go and see old Mub and tell her how good the acres were on the Granmere place. He waited and I waited — into December.

Late of a December afternoon I turned my car out of the highway and into the field road that wandered, after a long time, to old Mub's shack. The afternoon was hazy with fog and with smoke from woods fires. Where the land sloped downward toward the river, the evening deepened until there was a sadness about it that suited the quality of the time. I hunched my shoulders as I drove. The weather was not cold, but there was a chill in the air. It was making for the usual Christmas drizzle, I guessed.

Mub was on the porch of her shack when I drove into the little unworked spot around the house that was called 'yard.' Seeing Mub there, seeing her sitting there in her short-legged, hide-bottomed chair, seeing the voluminous checkered gingham about her little bony body, seeing her wrinkled and now ageless face, I was struck with the unchangingness of her. It seemed there had been no change in Mub for as long as I could remember. And I could remember as far back as when I, rompered and barefooted, came and played in the yard with Ramon and Damon. Now, in the same toothless mumble with which she used to say, 'Ain' you 'shame', wet-tin' yo' new britches? Whyn't you say?' — with the same old pink-gummed chewing of words she said to me, 'Whut you doin' in 'is low-life swamp, suh?'

I got out of the car. I got out very slowly. I said, 'No reason, Mub. No reason. Nothing in particular. Just riding about.' I laughed as I reached the porch. Then I propped

one foot on the porch, masterfully, the way I had seen Granddaddy and my father do many a time.

Mub pushed her lips together until they stuck away from her face like two thick stubby tongues. She chewed her gums. We used to say that she was 'mubbing' her words against her gums before she said them, because when she said words it was as if she had 'mubbed' them over before saying them. Finally she said, 'Cain' tell me, cain' tell ol' Mub! Ain' nobody go' no bizniss 'way down in 'is swamp, not now. Use' to have, though. Lotta bizniss.' She ended her words in thin high cackling laughter. Her laughter stopped. Her face resumed its sunken quietness.

I said, 'Where's Glow?'

Mub looked away into the house, and then said, 'Fixin' us a little somepin' t'eat. You come to see Glow?'

'No. I was just ridin' about and had a little something to tell you.'

'Tell me?'

'Yes.'

I took out my knife, opened it, and began to whet the blade on my boot.

'Ain' takin' no knife t' ol' Mub, I hopes.'

She laughed the high cackle.

I said, 'Yeah, sure,' in such a way she'd know I didn't mean it. I dropped the knife, point first, toward the floor of the porch. The point went into the gray boarding; and the board was so loose that it shook with the knife in it.

'You goin' to teah up ol' Mub's house, if you don't min' out theah, suh.'

I laughed and pulled the knife loose and looked at the point of it.

'Whut you come to tell ol' Mub?'

I sat down on the porch and leaned against one of the two-by-four scantlings that supported the porch roof. I did not look at old Mub. I looked across the fields toward the river, where, in the low places, it was already almost night. I said, 'Nearly about everybody on this plantation has moved up on the Granmere place, up near town.'

I did not look at Mub. She said, 'White folks ain' move' out t' big house, is they? Ain' yawl still livin' theah?'

I laughed quietly. 'Oh sure . . . sure.'

I waited.

Mub said, 'I thought yawl still in the big house.'

She waited.

I looked around at her and saw that she had been looking into the low places near the river the way I had. Her eyes shifted slowly until they were looking at me. They were big and globular, like animal eyes. They blinked once at me; then they closed. Mub still waited.

I said, 'Good land on that Granmere place, Mub, good land. It'll beat this land around here, going and coming.' I laughed, and waved my hand toward the low dark acres. 'Take ten acres of this stuff to raise a good fight. Not fit for cotton — corn either, most of it.'

I watched Mub's eyes. They flickered like a chicken's eyes, but they did not open. I was glad. I said, 'Good little house up on the Granmere place, Mub. Heap better'n this house.' Mub leaned forward and put her chin in her pink-brown palms. She chewed a long time. Her eyes were still shut. She said, 'Whut yawl aim to do wi' this place?'

I threw my feet to the ground, and as I did I dropped my knife. It fell into the little valley that years and years of raindrops, falling from the eaves, had fashioned. I picked up the knife. I said, vigorously, 'This land'll make a fine pasture. I can just see a herd of white-face' stuff out yonder, deep in good clover.'

I made a bleating sound like a calf. Then I laughed and said, 'Hear 'em?'

I looked at Mub. She was looking across the fields, trying to see the white-faced stuff, not seeing it.

'Yo' paw say us got to move?'

I said, 'Why, you and Glow will get rich up on that good cottonland!'

'When yo' paw say us got to move?'

I flicked my knife downward. The point plunged into the gray dirt. Still stooping to retrieve the knife, I grunted, 'Papa said he could get Curtis Roper to haul you next Friday morning — early.'

I sliced the ground. The metal and dirt made a gritty

sound on each other. I said, 'You can tell this land's soured. Too many rivers over it, too many high rivers.'

Mub mumbled deeply, 'High water come one time in duh spring, run me out. Spent t' night in 'at big water oak yonner. Long time ago, when Ramon and Damon wuz chillun. Me'n' Glow yonner all night in 'at big tree, huh wi' Damon an' me wi' Ramon. But us made a crop 'at year.'

While I listened to her, I became suddenly aware of Glow. I did not know how long she had been standing in the shadow of the doorway, listening.

I said, 'Evening, Glow.'

She came two steps out upon the porch. She said, 'Evenin', Mist' John.'

Mub turned her head. 'I thought you cookin' us somepin' t' eat.'

Glow was as old as my father, but she was not old. She was tall and bronzen and proud. She lifted herself slightly in herself and said to Mub, 'It ready.'

Her voice did not go with her angle of head. She looked from Mub to me, and said, 'You comin' wi' that Curtis Roper?'

Mub said quickly, 'Co'se he comin' wi' Mist' Curt, Glow. Now you lemme talk.'

Glow said, 'Hunh,' in a thick way that did not go with her long brown face and tall proudness. She stepped backward toward the door. Her eyes were on something behind and beyond me. I glanced over my shoulder and saw the great-boughed oak where Glow and Mub had stayed the night a long time ago.

I said, 'You never told me about that high water, Mub, the one that ran you into the tree — like a monkey.' I laughed.

Glow didn't laugh, nor Mub. Mub said, 'Lot I ain't tol' you, Mist' John. Lot 'at nobody 'cept me and dead folks don't know.'

From the doorway Glow said, 'Glow ain' dead! Glow know all you know.'

'Hush up yo' mouf, woman! Go on in 'at house to yo' kitchen!'

Glow said, 'Hunh!' again. But she left the doorway; and there was no way of knowing whether she was still in the shadows, because, even if she had gone into the kitchen, her bare feet would have made only a whishing sound that we should not have heard. So I looked for Mub's feet and saw that she was barefooted, too. Her feet, like five-headed flat things frightened of me, were almost hidden under the great gingham skirt. The toes were broad and were hard-shelled with big gray-pink nails.

Mub said, 'Yeah, Mist' John, lot I done seen since I bin heah. I bin heah so long hit seem lak I owns dis lan'. Hit seem lak I bin heah turr'ble long, plantin' an' wukkin' an' takin' in, walkin' dem furr's, tennin' dis lan'. 'Clah, hit seem lak I bin heah fuhevuh!'

Both of us were quiet under the sombre tones that had been her own speaking. It seemed that while we were silent the evening drew deep shadows out of the riverland and pulled them around the house and around us.

I said, 'I better be getting on back, Mub.'

She said, 'Dis low-life swamp no place fuh folks after night come on.'

I said, 'I bet you'll be glad to get out of it.'

She didn't answer. I moved in the deep twilight toward my car. I heard her getting to her feet laboriously, agedly. Then she said, 'You bettah be sho' an' come wi' dat Mist' Curt. He ain' no man to git on right wi' nigger folks.'

I didn't say anything. I didn't need to. She knew I'd come with Curtis. She knew I'd be there early Friday morning, helping Curtis move her out of the low-life swamp and into the high red-brown cottonland.

The last of night and first of morning had a strange brooding quality in it when Curtis and I turned out of the highway and into the field road that would wander until it came to Mub's cabin. In the east, toward which we rode, there were some stars, curiously near and bright against the soft sky. The air was moist and chilled. It had a sharp quality that burned in the lungs.

Curtis found a cigarette in the pocket of his leather jacket. 'Got a match?' he said.

'Yeah,' I said.

'Have a cigarette?' Curtis said.

'Nope — just had,' I said.

The big truck bumped over the field road. Its pointing headlights swept in a huge arc as we turned at a section corner and started southward down a land line. The fields were drab and dead under the white light.

I said, 'Lot of difference in land between December and April.'

Curt laughed harshly. He struck the match I had given him. The flaring flame boxed in the cab with light, boxed it in from the half-light in the world around. I glanced at Curt; saw his sharp features, the tight certainty of mouth, the little dark eyes, the thin beakish nose; saw the things about him that had always made me hate him a little; saw again the expression that to me was cruelty.

Then the match went out, and the world spread away in dawn before us again.

Curt said, 'Damn the land and farming and all that's tied up in it. Gimme a good truck and a load to haul.' He laughed again, and then dragged deeply at his cigarette.

I said, 'I guess we've been over that enough. I know what you like: something brainless, something that doesn't grow and hasn't got any feeling, something like a hunk of machinery to push up and down a highway all day long, something that don't ever change in a natural sort of way.'

Curt puffed a huge cloud of smoke into the cab. 'Aw hell, John! You sound like Granddaddy Lipscomb!'

'What's wrong with that?'

'Hell, hell! Skip it!'

We dropped into a sudden strained silence that was yet full of the rumbling of the truck.

Then the lights of the truck pictured the box cabin sharply as we came down the field road toward it. The gray weathered boards, the yellow clay-stone chimney and pillars, the well box near the back, the wooden-shuttered windows, the shingled roof with the shingles dry and curling away like old, old feathers.

Curtis laughed shortly, harshly, in a grunting of air.

'What?' I said.

'I was thinking — the difference between that shack and the one on the Granmere place. They'll have to get use' to it. It'll be like movin' into the big house.' He laughed again.

I said, 'Yeah, there's a big difference.'

The truck rolled to a stop in the little yard. Curt looked about.

'Tryin' to figger how to back up to that porch. Ain't much turning room.'

He pulled forward until the front bumper of the truck approached the bole of the ancient chinaberry tree. The cab top scraped in the lower limbs, cracked one of them with a sharp explosive sound.

Curt laughed. 'Wreck the damn' joint, won't we?'

The truck moved backward on the little house until finally the body ground with a scraping, then a crunching sound against the porch.

'You needn't tear it up,' I said.

'Why not?' Curt laughed. 'This baby would push that matchbox right over.'

I reached down in the dimness and turned the switch key. 'Think you're a damned tank unit?' I said.

'Aw, go to hell, John,' he grumbled.

We got out.

The morning was velvet-soft and quiet about us, now that the motor was stilled. The east was beginning to take shape in dimness.

They had come out upon the porch — Mub and Glow. They were dark shadows, watchful, mysterious.

Curt spoke first. 'Betcha ain't got half a load, Mub.'

They said nothing. Their silence was cutting and impious to Curt.

'Ain't you two damn' niggers awake yet? Good morning,' he said, commandingly.

They mumbled in low sullen tones.

Curt said to me, 'Them niggers better not mess with old Curt.'

He climbed onto the porch; snapped on his flashlight,

switched the beam of light about as if it were a pointing, imperious finger; strode past the two women, and went into the shack. His booted feet made loose boards rattle.

I climbed onto the porch. Glow took a step forward. 'Mist John?'

Mub turned on her. 'You, Glow, hush!'

Glow didn't shrink away. But she was silent.

Curtis came out upon the porch again. 'No more stuff than they got, John, we could knock down the house an' carry it along, too. Let's get it loaded.'

He flashed the beam of light aimlessly around the yard and the porch. Then he said, 'One of you hold this light for us.'

He stepped toward Glow, shoved the light at her. He was watching Mub. I was watching Glow. For a moment I thought she would brain him with that heavy light. I tensed inside myself, almost jumped to catch her hand.

Then it was over. The moment was gone. I said, 'It's getting so light out here we don't need much of a light.'

Curt said, 'It's blacker 'n the inside of a cow in there. Well, let's go, Johnnie. I ain't got the whole damn' day, you know.'

It seemed that, for a long stretching moment, the four of us were there upon that little porch in the freshness and the half-light of early morning, listening, all four of us, to the heavy nothingness of the time and the place.

Then, a cautious touch was on my arm. I turned. Mub, shrunken and old, looked up at me.

'Mist' John?'

'What?' I said, a curious tightness in my throat.

'Hit look lak I jes' cain' do it nohow.'

'What?'

'Seem lak I bin heah too long — done growed roots — an' cain' pull loose.'

Her eyes were wide and wondering.

'What do you mean?' I asked.

'I jes' cain' leave dis heah place, Mist' John, not noway. Got to stay heah till I dies. Hit seem lak I bawn to live an' die heah, right heah.'

Curtis's short rough laugh rocked jarringly against the calm deep tones of her voice. I looked at him and said suddenly, 'Shut up!' He hushed.

Glow opened her mouth to add words. But Mub put up bony brown fingers. 'Lemme talk, hon.'

I said, 'You mean you're going to stay in this place — starving, losing out, making failures — when you got ten acres of the Granmere place waiting?'

Her gums showed, pinkish-dark and old. She said, 'Seem lak I bin heah so long I owns dis lan'. Hit seem lak I b'longs heah. I been heah so turr'ble long.'

Curtis's booted feet took heavy steps toward us. He stood directly before me. 'You mean you're goin' to stand up there and let that black nigger witch tell you what she's goin' to do and ain't goin' to do?'

His voice grated against the early part of the day; and the masterful way his thumb hung in his belt angered me. I hated him now as much as I had ever hated him, as much as when we were twelve and thirteen and he was the bully among all of us cousins, all of us grandsons and granddaughters of the one man called Lipscomb. I hated him too for being a truck driver who made more money at truck driving than I did at farming.

I said, 'Keep your mouth shut, or take that damned truck and get it off this place!'

He looked at me in surprise — and silence. His thin mouth opened slightly.

At my elbow Mub said, 'I di'n't mean no harm! I di'n't mean no harm! Hit jes' heah in my soul. Cain' lea' dis place.' In her voice was strange puzzlement at her own certainty of feeling.

Curtis, crouched in front of me, was saying, 'Maybe you want to put me and my damned truck off. Hunh?'

Mub's breath jumped into her. 'Oh, Lawd, Lawd! Don't yawl fight heah on ol' Mub's porch! Oh, Lawd!' She pulled at my arm. I shook her loose.

A new feeling was in me: I felt that there was strength enough in me to put him off. I hated him enough for that.

Mub wailed, 'Ol' Mub'll leave heah! Ol' Mub'll lea' dis place, if yawl'll quit yawl's fightin'.'

'Glow ain' leavin'. Glow stayin'.'

The voice of the tall bronze woman was hard and prideful. All of us looked at her.

Mub said, 'Glow, chile!' There was fear in Mub's voice.

Curtis stepped toward Glow. 'Gimme that flashlight!

'I'll gi' it to you side yo' head.'

I said, 'Glow!'

She didn't look at me.

All three of us sprang together at Glow. Curtis reached her. A swift movement of his hand — he wrenched the light from her, struck at her. She raised an arm. The light glanced off it. Curtis stepped back.

'White-blooded — I' he said.

She stood away from him, taller than he was, prouder than he. Her lips curled as in a smile. But there was no smile in her voice. She said, 'Maybe I white-blood', maybe I —. But I mo' Lipscomb than you.'

I caught his arm as it went up. I said, 'Don't hit my niggers, Curtis!'

He whirled, jerked loose, made for me. I swung. And I felt the thing I had always wanted to feel: the hard gristly grinding of my knuckles into the giving flesh of his face. I struck again with my right, and caught the descending flashlight on my left forearm. The arm went dead. But I swung again with my right; saw him stagger down the loose boards of the porch toward the edge, and hit him again as he fell away from me toward the ground.

He reached for his knife as he got up. Swiftly I brought my own out, heard the metallic click of the blade, saw the momentary flash of moving light on the shiny steel. I waited for him to come toward the porch.

He stood there in the yard, blood showing around his mouth. When he spoke the blood in his mouth made him blubber as if he were crying. But he wasn't crying. He said, 'Don't come at me, Johnnie. I'll cut you' th'out — like a pig.'

He backed away from the house. He said, 'You can get some nigger-lover to move 'em, but not me.'

He spat blood onto the ground.

None of us said anything to him. We watched him leave.

The throbbing motor of the truck beat against us like a huge mechanical heart. Then, after we had waited, silent, long enough, the truck was gone, bumping up the field.

I stepped down to the ground. I said, 'Dammit, Mub, I guess you'll have to stay here and starve and climb trees to get out of high water. Being as you're so hell-bent on it, I don't give a damn. Papa won't either. He'll hope you drown.'

I looked up at Mub. Her ageless crinkled face smiled foolishly on me. 'Yassah, Mist' John, hit purty turr'ble in 'is low-life swamp — purty turr'ble.'

I picked up a splintered piece of the porch and began to whittle at it. I didn't look at Glow, or say anything to her. I had only the impression of her, quiet, tall, bronze, standing behind old Mub.

I said, 'I'll get on back,' and turned, and started walking across the yard toward the field road.

The road went up a slope, and on each side of the road were the brown dead fields of December. In the sorriness of the fields there was the end of a time. But as I went up the slope the day broadened and was liquid pale over the land, and the east reddened toward sunrise. And there was a feeling in me that there was a something which would not die, even when December was in the land and spring was far through frost and desolation from us. This was time's end; but the end was a bitter, fighting end. And there would remain something, enough to reclaim the land and make of it earth again.

At the top of the slope I turned and looked back toward the house of Mub and Glow. I saw them go slowly from the porch into the house — the tall woman first; the little ageless one last: both of them old and going toward death there on the land that was theirs because they had lived out their days upon it.

And I was glad. For I was young and full of strength, and the morning was bright in the land.

THRENODY FOR STELIOS

BY PETER GRAY

LAST May you were married, and now this morning your widow is wailing. At your wedding feast you shouted, 'We'll die, all of us,' and laughed; and now the old women are washing your body with wine. You shouted it drunkenly and laughed, and this morning two carpenters are building your coffin.

You never believed you would die; you had seen death often enough and funerals, and heard wailing; but you'd never thought about death, never felt that you yourself could die. That is only something to shout during drinking and singing, when you're happiest, on your wedding night, when you feel you'll live forever. You shout, 'We'll die, all of us,' and you laugh at your new bride and all your good friends, who laugh back at you, and the song sweeps on with a stronger force, endlessly, and you jump up and dance in your joy, in your joy, your strength and aliveness, leaping, turning, clapping your hands and stamping the floor, prancing with your head thrown back and your arms swinging free in the song. What a joke death was then — a great joke to laugh at last May.

Yes, yes, but this morning, this morning, you are dead. All night long your soul struggled, and this morning at dawn you died quietly. Your last breath sighed away, and Matina, watching you, gasped and stopped. She gasped and stood frozen tense, not breathing, not realizing, staring but not seeing you, like something dead herself.

The women there in the bedroom with her screamed your name and shook her and shook her till she came back and gave a low, choking, broken cry and fainted. Again the women brought her back to herself, and slapped her the way they slap newborn babies to make them cry; and they screamed your name over and over again, 'Stelio, Stelio, my good one, Stelio!' making a song of it, a whooping, wailing song, over and over again, until she too joined in, crying, 'Stelio, my man, Stelio!'

They held her and helped her to sway from side to side in time to their chanting. 'Stelio, Stelio, Stelio!' They stretched their arms in the air and swayed and wailed. Someone gave her a large kerchief to twist and snap in her hands as she wailed. Again her voice broke. 'Stelio, Stelio!' Her voice broke, she broke and lay broken and still. They could not lift her with their wailing.

'Come, get up, Matina, you must! There are things to do now,' they said. 'Get up! You must light his lamp. We must cover the pictures. Things to do now.' They dared not let her be still. Had not her own sister, Pagona, been crazy, actually crazy, a whole year after the father died, and just because she wouldn't wail?

They gave her a match and the lamp; and there was the yellow flame of your unsleeping lamp hung above the bed, flickering palely in the dawn light. Her hands lay slack again and her empty gaze turned to you lying there not moving, and she wondered dumbly were you dead. The women could not distract her with the paper and scissors and paste as they covered the pictures on the wall, but when she heard two of them squabbling about the paper for the big gilt mirror (Do you remember how you and Matina stood before it in your wedding clothes that night?), she brushed the women aside, lifted it from its hook and threw it out the window.

The gramophone — do you remember such things now? You were proud of it once, Stelio. Matina smashed that also, and all the records you used to dance to. And she broke the pots of mint and basil and all the flowers: the roses, geraniums, jasmine, gardenias, and wild cyclamens. She broke

and scattered the flower-pots while tears ran down her cheeks, and she felt no better afterwards. She burned the wedding garlands too.

Last May you were married, and now this morning your widow is wailing. You shouted, 'We'll die, all of us,' and laughed; and now the old women are washing your body with wine. You shouted it drunkenly and laughed, and this morning two carpenters hurry to finish your coffin.

You called your grandmother an old miser once. Now she slips the gold ring from your finger — 'to keep safe for Martina.' And with some trouble, for she's not as strong as she used to be, she breaks off your two gold teeth, that shone when you smiled, and puts them in her pocket too. She doesn't believe in tempting grave robbers, she says, with a firm snap of her jaw. Then she helps the other old women with your wedding clothes. (For what strange wedding they dress you now!) And she ties with her own fingers your black tie around your neck. She sees where there's a button gone, and without taking the jacket off your shoulders, she sews another button in its place, securely, and asks Pagona, who has good teeth, to bite the thread.

The village wakes to the death bell. The slow measured strokes of the bell wake the men who worked and loafed and drank with you, the girls you kissed and the ones you never kissed, the young boys who envied your strength, the old men who told you stories, and the mayor and the school teacher. The solemn tread of the death bell — importantly, monotonously, it goes with a solemn quiver following each dong. The villagers wake and say, 'Ach, it's Stelios, bad-fated one! God forgive him!'

They start to your house. Widow Chrysoula, whose husband Lambros died last month, comes shrieking your name, for although her grief is still new, she is not so ill-mannered as to mourn first her own dead. 'Stelio, Stelio, how good you were! How can we live without you? Why do you desert your wife, Stelio? With what dark bride are you going now?' She sways before you, her hands raised high; and all in the room sway and chorus with her. 'Stelio, Stelio. with what dark bride are you going now?'

She takes some fruit from the pocket of her skirt. 'Here, Stelio, is a red pomegranate for you and the first orange from our tree to refresh you on your way. And here is another pomegranate and another orange you'll please carry to my Lambros.' (At one time it would have amused you to see that the fruits for him are bigger than those for you.)

'Take my message, Stelio, to my husband Lambros, who was your good friend.' She is silent a while, swaying, swaying. 'Lambro!' she screams, terribly. 'Lambro! Greetings! I greet you, my husband.' And she stands before you and sings:

Where can I hide my bitter pain, where can I put it from me?
For if I leave it in the street, my neighbors all would suffer,
And if I hang it on a tree, the nightingales would perish.
Where can I pour my tears, my tears, where can I hide my weeping?
If on the earth my tears should fall, grasses and flowers would wither;
If on the stream my tears should drop, they would burn up the water;
If on the sea my tears should rain, the fishing boats would founder;
But if I lock them in my heart, then, Lambro, I shall join you.

A chorus of wailing bursts again in the room, a tortured frenzy of whooping and screaming in unison. Chrysoula waits until it subsides and there is only the sound of Matina's choking sobbing, and then she goes on with her message.

'Listen, Stelio, and tell my husband Lambros all this. Greetings, my husband! I keep the light burning on your grave. And I mourn for you every night. Some nights I don't close my eyes, but sing my grief till dawn. I sleep only to see you in my dreams — why don't you come more often, Lambro? I shall read you a Mass in the church and give all the village wheat to eat for your soul. Lambro, your mother wants your watch and the knife with the gold band and your gray horse. She chews my ears off, but I won't give her those things. You wouldn't want me to, I know. She wants back the blankets she gave me; and she can have them in proper time, for I have plenty of my own; but she shouldn't nag me now. And Lambro, already women come to me and say I should take another husband; before the forty days are up, they come with their silly talk. You have wed the black earth, Lambro, and the gravestone is your bride's mother;

you lie always with the black earth, Lambro; but I shall remain a widow. You wouldn't want me to marry again — would you, Lambro? Ach, I am miserable! What can I do? Perhaps you would tell me to marry your good friend Niko. Would you? Should I? I pray to God for your soul, Lambro.'

Someone leads her away from the bier. There are others to mourn you and send messages to the dead. You were always quick to do favors for your friends, Stelio, and now you will certainly deliver all the fruit and flowers and messages if you can. Here is the mayor mourning you rather matter-of-factly and then giving you a large bouquet of pink roses for his daughter, whom he loved. She died six years ago, and he is still sending her roses and greetings.

'Greetings, Nitsa! I miss you,' he says, halting and husky. 'You were always one for flowers, and perhaps you'll like these. They're not very much, but last winter I gave the church a thousand drachmas for your soul. What more can I do? Your mother and I both miss you and we speak of you often, Nitsa. I sold the olive trees that were your dowry, for old Charon asked for no dowry when he took you away. Well, Nitsa, I sold the trees and bought a flock of sheep, thirty-two, and hired lame Aleko to watch them. All are white except two. Nitsa, your mother suffers from rheumatism, but she's as well as can be expected at her age, and she also sends her greetings. That's about all, I guess. Oh yes, Nitsa, your cousin Phoula is engaged to marry a lawyer from Patras. He's a lawyer but he seems a good man. And your mother has given Phoula some of your things for her dowry, some copper pans and bedding. Charon asked for none of your dowry when he took you away. That's about all, I guess, Nitsa. We don't forget you.'

Again the shrill chorus of wailing; and now old Elainie the Drunk strides into the room, pushing her way to the bier, elbowing your relatives and respectable villagers aside — disheveled and ragged as ever. A streak of dirt slants from her brow across her cheek and down to her scrawny neck, and her hair is matted and tangled. Her bold, intelligent eyes stare wildly at your face.

'Steliol' she shouts, in her loud, raucous voice. 'Stelio.

why is the church bell ringing? I heard of no Christian feast day today. Why does it ring? Why these flowers and ripe fruit around you? What harvest is this, these flowers and fruits and this man? Why don't you answer me, Stelio?'

(You used to say that no one could wail half as well as Elainie the Drunk, and now she is wailing for you. Sometimes you gave her a few drachmas for wine, and tonight she'll drink wine at your wake.)

'What harvest is this, these flowers and fruits and this man?' she chants, in her raucous voice. 'You have olives to gather and figs and grapes to pick and corn to cut. What harvest is this? The good corn never cuts a man down, the olive and vine roots never gnaw on a heart, and even the fig tree is safe if you don't sleep in its shade. But what creature is the cypress in the graveyard? And who harvests a man and feeds him to a tree? Who chooses the best man in the village and cuts him down? Ach, this is cruel! Ach, Stelio, Stelio!'

Elainie stands before you, swaying, lost, an utterly lost look on her face, and her black eyes dazed. She sighs deeply, shudders, and regains herself, steps forward very quietly, somehow beautiful in her tatters, and kisses your lips. 'That is for you, Stelio.' She kisses your lips again. 'And that for my brother.' Then she turns, and with unseeing eyes, leaves the room.

(Did you taste wine and love on her lips, Stelio? She loved you in her curious drunken way. Did you taste wine and strange love on her lips when she kissed you? She tasted death on yours.)

There is a different tone in the wailing now. Her lament has brought a new distraction to the chorus of wailing, a new force, a wilder impulse of grief. They are like wolves now, baying their hunger and barking in unison and howling the moon. A mad, animal, night force, yapping and howling around your bier. They are like wolves now, and it's death they howl, not your death only, death itself they howl. There is a storm in the room, a force like a storm wind, brutal, destructive. A sudden bursting rage of sound, a tornado, so strong that it might magically lift you up and hurl you away.

Your brother Stratis cannot join the wailing in the room. (Do you remember how shy and touchy you were at his age, painfully timid one moment and blustering awkwardly the next?) He cannot mourn for you in this shrill room, he can take no part in this noisy old-woman frenzy. Always he had loved you jealously; and now again he is excluded.

So Stratis leaves. And there is the other sound, the solemn dong-quiver of the bell. He heads blindly for the church, goes blindly through the dreadful rain, the loud metallic pounding of grief, the slow measured bell weeping; goes into the church that is loud with the echo, up to the balcony — you know his headlong way — and up the ladder to the belfry platform, into the very sound itself, the loud pounding heart of his grief.

Old Panayotis, the sexton, stands below the big bell, beneath the mouth, holding the great iron clapper with a short rope in his hand. Stratis touches him on the arm. The old man turns and sees him.

‘Go down!’ Stratis cries. The old man can’t hear the words through the loud vibration of the bell. ‘Go down!’ Stratis shouts. And he grabs the clapper and strikes the bell a violent blow, a smashing metal-on-metal dong. The sound swirls madly in the hollow bell long after the blow, revolves in Stratis’s ears dully, swims like a pulse in his veins. He strikes the bell again. ‘Go away! Go down!’ he shouts and gestures.

‘Enough! Come on,’ Panayotis shouts back. ‘We’ve tolled your brother enough now. He’s not the king. Come on! Enough!’

Again Stratis bangs the bell. ‘Go away!’ he shouts. He pushes the old man rudely towards the trap door. ‘Go home!’ he shouts in his ear. ‘Hurry! Your wife! Hurry!’

‘What is it?’ Panayotis cries, alarmed. But Stratis only gives him another shove toward the door. The old man starts down the ladder, stops to make a bewildering fumbling gesture at the bell, and is gone.

When the ladder is clear, Stratis hauls it up into the belfry, and closes and fastens the trap door. Then with all of his might and with all of his love for you, Stelio, he smashes

the bell, and stands drenched in the sound. Another shattering blow, and now he can weep, now the tears run.

While Stratis tolls the bell for you — he stays there and gives you a royal knelling — and while the mourners still wail around your bier, half-mad Tomas digs your grave. You fought him once when you were a boy. Remember? It was a savage, cursing, kicking, biting, stone-throwing fight. Remember how he ran away?

Tomas is digging your grave now, Stelio. He works slowly, intently, almost as slow as the big bell tolling. Now and then he lifts a rich spadeful of earth and dumps it just as the bell tolls, and laughs a mirthless laugh with his slack misshapen mouth. And if someone should ask what amused him, he would raise his queer, smoking, yellow eyes, slightly bewildered, and laugh again. But he is alone. They told him where to dig and went away. He has dug graves before and knows what to do.

He works slowly, his fleshy lips drooping apart and his tongue sticking out. Occasionally he stops and examines a handful of the black earth. How soft and rich it is! He sniffs at a black handful and touches a bit with his wet tongue. (The wild cyclamen has fine flowers here, Stelio, and the cypress trees grow tall and strong.) Tomas suddenly starts mumbling a doggerel lullaby, his voice unhumanly hollow and monotonous.

Now may he sleep and quiet lie,
In silver cradle fine.
Of silver 'tis and 'tis of gold.
And brightly does it shine.

Oh, rock the sweet carnation red,
And rock the silver shining.
Oh, rock my boy in his cradle bed,
And stop his weary whining.

His spade strikes through a board, soft as earth; and he scratches with his fingers and collects a little heap of bones.

Now may he sleep and quiet lie.
Holy Slumber, do your best!
Of silver 'tis and 'tis of gold.
Master Slumber, give us rest!

He wraps up the bones clumsily in his jacket and carries them into the windowless charnel house and dumps them on the pile in the center. Here are the dry bones of your father and mother, the bones of three of your grandparents, the bones of Nitsa the mayor's daughter, the bones of many of your ancestors, of some famous men who fought the Turks, of all the old villagers you've ever heard about, those you've never heard about, all dumped together in this cave darkness. When you were a boy, Stelio, your cousin Loukas dared you to come in here and stay till you had counted to a hundred; and you counted to a hundred and fifty and went out shaken and rather sick.

Tomas shuffles back to his work. 'Of silver 'tis and 'tis of gold.' They'll hand him a full day's pay for this and he'll eat roast lamb tonight and lentils. 'Oh, rock the silver shining.'

Last May you were married, and now this morning Matina is wailing. At your wedding feast you shouted, 'We'll die, all of us,' and laughed, and now your brother is ringing your knell. You shouted it drunkenly and laughed, and now mad Tomas is digging your grave, Stelio.

WHO LIVED AND DIED BELIEVING

BY NANCY HALE

IT WAS a strange, hot summer. The days throbbed and the nights were exhausted and melancholy. In August the temperature rose over ninety and hung there; the heat shimmered over the buildings and the streets of the town. Every afternoon at two Elizabeth Percy came down the steps of the house that was made into apartments for nurses. She walked along the burning pavements, around the corner, past the newsstand where the magazines hung fluttering on lines of wire, to Massey's Drugstore.

Her hair was very dark and as smooth as dark brown satin; it was combed back from her calm forehead and fell curving under at the back behind her ears. She wore plain uniforms with small round collars close about her neck, and she was all white and fresh and slender and strong.

From the heat outside she would walk into the dim coolness of the drugstore that smelled of soda and candy. There was a faint sweat upon the marble of the soda fountain; Mr. Massey and the other clerks stood about in their light tan linen coats, and they smiled at her without speaking. Dave was behind the prescription counter wrapping up a small package; first the white paper and then slowly the thin bright red string. He lifted his head as she walked down the center of the store to where the tables were, and his eyes met Elizabeth's. She sat down at the small black table and one of the boys from the fountain came and took her order of Coca-

Cola. Several electric fans whirled remotely, high on the ceiling. The door opened again at the front, and three internes from the hospital came in. They leaned together on the marble counter in their whites. Their faces were young and pale with heat.

Dave came around the corner of the counter, and sat down beside Elizabeth. Mr. Massey walked slowly up toward the front of the store; he smiled absently at them; he always smiled at them as they sat together between two and three.

They never talked much. Elizabeth sucked the drink slowly through a straw, and lifted the glass and let bits of crushed ice drop into her mouth; they melted on her tongue. She loved to look at Dave. He was very thin and tall and he had straight yellow hair that fell forward in a lock on his forehead. His eyes were restless. He would glance at her suddenly and smile.

'How you doing over there?'

'She's just the same.'

'Long case.'

'Unh-hunh. Going to be longer.'

'Tough you have to nurse one of those cases. Beckwith have any idea how long it'll be?'

One afternoon Elizabeth said, 'Grainger told me yesterday he said he was going to use shock. Maybe.'

'Insulin?'

'No, I don't think so.'

Dave raised his eyebrows and shook his head. The damp yellow lock trembled against his forehead. He had finished the second year of medical school and was working at Massey's during the summer months.

'Oh-oh. That won't be so good.'

'Grainger'll have it, in the mornings.'

'No, no fun,' he said.

'I'm so sorry for Mrs. Myles.'

Dave shrugged his shoulders.

'Don't get tough,' she said. 'You're not a doctor yet. Beckwith's sorry for her, too. It's not the usual thing. She's gone through plenty.'

'Sure,' he said.

'Oh, real doctors have pity, you know; it's just you little boys.'

She smiled at him, and he smiled back after a minute. He looked restless and impatient. He reached one hand under the table and put it on her knee, and looked into her long, calm, dark blue eyes.

'Meet you at eleven?' he said. Elizabeth nodded. He took his hand away.

'She wants to see you again.'

'Oh, God.'

'It doesn't hurt you any. Just go up there to her room for a minute and say good night. She gets so much out of it.'

He gave a sort of groan, and shifted in his chair.

'She's got those damned eyes. I don't *mean* anything, I don't like her looking like that.'

'It's just because we're going together,' Elizabeth said. 'It's the only thing outside herself, you see, like the only thing that's outside and ahead, and she likes to think about our going together.'

'Oh, God.'

'She asks me about you every day. Lots of times. I don't know whether she forgets she's asked before or whether . . . Come on, do it again once. It doesn't hurt you.'

'All right. All right. Eleven.'

'Eleven.'

She got up and walked to the counter and laid the check down with a nickel. She went out into the heat, crossed the street, and walked up the wide steps of the hospital entrance.

In Copperthwaite Two the corridor was dim and hot. Elizabeth stopped at the desk and turned over the leaves of the order book. Doctor Beckwith had ordered the shock treatment for the morning; no breakfast. Elizabeth drew in her breath. Miss Grainger came out of the door of 53 and down the hall, without her cap.

'Hi,' Elizabeth said.

'Hi.'

'See you've got it ordered for tomorrow.'

'Yeah, man.'

'Does she know about it?'

'I'm not sure. He came up and went over her this morning, heart and all, before we went out. Told her, but not exactly; said they were going to give her a treatment and there'd be acute physical discomfort. I love Doctor Beckwith. Discomfort. I don't look forward to it, I tell you. Seems like there's some things you don't get used to, and I don't like shock.'

'What have you all done?'

'About the same. Walked. This walking miles in this weather does me in. I'm going home and go to sleep.'

Elizabeth flipped back the pages of the order book.

'What is this stuff, anyhow? We didn't have it, then.'

'Oh . . . camphor derivative? . . . something. Reckon I'll know plenty in the morning. How's Dave?'

'Fine,' Elizabeth said. They parted and went along the long corridor in opposite directions. Elizabeth pushed open the heavy door of 53.

Mrs. Myles sat beside the open window and in the vicious heat observed passing back and forth outside (along the pavement?) back and forth from hell the doughy and grimacing faces of the damned. And a little part of the rotted grapes that rolled about within her brain watched the faces with an abstracted care; each of the faces was forever familiar, a face seen before (where?), seen before and seen again, and where, where, had been the face before? In her brain the fruit gave out a stench that she could taste in her mouth, and with it came the horror; no, no, those faces she had never seen before; it only seemed that she had; and the seeming was wrong and she could not send it away, the seeming stayed, shaking its tattered locks and grinning; yes, these faces had been seen before. The faces passed, and none of them was his. Watch, watch, observe with shrinking but insistent care each hideous face that comes nearer and nearer with death in its eyes and the unbelievable humanity, the bigness, in the coming-nearer mouths, until each face passed and was not his, was never his.

Her heart that was no longer her friend beat frantically one two three four five six seven eight eighty is a normal

pulse for a woman seventy for a man but this was — hundred and forty . . . MAD

The heavy-strained tension split with the scream of silk. The door opened and Miss Percy came in. So cool so calm so bright. With calm brow, with dark hair, and eyes like dark blue water. Cool as the little leaves that tremble in the tree. What thou among the leaves hast never known. This she has never known, with her calm eyes. Oh reach to me, thou among the leaves, reach down to me in hell with your cool hands, reach down to me.

She sees it all clean. The same world, clean. It is just me. I must remember that, it is just me; the world is cool and calm and bright. Not this. It is just me. Not mad, he said, just an exaggeration of your understandable state of tension, just an exaggeration of a normal point of view, just an exaggeration but not mad.

‘Poor old Mr. Duggan next door’s making quite a lot of noise,’ Miss Percy said, smiling. She stood before the mirror of the yellow-oak bureau and took her cap from the bureau post and pinned it to the back of her dark head. ‘I hope it doesn’t bother you too much. Anyway, we’ll go right out.’

‘Poor Mr. Duggan,’ Mrs. Myles said. ‘Is he getting any better at all?’

‘I think they’re going to give him some treatments that will make him all well.’

The nurse glanced quickly at the patient.

She didn’t mean to say that. She doesn’t know if I know it, too. They are coming.

‘You’d better wear your wide hat,’ Miss Percy said. ‘The sun’s real hot this afternoon.’

Obediently she put the hat upon her head and tied the ribbons that held it on under her chin.

‘Put a little lipstick on,’ the nurse said. ‘It’s so becoming to you to have a little color in your lips. Don’t you remember what Doctor Beckwith said when he met us outside the steps yesterday, how pretty you looked? You’ve put on a pound and a half in two weeks. It won’t be long before we have you weighing what you ought to. Before you know it you’re going to be right strong.’

Now to smile. Now widen the corners of the mouth and look straight into Miss Percy's eyes and hold it for a moment. But no! This is no smile. This is the terrible and tragic shape of a comic mask. Thus grimace the damned, who burn in the fires, and looking upward to the cool hand that is stretched in kindness and impotence to meet their torment, try one last time and achieve the horrible stretch, the grin, of the comic mask.

They walked down the hot dim corridor and turned to the right.

'Can't we please go down in the elevator?' Mrs. Myles said. Miss Percy's face looked troubled.

'I know,' she said. 'Only he wants you to walk through the hospital.'

'All right.'

So once again. Endure, endure. Endure to the end.

First they walked through the children's ward. Once it had not been bad; the universal slime had not had time to foul this too; she had seen them as children, delicate and pale and sweet. But then the tide of the slime had mounted here too, and ever since it had been this way. Student nurses, nurses, internes passed them. 'Afternoon, Mrs. Myles.' They all know me. Can they see it in my face? . . . In the little beds the children lay or sat, with their sick faces. Sickness was everywhere. This is the great house of sickness. The children's faces were greenish with the heat. Which among them is mine? He is dead. He is not dead; which among them is mine, not well and laughing, but sick, which among them is my sick, corrupted child, infected from me all its tiny beginnings with the worm of sick sick sick? I am sick and all of mine is sick.

And she smelled the sharp recurrent fear. Fear, that clawed at the ruin of her mind; fear that rattled in her chest about the flabby palpitating boundaries of her heart. This fear is wicked, she thought: I am not afraid *for* the children, I am afraid *of* them. I am afraid of everything. I am full of poison of wickedness and fear; cold poison.

'He wants you to face things,' Miss Percy said as they

passed through and beyond the men's ward. 'You know. Not get so you think you couldn't do something, special.'

'I know.'

In the beds the men lay, with sickness floating in the pool of their eyes. They passed on through the women's ward. A woman looked up. One side of her face was swollen out to huge proportions, and covered with bandages through which leaked sticky, yellow stuff. There was the long ominous smell of sweet ether and they passed suddenly across the hall of the hospital and their feet sounded sharp and loud on the stone flagging, and they went out into the loud sad heat. They descended the steps and started to walk down the road away from the town.

Suddenly from behind in the sunshine blared a loud-speaker, carried on a truck painted silver, with huge letters advertising an air-cooled movie house downtown. Slowly, slowly, the truck crept along the hot street. The enormous screaming music shook the atmosphere:

'Fall in love, fall in love, says my heart . . .

Fall in love, FALL IN LOVE . . .

It swung slowly around a corner, out of sight. From far away in the afternoon the idiot voice still screamed:

'Fall in love, fall in love, says my heart . . .'

They walked steadily on, the nurse with a secret little smile; the woman, with a stiff and empty face.

The hours passed in gross and threatening procession. And with the hours the woman felt the always coming on, the rising walls, of the enclosing fear, like sound-proof glass, shutting her away; the terrible pawlike hand fumbling with the cork to stopper her finally into this bottle of aloneness.

She sat beside the window in the decline of the afternoon, and her hand was too sick with fear to stretch out to the shade and pull it down against the sun. She did not dare to move her hand. And soon the sun had bobbed behind the dreadful mountains of the west.

The nurse spoke to her several times and at last in her closing bottle she heard the voice from far away and turned

and it was supper being put before her on a tray. In the bowls of all the spoons were faces, that grinned at her and twisted their mouths into screams.

She ate, and then she was sick and the good food left her body in protest and she sat again by the window where the evening light now ran in around the edges of the shade like liquid poison, wet and lying on the floor and on the furniture of the room. The nurse put a table before her and laid out cards for a game upon its surface.

She looked down and saw the ferret faces of the kings and queens, the knaves; pinched and animal-like faces that whispered until the whispering was like a whistling in the room; and she turned her face away, but there was only the faraway flapping shade with the night running in around the edges, and she looked again at her hands but they were vast and swollen and she turned away and closed her eyes but within her was nothing but fear.

'How do you feel?' the nurse said in the evening room.

'How do you feel?' the nurse said.

'How do you feel?' the nurse said.

'HOW DO YOU FEEL?' the nurse said.

The nurse said, 'Mrs. Myles, is there anything the matter?'

'It's as if,' she said, 'all the human things had been taken out of me and it left holes, like a cheese with great empty holes. And the holes have to be filled with something and they are all filled up with fear. So that where I had all sorts of things now I haven't got anything but fear in all the holes.'

But that wasn't it at all, not only that; there was the bottle, how to tell someone of the bottle, glass, and sound-proof, where the stopper was being pushed tight home with her inside; not like a moth, no, not so clean, not like the souls in bottles, *animula*, *vagula*, *blandula*. No, like a festering purple lump of tissue.

Hell is not heat or cold, it is banishment to the ultimate ego. And in a few hours I shall be stoppered forever, she thought. I will not be able to speak, I will not be able to hear. I will be *mad*.

She asked for a pencil and paper. She wrote, and her handwriting was not her own; it was strange and inchoate

like the sawings of the line of a fever chart. She looked at it with desperation. Will I scream? Will I groan? Will I grimace and mouth meaningless words? What will I do, with all of them watching me, crawling loathsomely inside the bottle, the face plastered on the purple stinking tissue like the fearful little faces in the spoons; while they watch, with their cool, well eyes, dressed all in white.

She tried to explain about the bottle on the paper with her failing handwriting, and then she folded it and wrote the doctor's name outside.

'Put it somewhere,' she said urgently. 'I want you to give it to Doctor Beckwith tomorrow if . . . if I . . .'

If I can no longer communicate what I feel, if I am mad.

'You're going to be fine,' the nurse said. 'You're going to be fine. Nothing's going to happen to you. Don't be afraid.'

She thinks I mean die. No. Only the bottle. Or die?

Or die? For they are coming in the morning with something in their hands. For they are coming in the morning, footsteps measured, slow, down the corridor to me, bearing . . . the cross? . . . in their arms. No. No. You can still endure a little, do not think of Christ, that's the beginning. When the stopper is jammed at last deep into the neck of the bottle, then it will all be thoughts of Christ. Just with the last resisting inch, I can avoid the thought of Christ. . . .

But Christ. So cool, so calm, so bright. O Jesus thou art standing outside the fast-closed door. Jesus with his mild face, his mournful eyes, the bright brown beard, the suffering. Oh, no!

The minutes, the hours passed in ever-gathering procession. Miss Percy ran water and opened the high, narrow bed and helped the woman into it.

'Dave is coming to say good night to you,' she said above the bed.

'Dave is coming to say GOOD NIGHT TO YOU,' she said.

Oh . . . Dave is coming to say good night to me. . . . Dave? I don't know what is that word: Dave. Something; once; better; but not now. Only the bones of ego smelling of fear and dirt.

'Mrs. Myles.'

'Mrs. Myles.'

'Mrs. Myles.'

'MRS. MYLES!'

She turned her head and in the doorway, unreal, remote, beyond hell, they stood, the nurse, white and slender, and the young man — he was Dave. They stood there, down a tiny vista beckoning, the last reminder. For they were love. It still endured, somewhere, upon the fading world. It was a flickering candle point upon the dark; flickering in the waves that even now, like the great winds of hell, blew the candle flame, tiny, tiny.

The woman on the bed strained toward what she saw. Upon these bones of ego hangs one last shred of flesh, and as long as it hesitates there, gnawed by the mouths of cockroaches, so long that shred of flesh shall reach, shall strain toward what it sees, toward love. The shred is hanging by a nerve, and the candle point flickers and grows far, far away at the end of the cone-shaped darkness.

'Good night, Mrs. Myles.'

'Good night,' she said. 'Are you going out somewhere together?'

'Unh-hunh,' Miss Percy said. 'Reckon we'll go for a drive in the country to find a breeze.'

'Yes,' the woman said. 'I hope it'll be cool, in the country. I hope you have a lovely time. I hope you're happy.'

She turned her head away from the door and closed her eyes, struggling to maintain that point of light somewhere in the darkness that was growing. As long as I can see it the bones will not be wholly bare, and the world not gone. I hope they will be happy. They love each other. Here I lie: in my sepulcher, and the stopper hovers, and the smell of brimstone everywhere. But while the candle flickers I will remember. When it gutters and goes out, I will go out, and the shred of flesh shall drop at last and the paw that reeks shall push the stopper down. . . .

'Well, if you need anything, you know you just have to ring and Miss Perley will get it for you, dear. Good night,' the nurse said.

But that, the woman did not hear.

After eleven the hospital was quiet and the lights along the corridors were turned out, so that only the light over the desks of the nurses in charge shone. The wards were dark and still; along some corridor could be heard occasionally the rattling trundle of a stretcher being pushed in a hurry, the stifled coming and going of a night emergency.

Elizabeth Percy went out through the hospital to the main entrance with Dave. A yawning nurse behind a desk raised her eyes and said 'Hi!'; a doctor came hurriedly along the passage, wriggling his arms into a hospital coat as he went; his head was down and as Elizabeth passed he glanced upward from under his brows, nodded, and said, 'Miss Percy. . . .' They came out onto the open stone flagging of the entrance hall where lights burned behind the admittance desk, and went down into the melting, melancholy night.

Elizabeth put her hand through Dave's arm and squeezed it; he glanced down at her and smiled.

'How you, babe?' he said.

'A little whipped. . . . That case is so hard, you can't do anything for her much and she's going through something awful.'

'Forget it,' he said. 'You're off now. Climb in. Reckon it'll hold together a little longer.'

She got into the old Chevrolet parked by the curb in the darkness.

They drove through the subsiding lights of the town, past the movie theatres with their electric signs turned off, now; the few people in light clothes dawdling before the doors of ice-cream parlors; there was the faint occasional hoot of a motor horn, the slam of a front door. As they passed into the outskirts of the town, the smell of the honeysuckle met them, drifting in from the country, and from far away the small sweet sawing of the crickets in the fields. They crossed a bridge and drove out along the country road, like a tunnel of darkness covered over with the branches of the trees. Their headlights made a white passage down the center of the tunnel. The smell of honeysuckle grew stronger, filling

the whole night air, and sometimes they would pass a spot where the honeysuckle smell grew suddenly sharper, sweeter, bursting like fresh fountains into scent.

'My, this is nice,' Elizabeth said. Her head was leaned back against the back of the seat.

He pressed her knee with his right hand and drew it toward his.

'Heat like we've been having can't last much longer,' he said. 'Registered over a hundred outside the store this afternoon. Got to crack sometime. May Leeds says her father and all the farmers are praying for rain.'

'How's May?' Elizabeth asked in her low, quiet voice.

'Oh . . . I just took her to a movie while I was waiting around for you. She just dropped in while I was finishing up. . . . I've got to do something with the evenings, haven't I?'

'Of course, darling.'

'It was a lousy movie.'

She said nothing.

Far out along the road Dave stopped the car off to one side, under the boughs of the trees, and switched out the lights so that nothing could be seen; only the wide dark; the smell of the honeysuckle quivered through the darkness, and in the field beside them a whippoorwill called. Dave lit a cigarette and put his arm around Elizabeth.

'God, it's good to get out of that hellhole,' he said.

After a moment Elizabeth spoke.

'I can't get Mrs. Myles out of my head,' she said. 'She just doesn't get any relief at all.'

'Oh, skip the hospital when you're out of it.'

'I know. Only I keep thinking that's what love can do to you.'

'Inability to adjust.'

'Yes, I know. But I guess it isn't so easy to adjust when you're too much in love, and then everything sort of came on her. I can't help picking things up. She was just mad about him and apparently he never cared much about her and she knew it, and that must be just . . . awful. And then when she got pregnant he went off with this other woman,

and when she had her baby it died right away. Placenta previa. It would take quite a lot of adjusting.

'Well . . . Skip it. You can't go stewing about patients' problems. Leave that to Beckwith. How about kissing me?'

'You'd think she'd be through with love, wouldn't you? But she sort of hangs on to the idea of it. Like about . . . us.'

'Yeah. Listen, I'm sorry, but I can't go up there any more and represent something for your patient. It just makes me feel too God-damn gummy.'

'You don't have to. You never had to, only she seemed to get so much out of seeing you and it's awful seeing her every day, so lost. Anyway, she's getting shock in the morning.'

'She is?'

'Yes. I hope it'll do the trick.'

'How about skipping the hospital, baby? You're supposed to be a nurse, not an angel of mercy. Quit brooding about work out of hours. Kiss me.'

She put both arms around him and kissed his mouth. His arms came around her and she felt the restlessness, the impatience in his body, and the eagerness, the searching.

'Oh, darling,' she said. 'I guess I'm pretty much in love with you.'

'I don't mind you one bit myself,' he murmured.

She started to speak, checked herself, and then spoke.

'Dave, darling, you wouldn't hurt me, would you?'

'Mmh-mmh.'

'You could hurt me so easily. I'm so wide open to you.'

'That's just the way I like you,' he said, and he put his mouth down on hers, and his hands passed down her arms. Now they were close together, closer and closer in the satin darkness, and in the field the bird called at intervals and the smell of the honeysuckle came down in waves of shuddering sweetness. Over the country where they were the night sky seemed to brood, hanging soft and thick and vast over the land. Far away a train passed in the darkness and across the fields Elizabeth heard its whistle cry three times, three times — ah, ah, aaaah.

When they drove back into town it was very late and the air had a false coolness; there was a little breeze that would go away with the dawn. Elizabeth leaned silent against the seatback. Dave sat up straight and drove, and talked about the coming year of work.

'We get Parsons in surgery and will that be something. You remember Jim Jencks from down Eliza County, he was a real nice guy, I used to see a whole lot of him; he just had one run-in with Parsons after another, and that's one reason, I guess, he isn't going to be able to come back this year. Hope I don't get fixed up wrong with the old bastard.'

'What's Jim Jencks doing now?' Elizabeth said.

'He just went on home. The damn fool, he got married. That finished him. Reckon he'll be raising pigs the rest of his life.'

'I didn't know he got married.'

'Yeah. Lehman, Lemmon . . . ? Married a nurse, anyway. Never had good sense.'

Elizabeth made a small noise with her lips.

'Oh! . . . Beg your pardon! Only *you* know, the business of guys marrying nurses, the way they do. . . . You know just as well as I do.'

'Yes.'

He left her in the dark and empty street before the apartment house where she lived. In the silence of the town the car sounded noisily as he drove away. Elizabeth looked after the car for a moment and then she walked slowly up the brick steps to the house full of nurses asleep.

The woman in Room 53 was awake, passing from unconscious to conscious horror, as soon as the phlegm-gray dawn had filled the corners of the room. There was the relentless metronome beat of doom rapping everywhere. It could not be slowed, nor stopped, nor avoided, but beat faster minute by minute until at last the beat would fuse, would *be*, the footsteps coming down the corridor outside, bearing the thing that would be borne. The woman turned her head in an old and useless reflex against horror and stared out of the window into the gray light.

On the bank opposite the hospital window there were a number of little things, moving about and pecking, and she knew that they were birds; but they were not birds, they were frightful lumps of mud, mud-birds, that jerked about the dirt. She turned her eyes away from them in loathing, but there was nowhere else to look. She closed her eyes upon the horror of outside, to meet the inside horror.

The chorus sang the evil hymns. O Jesus, thou art standing outside the fast-closed door. O Jesus, thou . . . the bright brown beard, the promise that is stained and filthied with corruption, and where is there to fly to lose this wickedness? Abide with me; fast falls the eventide. The awful sweetish dripping of the notes in chorus; that seems to be a promise, that asks for comfort.

The panic grew and the metronome beat, a little faster; the tentacles within reached out in frenzy and there was nothing there to grasp, only abide with me; fast falls the eventide; the dim valley of sin, echoing in the shadows. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I shall fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff. . . . Were those what they would bear? The rod and the staff? Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death. . . . I shall fear this evil, spreading like phlegm along the valley, everywhere, and all is evil, abiding with me. . . .

Oh, no! she cried inside herself with one last straining, no! But where was there to look? And in the ultimate necessity there flickered far off the pale point of the candle flame.

And then the footsteps down the corridor. And then the footsteps, am I dreaming them? The door opened and the priests and the acolytes came in — no, the doctor and the resident and the internes and the nurse — no, the white-robed priests of this obscene observance, this sacrifice, and I am the sacrifice that lies quite still upon the altar, and they bear the weapon in their hands: the huge, brutal, long syringe lying upon a bed of gauze, and I am Christ to meet their sacrifice, to give my life. Six people in the room, and the sacrifice.

‘Good morning, gentlemen,’ the woman said.

The nurse, by the head of the bed, laid her hand upon the

patient's hand. The three internes stood grouped at the foot of the bed. The doctor stood on the right of the bed and looked down into the patient's face. The resident stood halfway down the left side of the bed, and in his hands he held the syringe.

She looked up into the doctor's face and upon it lay his eyes, flat, like gray, wet, cold oysters laid upon a plate.

'Listen,' the woman said hurriedly. 'Tell me quick. Does it matter what thoughts I am thinking? I mean will this fasten them permanently this way? Because my thoughts are so bad, and I can't seem to think any good thoughts. . . .'

'It doesn't matter, kiddy,' said the doctor. The eyes like oysters swam at her, and spun a little round and round. He laid his fingers on her wrist. The resident took her left arm and felt with his fingers along the veins on the inside of her elbow. She closed her eyes. Now let me think one good thought, that my brain may be embalmed in this sacrifice with a good thought held in it like a fly in amber. Oh, stay with me, flame, the point before the eyes, the one last point. . . .

A wave from the outside of sick; of liquid; of shuddering horror ran up her veins.

'Thrombosed,' the resident said. 'We'll have to try another.'

'Steady, kiddy,' the doctor said.

Oh, flame, abide with me in the moment of dissolution. . . .

Then crashingly a thousand carmine circles spun in her brain and there were crashes and mad carmine and the dark.

'Look at that,' the leftmost interne said as the figure on the bed sat straight up, clenched in convulsion.

'Patient down on G Ward fractured three vertebrae in one of those,' the resident said, watching.

'You'll have your good days and your bad days.' The nurse's voice came to her. 'You'll have your good days and your bad days, Mrs. Myles.'

She was eating lunch off a tray and it was lettuce that she was putting in her mouth. It was thin and crisp and very

cold. The world around her was hot and the sun beat through the window beside her. Everything was fatigue, and pain in her back, but the lettuce on her tongue was cool, and the nurse's voice; her name was Miss Percy and she was always there, in the revolving mist, speaking to her out of the wilderness, cool and clear.

'You'll have your good days and your bad days, Mrs. Myles.'

She was walking through the jungle of the world, and she was lost. She did not know where she was. It was an utterly strange, green jungle. Only the nurse, Miss Percy, was there beside her, and so she continued to walk through this land.

They came to a brook that ran through a shady hollow and they sat down on a large stone by the margin of the brook and the nurse took off the woman's shoes, and she put her tired feet in the brook. The water was warm and fresh and ran softly past her feet. Beside the brook stood tall green trees that she had never seen before. She kept her feet in the soft running water and listened to the rustling in the leaves of the strange trees.

'How did I get here?' she asked. 'Where have I been?'

The nurse's voice came with the sound of the brook, cool and clear.

'You're taking a walk in the country. You're staying at the hospital for a while.'

'I don't remember . . .'

'You'll have amnesia for a little bit. It's all right.'

It's all right . . .

Miss Percy stopped the doctor in the corridor.

'Doctor Beckwith, may I speak to you for a minute?'

The doctor stopped on one foot in his hurrying walk. The two horns of the stethoscope stuck up from the pocket of his white coat.

'My patient is getting hardly any sleep, doctor. I wondered if you could order something.'

'Can't give sedatives, you know, with the treatments. Has a counteractive effect.'

'She just seems so terribly tired.'

'Well, she didn't even feel tired before. . . . I'll order insulin tonight, Miss Percy. See whether that'll put her to sleep.'

'Thank you, doctor.'

'You don't look as if you'd got much sleep yourself,' the doctor said.

'Oh. . . it's just this heat.'

'Got to break soon.'

'Yes.'

They were in a bowling alley, that was what it was, although she did not know where the bowling alley was or how she had got there. But the nurse was sitting on one of the wooden theatre seats behind her. She herself was standing, facing the alley with a bowl in her hand.

She continued with the action that somehow she had begun. She neither felt the bowl with her hand nor felt the floor under her feet when she moved forward. It was like moving through air. She willed herself to make the gestures that somewhere inside she knew should be made now, and her body carried out the commands, but without sensation, without seeming to touch anything at all.

It just shows what you can do by will power, she thought, surprised. I can do anything I will myself to do, even though I am moving in air.

She let go the bowl and watched down the long straight alley where the bowl rolled, and heard the rumble of the falling pins.

She watched as the three black bowls came rolling up the wooden trolley to the side, and came to a stop. She picked up one of them and although she had picked it up she felt nothing against her palm.

It's almost fun, she thought, seeing what you can do by will power.

It was night, and suddenly she could not bear to lie in bed any longer. Since the nurse had stuck the needle in her arm the strangest energy and slow hope had begun in her.

In the dim spaces of this room the nurse was moving about. She was taking off her cap.

'I want to get up,' the woman said. 'Can I get up? I want to talk.'

The nurse turned and smiled.

'All right,' she said. She pulled forward the big chair that was by the window, and helped the woman into it. The nurse sat down on a small straight chair and smiled at the woman.

'But were you going away . . .' the woman said, puzzled. Something stirred in her head, faintly remembered.

'No,' the nurse said. 'I haven't anywhere special to go. I'd be glad to stay a little later, Mrs. Myles.'

'You don't know,' she said, 'what hope can feel like. It's like running water. I mean freedom. Oh, you don't know what it's like! To be able to see freedom. Even just a little bit.'

'You're going to have all the freedom in the world.'

'I keep thinking of the loveliest things — long straight roads and driving along them fast in an open car. You don't know what hope can feel like. It's like the wind beginning to blow. Am I really going to be free?'

Suddenly the words of something whose origin she could not remember came into her head and she began to repeat them aloud: 'That this nation, under God, shall have a new birth in freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.'

Shall not perish . . .

'That's what I mean,' she said. 'That's the way it feels. I can't remember but it wasn't that way before, it wasn't by the people, for the people, I mean as if I were the people, as if I were a nation. A woman like a nation.'

'Yes,' the nurse said. 'I know. Instead of under a dictator, you mean. It's awful to live under a dictator and not belong to yourself any more, isn't it?'

'Yes,' she said impatiently, pushing that part away from her, for now there was hope, forming like a five-petaled flower, like a star. Sitting forward on the edge of the chair in her excitement, she repeated the words again, whatever

they were: 'This nation, under God, shall have a new birth in freedom — and that government of the people . . .'

And after some time the nurse went away and came back with a tall glass that was filled with sugared water, flavored deliciously with lemon, and the woman drank it.

And on some mornings the doctor and the resident and three internes came into her room, and the resident carried the large syringe. He was always the one who inserted the needle into her vein. It was a thing that came suddenly on some mornings and it had to be faced, once more; endure, she thought, endure to the end. And always at the last she summoned to her the vision, with her eyes closed, of the candle flame, that companioned her through the darkness, through the bad days, through it all. It did not leave her, it remained to fortify her in the last extremity, when they came and the needle went into her arm and in her head spun the carmine circles and the world crashed, and then the dark. . . .

'Don't think she'll have to have another,' the doctor said, as they watched the figure in convulsion on the bed. 'This stuff certainly is magic in some cases.'

On an afternoon in the yellow sunshine, suddenly she was sitting under an apple tree in the yard beside the hospital, and the nurse, Miss Percy, was sitting on the grass beside her. Mrs. Myles turned her head slowly and smiled. The heat had gone; it was a cool and lovely afternoon; the leaves rustled in the tree above her and from its branches came the smell of apples.

On the grass farther away some internes were playing baseball. Their voices shouted to one another, and the ball could be heard smacking their cupped palms. A breeze trickled along the air. The shadows were beginning to lengthen from the wall of the hospital, and in that light the internes, in their white clothes, ran and shouted. From a grass bank on the other side of the road from the hospital a bird called, suddenly, sweetly.

'Hello,' Mrs. Myles said.

'Hello, dear. You're feeling much better, aren't you?'

'Yes,' she said. Things were swimming back into her mem-

ory, the buildings here were taking their places in the world. And everything was very calm, very peaceful; there was no hurry. It doesn't matter.

She looked at the nurse, who had been there all the time. In the darkness and the long confusion, in that strange land where she had been, the nurse had been with her all the time. She studied the dark, smooth hair, the oval face, and the long, dark blue, quiet eyes.

'How is Dave?' Mrs. Myles said.

'You're remembering, aren't you?' the nurse said, without looking at the patient. 'I think he's fine. I haven't seen him for a while.'

'But . . .'

That did not fit. She stayed silent for a little time, while the remembrances slowly rearranged themselves within her head.

'But, you're in love with him,' she said slowly. 'It was you both. You are in love with each other.'

'Well . . . You see, we aren't going together any more.'

Something was wrong. Wait while the sifting memory slowly settled. Her own life was dead, somehow she had learned that, someone had taught her that in the strange, twilight land. She knew that she had been reborn and that this was a new life. She could never have the things of her own old life, for they had gone and they were dead. But one thing only . . . a candle burning down a vista, some constant star that had companioned her through the dark valleys of the land she had left. . . . She remembered two figures standing in a doorway.

'You're not?'

'No,' the nurse said. She looked tired. They stared at each other and then a new and curious thing happened, a wave swept upward and from her eyes the woman felt tears falling. It was not despair. It was only deepest sadness. The last thing had gone out of the old life. Now the past was wiped black and she was all alone and beginning a new life, reborn alone. The purest, quietest sadness swept her and she could not halt the tears that fell and fell.

'You mustn't mind at all, dear,' the nurse said. But their

eyes kept meeting: the nurse's quiet and dry, the woman's full of tears.

The baseball game had broken up and a young interne came strolling by the apple tree, and looked down at the two who sat upon the grass. His face Mrs. Myles knew. It had looked at her on many mornings.

'Afternoon, Mrs. Myles, Miss Percy,' the interne said, and then stopped in embarrassment at the tears on the woman's face.

'Well . . .' he said. 'Seems fine to have a good cry, doesn't it?'

'Yes,' she said, crying quietly, for all that was dead, now, forever, and could never be brought back. And it was fading fast. Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget what thou among the leaves hast never known. It was all over; it was finished; the fight with death and sin, the wandering in the strange lost land. It was all gone, and love was gone too, and the candle flame had silently gone out. Above their heads where they sat upon the grass the little leaves in the apple tree whispered. It was all gone, and from now on the world was new, a page unwritten.

THE PEACH STONE

BY PAUL HORGAN

AS *THEY* all knew, the drive would take them about four hours, all the way to Weed, where *she* came from. They knew the way from travelling it so often, first in the old car, and now in the new one; new to them, that is, for they'd bought it second hand, last year, when they were down in Roswell to celebrate their tenth wedding anniversary. They still thought of themselves as a young couple, and *he* certainly did crazy things now and then, and always laughed her out of it when she was cross at the money going where it did, instead of where it ought to go. But there was so much droll orneriness in him when he did things like that that she couldn't stay mad, hadn't the heart; and the harder up they got, the more she loved him, and the little ranch he'd taken her to in the rolling plains just below the mountains.

This was a day in spring, rather hot, and the mountain was that melting blue that reminded you of something you could touch, like a china bowl. Over the sandy brown of the earth there was coming a green shadow. The air struck cool and deep in their breasts. *He* came from Texas, as a boy, and had lived here in New Mexico ever since. The word *home* always gave *her* a picture of unpainted, mouse-brown wooden houses in a little cluster by the rocky edge of the last mountain-step — the town of Weed, where Jodey Powers met and married her ten years ago.

They were heading back that way today.

Jodey was driving, squinting at the light. It never seemed so bright as now, before noon, as they went up the valley. He had a rangy look at the wheel of the light blue Chevvie — a bony man, but still fuzzed over with some look of a cub about him, perhaps the way he moved his limbs, a slight appealing clumsiness, that drew on thoughtless strength. On a rough road, he flopped and swayed at the wheel as if he were on a bony horse that galloped a little sidewise. His skin was red-brown from the sun. He had pale blue eyes, edged with dark lashes. *She* used to say he 'turned them on' her, as if they were lights. He was wearing his suit, brown-striped, and a fresh blue shirt, too big at the neck. But he looked well dressed. But he would have looked that way naked, too, for he communicated his physical essence through any covering. It was what spoke out from him to anyone who encountered him. Until Cleotha married him, it had given him a time, all right, he used to reflect.

Next to him in the front seat of the sedan was Buddy, their nine-year-old boy, who turned his head to stare at them both, his father and mother.

She was in back.

On the seat beside her was a wooden box, sandpapered, but not painted. Over it lay a baby's coverlet of pale yellow flannel with cross-stitched flowers down the middle in a band of bright colors. The mother didn't touch the box except when the car lurched or the tires danced over corrugated places in the gravel highway. Then she steadied it, and kept it from creeping on the seat cushions. In the box was coffined the body of their dead child, a two-year-old girl. They were on their way to Weed to bury it there.

In the other corner of the back seat sat Miss Latcher, the teacher. They rode in silence, and Miss Latcher breathed deeply of the spring day, as they all did, and she kept summoning to her aid the fruits of her learning. She felt this was a time to be intelligent, and not to give way to feelings.

The child was burned to death yesterday, playing behind the adobe chickenhouse at the edge of the arroyo out back, where the fence always caught the tumbleweeds. Yesterday,

in a twist of wind, a few sparks from the kitchen chimney fell in the dry tumbleweeds and set them ablaze. Jodey had always meant to clear the weeds out; never seemed to get to it; told Cleotha he'd get to it next Saturday morning, before going down to Roswell; but Saturdays went by, and the wind and the sand drove the weeds into a barrier at the fence, and they would look at it every day without noticing, so habitual had the sight become. And so for many a spring morning, the little girl had played out there, behind the gray stucco house, whose adobe bricks showed through in one or two places.

The car had something loose; they believed it was the left rear fender; it chattered and wrangled over the gravel road.

Last night Cleotha stopped her weeping.

Today something happened; it came over her as they started out of the ranch lane, which curved up towards the highway. She looked as if she were trying to make the car go by leaning forward; or trying to see something beyond the edge of Jodey's head and past the windshield.

Of course, she had sight in her eyes; she could not refuse to look at the world. As the car drove up the valley that morning, she saw in two ways — one, as she remembered the familiar sights of this region where she lived; the other, as if for the first time she were really seeing, and not simply looking. Her heart began to beat faster as they drove. It seemed to knock at her breast as if to come forth and hurry ahead of her along the sunlighted lanes of the life after today. She remembered thinking that her head might be a little giddy, what with the sorrow in her eyes so bright and slowly shining. But it didn't matter what did it. Ready never to look at anyone or anything again, she kept still; and through the window, which had a meandering crack in it like a river on a map, all that she looked upon seemed dear to her. . . .

Jodey could only drive. He watched the road as if he expected it to rise up and smite them all over into the canyon, where the trees twinkled and flashed with bright drops of light on their new varnished leaves. Jodey watched the road and said to himself that if it thought it could turn him over or make him scrape the rocks along the near side of the hill

they were going around, if it thought for one minute that he was not master of this car, this road, this journey, why, it was just crazy. The wheels spraying the gravel across the surface of the road travelled on outward from his legs; his muscles were tight and felt tired as if he were running instead of riding. He tried to *think*, but he could not; that is, nothing came about that he would speak to her of, and he believed that she sat there, leaning forward, waiting for him to say something to her.

But this he could not do, and he speeded up a little, and his jaw made hard knots where he bit on his own rage; and he saw a lump of something coming in the road, and it aroused a positive passion in him. He aimed directly for it, and charged it fast, and hit it. The car shuddered and skidded, jolting them. Miss Latcher took a sharp breath inward, and put out her hand to touch someone, but did not reach anyone. Jodey looked for a second into the rear-view mirror above him, expecting something; but his wife was looking out of the window beside her, and if he could believe his eyes, she was smiling, holding her mouth with her fingers pinched up in a little claw.

The blood came up from under his shirt, he turned dark, and a sting came across his eyes.

He couldn't explain why he had done a thing like that to her, as if it were she he was enraged with, instead of himself.

He wanted to stop the car and get out and go around to the back door on the other side, and open it, and take her hands, bring her out to stand before him in the road, and hang his arms around her until she would be locked upon him. This made a picture that he indulged like a dream, while the car ran on, and he made no change, but drove as before. . . .

The little boy, Buddy, regarded their faces, again, and again, as if to see in their eyes what had happened to them.

He felt the separateness of the three.

He was frightened by their appearance of indifference to each other. His father had a hot and drowsy look, as if he had just come out of bed. There was something in his father's face which made it impossible for Buddy to say anything.

He turned around and looked at his mother, but she was gazing out the window, and did not see him; and until she should see him, he had no way of speaking to her, if not with his words, then with his eyes, but if she should happen to look at him, why, he would wait to see what she looked *like*, and if she *did*, why, then he would smile at her, because he loved her, but he would have to know first if she was still his mother, and if everything was all right, and things weren't blown to smithereens — *bla-a-a-sh! wh-o-o-m!* — the way the dynamite did when the highway came past their ranch house, and the men worked out there for months, and whole hill-sides came down at a time. All summer long, that was, always something to see. The world, the family, he, between his father and mother, was safe.

He silently begged her to face towards him. There was no security until she should do so.

'Mumma?'

But he said it to himself, and she did not hear him this time, and it seemed intelligent to him to turn around, make a game of it (the way things often were worked out), and face the front, watch the road, delay as long as he possibly could bear to, and *then* turn around again, and *this* time, why, she would probably be looking at him all the time, and it would *be*: it would simply *be*.

So he obediently watched the road, the white gravel ribbon passing under their wheels as steadily as time.

He was a sturdy little boy, and there was a silver nap of child's dust on his face, over his plum-red cheeks. He smelled something like a raw potato that has just been pared. The sun crowned him with a ring of light on his dark hair. . . .

What Cleotha was afraid to do was break the spell by saying anything or looking at any of them. This was *vision*, it was all she could think; never had anything looked so in all her life; everything made her heart lift, when she had believed this morning, after the night, that it would never lift again. There wasn't anything to compare her grief to. She couldn't think of anything to answer the death of her tiny child with. In her first hours of hardly believing what had happened, she had felt her own flesh and tried to imagine

how it would have been if she could have borne the fire instead of the child. But all she got out of that was a longing avowal to herself of how gladly she would have borne it. Jodey had lain beside her, and she clung to his hand until she heard how he breathed off to sleep. Then she had let him go, and had wept at what seemed faithless in him. She had wanted his mind beside her then. It seemed to her that the last degree of her grief was the compassion she had had to bestow upon him while he slept.

But she had found this resource within her, and from that time on, her weeping had stopped.

It was like a wedding of pride and duty within her. There was nothing she could not find within herself, if she had to, now, she believed.

And so this morning, getting on towards noon, as they rode up the valley, climbing all the way, until they would find the road to turn off on, which would take them higher and higher before they dropped down towards Weed on the other side, she welcomed the sights of that dusty trip. Even if she had spoken her vision aloud, it would not have made sense to the others.

Look at that orchard of peach trees, she thought. I never saw such color as this year; the trees are like lamps, with the light coming from within. It must be the sunlight shining from the other side, and, of course, the petals are very thin, like the loveliest silk; so any light that shines upon them will pierce right through them and glow on this side. But they are so bright! When I was a girl at home, up to Weed, I remember we had an orchard of peach trees, but the blossoms were always a deeper pink than down here in the valley.

My! I used to catch them up by the handful, and I believed when I was a girl that if I crushed them and tied them in a handkerchief and carried the handkerchief in my bosom, I would come to smell like peach blossoms and have the same high pink in my face, and the girls I knew said that if I took a peach *stone* and held it *long enough* in my hand, it would *sprout*; and I dreamed of this one time, though, of course, I knew it was nonsense; but that was how children

thought and talked in those days — we all used to pretend that *nothing* was impossible, if you simply did it hard enough and long enough.

But nobody wanted to hold a peach stone in their hand until it *sprouted*, to find out, and we used to laugh about it, but I think we believed it. I think I believed it.

It seemed to me, in between my *sensible* thoughts, a thing that any woman could probably do. It seemed to me like a parable in the Bible. I could preach you a sermon about it this day.

I believe I see a tree down there in that next orchard which is dead; it has old black sprigs, and it looks twisted by rheumatism. There is one little shoot of leaves up on the top branch, and that is all. No, it is not dead, it is aged, it can no longer put forth blossoms in a swarm like pink butterflies; but there is that one little swarm of green leaves — it is just about the prettiest thing I've seen all day, and I thank God for it, for if there's anything I love, it is to see something growing. . . .

Miss Latcher had on her cloth gloves now, which she had taken from her blue cloth bag a little while back. The little winds that tracked through the moving car sought her out and chilled her nose, and the tips of her ears, and her long fingers, about which she had several times gone to visit various doctors. They had always told her not to worry, if her fingers seemed cold, and her hands moist. It was just a nervous condition, nothing to take very seriously; a good hand lotion might help the sensation, and in any case, some kind of digital exercise was a good thing — did she perhaps play the piano. It always seemed to her that doctors never *paid any attention* to her.

Her first name was Arleen, and she always considered this a very pretty name, prettier than Cleotha; and she believed that there was such a thing as an *Arleen* look, and if you wanted to know what it was, simply look at her. She had a long face, and pale hair; her skin was white, and her eyes were light blue. She was wonderfully clean, and used no cosmetics. She was a girl from 'around here,' but she had gone away to college, to study for her career, and what she had

known as a child was displaced by what she had heard in classrooms. And she had to admit it: people *here* and *away* were not much alike. The men were different. She couldn't imagine marrying a rancher and 'sacrificing' everything she had learned in college.

This poor little thing in the other corner of the car, for instance: she seemed dazed by what had happened to her — all she could do evidently was sit and stare out the window. And that man in front, simply driving, without a word. What did they have? What was their life like? They hardly had good clothes to drive to Roswell in, when they had to go to the doctor, or on some social errand.

But I must not think uncharitably, she reflected, and sat in an attitude of sustained sympathy, with her face composed in Arleenish interest and tact. The assumption of a proper aspect of grief and feeling produced the most curious effect within her, and by her attitude of concern she was suddenly reminded of the thing that always made her feel like weeping, though, of course, she never did, but when she stopped and *thought* —

Like that painting at college, in the long hallway leading from the Physical Education lecture hall to the stairway down to the girls' gym: an enormous picture depicting the Agony of the Christian Martyrs, in ancient Rome. There were some days when she simply couldn't look at it; and there were others when she would pause and see those maidens with their tearful faces raised in calm prowess, and in them, she would find herself — they were all Arleens; and after she would leave the picture she would proceed in her imagination to the arena, and there she would know with exquisite sorrow and pain the ordeals of two thousand years ago, instead of those of her own lifetime. She thought of the picture now, and traded its remote sorrows for those of today until she had sincerely forgotten the mother and the father and the little brother of the dead child with whom she was riding up the spring-turning valley, where noon was warming the dust that arose from the gravelled highway. It was white dust, and it settled over them in an enriching film, ever so finely. . . .

Jodey Powers had a fantastic scheme that he used to think about for taking and baling tumbleweed and making a salable fuel out of it. First, you'd compress it — probably down at the cotton compress in Roswell — where a loose bale was wheeled in under the great power-drop, and when the nigger at the handle gave her a yank, down came the weight, and packed the bale into a little thing, and then they let the steam exhaust go, and the press sighed once or twice, and just seemed to *lie* there, while the men ran wires through the gratings of the press and tied them tight. Then up came the weight, and out came the bale.

If he did that to enough bales of tumbleweed, he believed he'd get rich. Burn? It burned like a house afire. It had oil in it, somehow, and the thing to do was get it in shape for use as a fuel. Imagine all the tumbleweed that blew around the State of New Mexico in the fall, and sometimes all winter. In the winter, the weeds were black and brittle. They cracked when they blew against fence posts, and if one lodged there, then another one caught at its thorny lace; and next time it blew, and the sand came trailing, and the tumbleweeds rolled, they'd pile up at the same fence, and build out, locked together against the wires. The wind drew through them, and the sand dropped around them. Soon there was a solid-looking but airy bank of tumbleweeds built right to the top of the fence, in a long windward slope; and the next time the wind blew, and the weeds came, they would roll up the little hill of brittle twigs and leap off the other side of the fence, for all the world like horses taking a jump, and go galloping ahead of the wind across the next pasture on the plains, a black and witchy procession.

If there was an arroyo, they gathered there. They backed up in the miniature canyons of dirt-walled watercourses, which were dry except when it rained hard up in the hills. Out behind the house, the arroyo had filled up with tumbleweeds; and in November, when it blew so hard and so cold, but without bringing any snow, some of the tumbleweeds had climbed out and scattered, and a few had tangled at the back fence, looking like rusted barbed wire. Then there came a few more; all winter the bank grew. Many times he'd

planned to get out back there and clear them away, just e-e-ase them off away from the fence posts, so's not to catch the wood up, and then set a match to the whole thing, and in five minutes, have it all cleared off. If he did like one thing, it was a neat place.

How Cleotha laughed at him sometimes when he said that, because she knew that as likely as not he would forget to clear the weeds away. And if he'd said it once he'd said it a thousand times, that he was going to gather up that pile of scrap iron from the front yard, and haul it to Roswell, and sell it — old car parts, and the fenders off a truck that had turned over up on the highway, which he'd salvaged with the aid of the driver.

But the rusting iron was still there, and he had actually come to have a feeling of fondness for it. If someone were to appear one night and silently make off with it, he'd be aroused the next day, and demand to know who had robbed him; for it was dear junk, just through lying around and belonging to him. What was his was part of him, even that heap of fenders that rubbed off on your clothes with a rusty powder, like caterpillar fur.

But even by thinking hard about all such matters, treading upon the fringe of what had happened yesterday, he was unable to make it all seem long ago, and a matter of custom and even of indifference. There was no getting away from it — if anybody was to blame for the terrible moments of yesterday afternoon, when the wind scattered a few sparks from the chimney of the kitchen stove, why he was.

Jodey Powers never claimed to himself or anybody else that he was any *better* man than another. But everything he knew and hoped for, every reassurance his body had had from other people, and the children he had begotten, had been knowledge to him that he was *as good* a man as any.

And of this knowledge he was now bereft.

If he had been alone in his barrenness, he could have solaced himself with heroic stupidities. He could have produced out of himself abominations, with the amplitude of Biblical despair. But he wasn't alone; there they sat; there was Buddy beside him, and Clee in back, even the teacher, Arleen — even to her he owed some return of courage.

All he could do was drive the damned car, and keep *thinking* about it.

He wished he could think of something to say, or else that Clee would.

But they continued in silence, and he believed that it was one of his making. . . .

The reverie of Arleen Latcher made her almost ill, from the sad, sweet experiences she had entered into with those people so long ago. How wonderful it was to have such a rich life, just looking up things! — And the most wonderful thing of all was that even if they were beautiful, and wore semitransparent garments that fell to the ground in graceful folds, the maidens were all pure. It made her eyes swim to think how innocent they went to their death. Could anything be more beautiful, and reassuring, than this? Far, far better. Far better those hungry lions, than the touch of lustful men. Her breath left her for a moment, and she closed her eyes, and what threatened her with real feeling — the presence of the Powers family in the faded blue sedan climbing through the valley sunlight towards the turn-off that led to the mountain road — was gone. Life's breath on her cheek was not so close. Oh, others had suffered. She could suffer.

'All that pass by clap their hands at thee: they hiss and wag their heads at the daughter of Jerusalem —'

This image made her wince, as if she herself had been hissed and wagged at. Everything she knew made it possible for her to see herself as a proud and threatened virgin of Bible times, which were more real to her than many of the years she had lived through. Yet must not Jerusalem have sat in country like this with its sandy hills, the frosty stars that were so bright at night, the simple Mexicans riding their burros as if to the Holy Gates? We often do not see our very selves, she would reflect, gazing ardently at the unreal creature which the name Arleen brought to life in her mind.

On her cheeks there had appeared two islands of color, as if she had a fever. What she strove to save by her anguished retreats into the memories of the last days of the Roman Empire was surely crumbling away from her. She said to herself that she must not give way to it, and that she was just

wrought up; the fact was she really *didn't* feel anything — in fact, it was a pity that she *couldn't* take that little Mrs. Powers in her arms, and comfort her, just *let* her go ahead and cry, and see if it wouldn't probably help some. But Miss Latcher was aware that she felt nothing that related to the Powers family and their trouble.

Anxiously she searched her heart again, and wooed back the sacrifice of the tribe of heavenly Arleens marching so certainly towards the lions. But they did not answer her call to mind, and she folded her cloth-gloved hands and pressed them together, and begged of herself that she might think of some way to comfort Mrs. Powers; for if she could do that, it might fill her own empty heart until it became a cup that would run over. . . .

Cleotha knew Buddy wanted her to see him; but though her heart turned towards him, as it always must, no matter what he asked of her, she was this time afraid to do it because if she ever lost the serenity of her sight now she might never recover it this day; and the heaviest trouble was still before her.

So she contented herself with Buddy's look as it reached her from the side of her eye. She glimpsed his head and neck, like a young cat's, the wide bones behind the ears, and the smooth but visible cords of his nape, a sight of him that always made her want to laugh because it was so pathetic. When she caressed him she often fondled those strenuous hollows behind his ears. Heaven only knew, she would think, what went on within the shell of that topknot! She would pray between her words and feelings that those unseen thoughts in the boy's head were ones that would never trouble him. She was often amazed at things in him which she recognized as being like herself; and at those of Buddy's qualities which came from some alien source, she suffered pangs of doubt and fear. He was so young to be a stranger to her!

The car went around the curve that hugged the rocky fall of a hill; and on the other side of it, a green quilt of alfalfa lay sparkling darkly in the light. Beyond that, to the right of the road, the land levelled out, and on a sort of platform of

swept earth stood a two-room hut of adobe. It had a few stones cemented against the near corner, to give it strength. Clee had seen it a hundred times — the place where that old man Melendez lived, and where his wife had died a few years ago. He was said to be simple-minded, and claimed he was a hundred years old. In the past, riding by here, she had more or less delicately made a point of looking the other way. It often distressed her to think of such a helpless old man, too feeble to do anything but crawl out when the sun was bright and the wall was warm, and sit there, with his milky gaze resting on the hills he had known since he was born, and had never left. Somebody came to feed him once a day, and see if he was clean enough to keep his health. As long as she could remember, there'd been some kind of dog at the house. The old man had sons and grandsons and great-grandsons — you might say a whole orchard of them, sprung from this one tree that was dying, but that still held a handful of green days in its ancient veins.

Before the car had quite gone by, she had seen him. The sun *was* bright, and the wall must have been warm, warm enough to give his shoulders and back a reflection of the heat which was all he could feel. He sat there on his weathered board bench, his hands on his branch of apple tree that was smooth and shiny from use as a cane. His house door was open, and a deep tunnel of shade lay within the sagged box of the opening. Cleotha leaned forward to see him, as if to look at him were one of her duties today. She saw his jaw moving up and down, not chewing, but just opening and closing. In the wind and flash of the car going by, she could not hear him; but from his closed eyes, and his moving mouth, and the way his head was raised, she wouldn't have been surprised if she had heard him singing. He was singing, some thread of song, and it made her smile to imagine what kind of noise it made, a wisp of voice.

She was perplexed by a feeling of joyful fullness in her breast, at the sight of the very same old witless sire from whom in the past she had turned away her eyes out of delicacy and disgust.

The last thing she saw as they went by was his dog, who

came around the corner of the house with a caracole. He was a mongrel puppy, partly hound — a comedian by nature. He came prancing outrageously up to the old man's knees, and invited his response, which he did not get. But as if his master were as great a wag as he, he hurled himself backward, pretending to throw himself recklessly into pieces. Everything on him flopped and was flung by his idiotic energy. It was easy to imagine, watching the puppy-fool, that the sunlight had entered him as it had entered the old man. Cleotha was reached by the hilarity of the hound, and when he tripped over himself and plowed the ground with his flapping jowls, she wanted to laugh out loud.

But they were past the place, and she winked back the merriment in her eyes, and she knew that it was something she could never have told the others about. What it stood for, in her, they would come to know in other ways, as she loved them. . . .

Jodey was glad of one thing. He had telephoned from Hondo last night, and everything was to be ready at Weed. They would drive right up the hill to the family burial ground. They wouldn't have to wait for anything. He was glad, too, that the wind wasn't blowing. It always made his heart sink when the wind rose on the plains and began to change the sky with the color of dust.

Yesterday: it was all he could see, however hard he was *thinking* about everything else.

He'd been on his horse, coming back down the pasture that rose up behind the house across the arroyo, nothing particular in mind — except to make a joke with himself about how far along the peaches would get before the frost killed them all, *snap*, in a single night, like that — when he saw the column of smoke rising from the tumbleweeds by the fence. Now who could've lighted them, he reflected, following the black smoke up on its billows into the sky. There was just enough wind idling across the long front of the hill to bend the smoke and trail it away at an angle, towards the blue.

The hillside, the fire, the wind, the column of smoke.

Oh by God! And the next minute he was tearing down the

hill as fast as his horse could take him, and the fire — he could see the flames now — the fire was like a bank of yellow rags blowing violently and torn in the air, rag after rag tearing up from the ground. Cleotha was there, and in a moment, so was he, but they were too late. The baby was unconscious. They took her up and hurried to the house, the back way where the screen door was standing open with its spring trailing on the ground. When they got inside where it seemed so dark and cool, they held the child between them, fearing to lay her down. They called for Buddy, but he was still at school up the road, and would not be home until the orange school bus stopped by their mailbox out front at the highway after four o'clock. The fire poured in cracking tumult through the weeds. In ten minutes there were only little airy lifts of ash off the ground. Everything was black. There were three fence posts still afire; the wires were hot. The child was dead. They let her down on their large bed.

He could remember every word Clee had said to him. They were not many, and they shamed him, in his heart, because he couldn't say a thing. He comforted her, and held her while she wept. But if he had spoken then, or now, riding in the car, all he could have talked about was the image of the blowing rags of yellow fire, and blue, blue, plaster blue behind and above, sky and mountains. But he believed that she knew why he seemed so short with her. He hoped earnestly that she knew. He might just be wrong. She might be blaming him, and keeping so still because it was more proper, now, to *be* still than full of reproaches.

But of the future, he was entirely uncertain; and he drove, and came to the turn-off, and they started winding in back among the sandhills that lifted them towards the rocky slopes of the mountains. Up and up they went; the air was so clear and thin that they felt transported, and across the valleys that dropped between the grand shoulders of the pine-haired slopes, the air looked as if it were blue breath from the trees. . . .

Cleotha was blinded by a dazzling light in the distance, ahead of them, on the road.

It was a ball of diamond-brilliant light.

It danced, and shook, and quivered above the road far, far ahead. It seemed to be travelling between the pine trees on either side of the road, and somewhat above the road, and it was like nothing she had ever seen before. It was the most magic and exquisite thing she had ever seen, and wildly, even hopefully as a child is hopeful when there is a chance and a need for something miraculous to happen, she tried to explain it to herself. It could be a star in daytime, shaking and quivering and travelling ahead of them, as if to lead them. It was their guide. It was shaped like a small cloud, but it was made of shine, and dazzle, and quiver. She held her breath for fear it should vanish, but it did not, and she wondered if the others in the car were smitten with the glory of it as she was.

It was brighter than the sun, whiter; it challenged the daytime, and obscured everything near it by its blaze of flashing and dancing light.

It was almost as if she had approached perfect innocence through her misery, and were enabled to receive portents that might not be visible to anyone else. She closed her eyes for a moment.

But the road curved, and everything travelling on it took the curve too, and the trembling pool of diamond-light ahead lost its liquid splendor, and turned into the tin signs on the back of a huge oil truck which was toiling over the mountain, trailing its links of chain behind.

When Clee looked again, the star above the road was gone. The road and the angle of the sun to the mountain-top and the two cars climbing upward had lost their harmony to produce the miracle. She saw the red oil truck, and simply saw it, and said to herself that the sun might have reflected off the big tin signs on the back of it. But she didn't believe it, for she was not thinking, but rather dreaming; fearful of awakening. . . .

The high climb up this drive always made Miss Latcher's ears pop, and she had discovered once that to swallow often prevented the disagreeable sensation. So she swallowed. Nothing happened to her ears. But she continued to swallow, and feel her ears with her cloth-covered fingers, but what

really troubled her now would not be downed, and it came into her mouth as a taste; she felt giddy — that was the altitude, of course — when they got down the other side, she would be all right.

What it was was perfectly clear to her, for that was part of having an education and a trained mind — the processes of thought often went right on once you started them going.

Below the facts of this small family, in the worst trouble it had ever known, lay the fact of envy in Arleen's breast.

It made her head swim to realize this. But she envied them their entanglement with one another, and the dues they paid each other in the humility of the duty they were performing on this ride, to the family burial ground at Weed. Here she sat riding with them, to come along and be of help to them, and she was no help. She was unable to swallow the lump of desire that rose in her throat, for life's uses, even such bitter ones as that of the Powers family today. It had been filling her gradually, all the way over on the trip, this feeling of jealousy and degradation.

Now it choked her, and she knew she had tried too hard to put from her the thing that threatened her, which was the touch of life through anybody else. She said to herself that she must keep control of herself.

But Buddy turned around again, just then, slowly, as if he were a young male cat who just happened to be turning around to see what he could see, and he looked at his mother with his large eyes, so like his father's: pale petal-blue, with drops of light like the centres of cat's eyes, and dark lashes. He had a solemn look, when he saw his mother's face, and he prayed her silently to acknowledge him. If she didn't, why, he was still alone. He would never again feel safe about running off to the highway to watch the scrapers work, or the huge Diesel oil tankers go by, or the cars with strange license plates — of which he had already counted thirty-two different kinds, his collection, as he called it. So if she didn't see him, why, what might he find when he came back home at times like those, when he went off for a little while just to play?

They were climbing down the other side of the ridge now. In a few minutes they would be riding into Weed. The

sights as they approached were like images of awakening to Cleotha. Her heart began to hurt when she saw them. She recognized the tall iron smokestack of the sawmill. It showed above the trees down on the slope ahead of them. There was a stone house which had been abandoned even when she was a girl at home here, and its windows and doors standing open always seemed to her to depict a face with an expression of dismay. The car dropped farther down — they were making that last long curve of the road to the left — and now the town stood visible, with the sunlight resting on so many of the unpainted houses and turning their weathered gray to a dark silver. Surely they must be ready for them, these houses; all had been talked over by now. They could all mention that they knew Cleotha as a little girl.

She lifted her head.

There were claims upon her.

Buddy was looking at her soberly, trying to predict to himself how she would *be*. He was ready to echo with his own small face whatever her face would show him.

Miss Latcher was watching the two of them. Her heart was racing in her breast.

The car slowed up. Now Cleotha could not look out the windows at the wandering earthen street, and the places alongside it. They would have to drive right through town, to the hillside on the other side.

'Mumma?' asked the boy softly.

Cleotha winked both her eyes at him, and smiled, and leaned towards him a trifle.

And then he blushed, his eyes swam with happiness, and he smiled back at her, and his face poured forth such radiance that Miss Latcher took one look at him, and with a choke, burst into tears.

She wept into her hands, her gloves were moistened, her square shoulders rose to her ears, and she was overwhelmed by what the mother had been able to do for the boy. She shook her head and made long gasping sobs. Her sense of betrayal was not lessened by the awareness that she was weeping for herself.

Cleotha leaned across to her, and took her hand, and murmured to her. She comforted her, gently.

'Hush, honey, you'll be all right. Don't you cry, now. Don't you think about us. We're almost there, and it'll soon be over. God knows you were mighty sweet to come along and be with us. Hush, now, Arleen, you'll have Buddy crying, too.'

But the boy was simply watching the teacher, in whom the person he knew so well every day in school had broken up, leaving an unfamiliar likeness. It was like seeing a reflection in a pond, and then throwing a stone in. The reflection disappeared in ripples of something else.

Arleen could not stop.

The sound of her 'hooping made Jodey furious. He looked into the rear-view mirror and saw his wife patting her and comforting her. Cleotha looked so white and strained that he was frightened, and he said out, without turning around: 'Arleen, you cut that out, you shut up, now. I won't have you wearin' down Clee, God damn it, you quit it!'

But this rage, which arose from a sense of justice, made Arleen feel guiltier than ever; and she laid her head against the car window, and her sobs drummed her brow bitterly on the glass.

'Hush,' whispered Cleotha, but she could do no more, for they were arriving at the hillside, and the car was coming to a stop. They must awaken from this journey, and come out onto the ground, and begin to toil their way up the yellow hill, where the people were waiting. Over the ground grew yellow grass that was turning to green. It was like velvet, showing dark or light, according to the breeze and the golden afternoon sunlight. It was a generous hill, curving easily and grandly as it rose. Beyond it was only the sky, for the mountains faced it from behind the road. It was called Schoolhouse Hill, and at one time, the whole thing had belonged to Cleotha's father; and before there was any schoolhouse crowning its noble swell of earth, the departed members of his family had been buried halfway up the gentle climb.

Jodey helped her out of the car, and he tried to talk to her with his holding fingers. He felt her trembling, and she

shook her head at him. Then she began to walk up there, slowly. He leaned into the car and took the covered box in his arms, and followed her. Miss Latcher was out of the car on her side, hiding from them, her back turned, while she used her handkerchief and positively clenched herself back into control of her thoughts and sobs. When she saw that they weren't waiting for her, she hurried, and in humility, reached for Buddy's hand to hold it for him as they walked. He let her have it, and he marched, watching his father, whose hair was blowing in the wind and sunshine. From behind, Jodey looked like just a kid. . . .

And now for Cleotha, her visions on the journey appeared to have some value, and for a little while longer, when she needed it most, the sense of being in blind communion with life was granted her, at the little graveside where all those kind friends were gathered, on the slow slope up of the hill on the summit of which was the schoolhouse of her girlhood.

It was afternoon, and they were all kneeling towards the upward rise, and Judge Crittenden was reading the prayer book.

Everything left them but a sense of their worship, in the present.

And a boy, a late scholar, is coming down the hill from the school, the sunlight edging him; and his wonder at what the people kneeling there are doing is, to Cleotha, the most memorable thing she is to look upon today; for she has resumed the life of her infant daughter, whom they are burying, and on whose behalf, something rejoices in life anyway, as if to ask the mother whether love itself is not ever-living. And she watches the boy come discreetly down the hill, trying to keep away from them, but large-eyed with a hunger *to know* which claims all acts of life, for him, and for those who will be with him later; and his respectful curiosity about those kneeling mourners, the edge of sunlight along him as he walks away from the sun and down the hill, is of all those things she saw and rejoiced in, the most beautiful; and at that, her breast is full, with the heaviness of a baby at it, and not for grief alone, but for praise.

'I believe, I believe!' her heart cries out in her, as if she

were holding the peach stone of her eager girlhood in her woman's hand.

She puts her face into her hands, and weeps, and they all move closer to her. Familiar as it is, the spirit has had a new discovery. . . .

Jodey then felt that she had returned to them all; and he stopped seeing, and just remembered, what happened yesterday; and his love for his wife was confirmed as something he would never be able to measure for himself or prove to her in words.

THE ENCHANTED

BY LAURETTE MACDUFFIE KNIGHT

THE road stretched before me, lonely and monotonous, bordered on either side by the white sand and scrub pine of North Carolina seacoast country. There was nothing visible by which to identify it, nothing, even, to indicate the approach of a town, but I began to experience a sense of recognition. Somewhere along here, I thought, you turned off for the road to Cypress Lake.

Evelyn and I used to do a lot of driving, usually with three or four others in the car, occasionally alone, and I remembered now how moonlight shining on this soft white sand gave it a brilliant quality like that of snow. It had seemed beautiful to me because I wasn't used to it — in 1918 my familiarity with sand was confined to the Coney Island variety, which was hard underfoot, coarse and brown to the eye and under no circumstances to be likened to snow. Other things were beautiful for the same reason, though I would have died rather than speak of them, just as I would cut out my tongue before mentioning my fancy concerning the sand.

At first it was just the friendly courtesy of the Somerset people, and the impression they gave of infinite leisure, of having time for everything. They were not overwhelmed by the fact of war; they did what they could, and that was that. It was an old town, it had survived several wars, and it would survive this one. *Everything passes*, that was the Somerset philosophy — but passes in its own good time.

Walking along the wide, quiet streets, you'd find yourself trying to slow down, ashamed of the unnecessary haste and aggressiveness that stamped you as an outsider. You knew how crude you must seem to these people though the fact that you wore the uniform of your country, coupled with their own good breeding, kept them from showing it.

Our company had been sent from Fort Slocum to Camp McDougal, on the outskirts of Somerset. And from the moment I looked out of the train window and saw them — the whole town, or as much of it as could crowd onto the station platform — standing there, smiling, I felt like a kid from an orphan asylum determined to make good in his first home. I *was* a kid from an orphan asylum, although I'd been on my own for a couple of years. I was nineteen years old, conscious, for the first time, of my social deficiencies, and a lot more frightened by the girls I met at dances than by the possibility of ending up dead on a battlefield.

By all, that is, except Evelyn Monroe. She was only seventeen, and a little girl, no more than five feet tall, with delicate features and fine, warmly yellow hair. But Evelyn, in spite of her youth, was remarkably self-possessed. The other girls were forever engaged in putting themselves over as vivacious belles — chattering, gesticulating, breaking out into nervous peals of laughter; gazing provocatively, or mysteriously, or just hopefully into dazed male faces.

Evelyn wasn't afraid of silence. Her habitual manner, casual to the point of indifference, could be disconcerting. Sometimes — but this was later on — it infuriated me to see her so preoccupied, so apparently unaware of me. But just when I felt I couldn't stand it another minute she'd turn, smiling, and ask innocently, 'What are you frowning so about, darling?' and then, of course, I couldn't tell her. I didn't even want to tell her. I didn't want to spoil that wonderful moment. All this came later, anyway. At first, the casualness made me feel easy and comfortable.

I seldom thought of Evelyn any more, and when I did it was without either pleasure or pain. No emotion can live, unfed, for twenty years. It might even be said that I hardly remembered her — consciously. In a drawer of my desk at

home there was a snapshot of a girl wearing a costume as strange as any costume seen long after it has gone out of fashion: a low-necked, lace-collared dress of some thin material, bloused shapelessly above and below a belt; white stockings and little pointed oxfords. The pale hair was piled high on her head, and her face looked small and expressionless.

This was Evelyn Monroe at seventeen; a woman thirty-nine years old now and married for nineteen of them to a man I remembered vaguely as a silent, solid boy, one of the boys who lounged in a drugstore doorway and — at first, before soldiers became a commonplace — stared respectfully as I passed. This was a picture of my first love. It might have been the likeness of any exceptionally pretty girl of the great war period. For, if the camera does not lie, neither can it, after twenty years, tell any part of the truth.

If you were brought up in, say, the Gramercy Park section, you will always think a little sentimentally of that part of New York. That's home, to you, just as much as any small Indiana town is home to someone else. But nobody would be likely to remember the Frances Warner Williams Home for Orphaned Children with quite the same special tenderness. And no matter how much you love New York as a whole, it is still very hard to reduce a sprawling city of seven millions to the cosy proportions of 'back home.'

That was how I explained to myself the irrational fact that for so many years I had remembered an obscure Southern town in the way a man remembers home. Reason told me, even as I drove toward it, that time and a process of idealization had gilded Somerset with magic qualities it did not possess. It occurred to me that there was no need to rob myself of this last harmless illusion. I wasn't due in Pinchurst, where Charley Alderson and his wife had invited me for the golf matches, until day after tomorrow, but there were plenty of other places to spend two days.

Now a few tumble-down, weather-beaten shacks had appeared, shockingly at variance with the rich land surrounding them. Just ahead lay the muddy Cape Fear, and once over that it would be too late. But I knew I wasn't going to

turn back. From the time I crossed the North Carolina state line, perhaps, subconsciously, from the moment Alderson's letter arrived, my mind had been obsessed with one thought. I made no attempt to explain that, or to analyze it; I just drove on, over the bridge that spanned the river — and into Somerset.

The first impression was one of sagging, mean houses grayed with age, of dirt and hopeless poverty. But this was the slum district. Every town, no matter how insignificant in size, has its slum, and it is generally — possibly on the principle of saving the best for the last — the first thing to greet the incoming visitor. The charm of Somerset, I told myself, was not to be judged by this. I drove through it, past a smoke-blackened, deserted-looking railroad station (the station that had been so gay and inviting in the sunlight of that morning long ago), and into the business center. And with every block it became increasingly clear that the Somerset I remembered existed nowhere but in my mind.

This might have been any small town anywhere. Its sole distinguishing feature was the air of heavy somnolence that enveloped it; the feeling which I, as a boy of nineteen, had revered as one of dignified leisure. Rejecting the adjective 'decaying' as a trifle overdramatic, I looked around. Nothing had altered. There stood the bank, the two small department stores, the 'new' hotel, built thirty years before and undoubtedly still referred to as the new hotel, to distinguish it from the old. Here was the drugstore that had been, and apparently was still, the gathering place for the younger element. Except for their dress, the group of boys lounging in the doorway might have been the old group that included Joe London.

As I went in, they turned blank, incurious faces in my direction, like dogs performing a reflex action. I found the telephone directory, picked it up and turned to the L's. My heart was beating too fast and I had the same impulse I'd had a little while before — to turn back, to get away before it was too late. Too late for what, the impulse didn't say. It was just a feeling, and made no sense. I had thought so much about seeing Evelyn that the whole thing had assumed an exaggerated importance in my mind.

There was no Joseph London listed. Only C. G. London — that, presumably, would be Joe's father — and below it, Mrs. Evelyn London. I went into the telephone booth and asked for the number.

Only then did I realize it was possible she might have forgotten so completely that my name would mean nothing to her.

I thought I recognized the light, sweet voice that answered. 'Hello, Evelyn,' I said. 'This is Phil Scott.'

'Well, hello, Phil. How are you?' There was not the slightest indication of surprise in her tone.

'Fine, thanks. I was just driving through to Pinehurst —' I stopped myself. Pinehurst was in an opposite direction, and she hadn't asked for any explanation. 'I'd like to see you, if that's possible.'

'Of course, Phil. Come right on over, won't you?'

I said I would, and hung up. The entire exchange had been as easy and natural as though she were accustomed to hearing from me every day. I didn't know what to make of it. No other woman of my acquaintance could have got through such a conversation without some reference to those twenty years.

Driving out Market Street, I thought of the last time I saw Evelyn. We were sitting in the porch swing and there was a low-hung reddish moon in the sky. The Armistice had been signed, the war won without any assistance from me, and now, after six months in paradise, I was being tossed out into the cold. I was very unhappy, very much in love and inclined to be bitter. Wallowing in self-pity and adolescent heroism, I told Evelyn that I was going to make a success of myself somehow or die in the attempt, but that it wouldn't be fair to ask her to wait. I wasn't good enough for a girl like her anyway, I said humbly.

From a worldly point of view, at least, that was true. I had no background and very little education. She was a daughter of what I thought of as 'society people,' a family with socially prominent connections all over the South. Since my acquaintance with the gentry was limited to the movies and newspapers, I had been astonished, at first, to see how simply

the Monroes lived. To me, it was incredible that 'society people' could be poor.

Even more incredible was their unquestioning acceptance of me. Evelyn considered that I 'talked funny,' but all Yankees talked funny and she made no distinction between the cultured and the uncultured. Probably she believed that all Yankees were awkward and ill-mannered. I was like a creature from another planet, and she viewed my peculiarities with indulgence.

She loved me a little, perhaps, though I was never sure. We were not often alone. Evelyn's greatest pleasure was driving the family car, when she could have it, and she handled it with an impressive, if casual, efficiency. She drove, apparently, for the sheer delight of motion. Scenery meant nothing to her — she would as soon ride around town as in the country — and we rarely had any objective, though, at my request, we often ended up at Cypress Lake. We just drove, usually accompanied by anywhere from one to four others. 'Let's pick up Joe,' she'd say, seeing him lounging before the drugstore. 'You don't mind, do you, darling?' I didn't mind. It never occurred to me to think of Joe London as a rival.

But five months after I left Somerset, she wrote that she was marrying Joe. Just a bare statement of the fact, and then, 'Love, darling,' and her signature. A little later I received a formal announcement of the wedding, and spent a week's salary on a present fine enough, in my eyes, to impress even society people like the Monroes and the Londons. Now she had divorced Joe, or else he was dead.

I located the number and stopped before a big white frame house. There was a group of people on the porch and as I walked up the path one of the women rose and came to the steps. She wore a short blue dress and patent-leather sandals, and her yellow hair was long and fluffy about her face.

'Hello, Phil,' she said, and then I knew it was Evelyn. It sounds crazy but at first I had failed to recognize her, not because she had changed so much but because she hadn't changed at all. People rarely alter enough, between twenty and forty, to be totally unrecognizable; still, there's a differ-

ence — in expression, in carriage, sometimes you can't put your finger on what it is, but it's there — the years leave marks.

The years had left no marks on Evelyn. She was exactly the same slim, pretty little girl. Her skin was creamy and looked cool to the touch, there were no lines about her vivid blue eyes, and the clothes she wore, the way her hair was arranged, made her seem younger than the girl in my snapshot. My first thought had been that this must be Evelyn's daughter.

'Hello, Evelyn,' I said. If she thought it peculiar that I had stared so long without speaking, her manner gave no indication of it.

'I'm so glad to see you,' she said. 'I want you to meet some friends of mine.'

She introduced the bald man and the dark, plump woman sitting beside him in the swing as Mr. and Mrs. John Allen.

'And this is Keith Harris — Phil Scott.'

'How do you do,' I said.

A pair of blue eyes, so light as to have a blind look, surveyed me expressionlessly for a moment. Then the boy — he looked no more than twenty-five, if that — stood up and held out his hand. He was a good two inches taller than I, which would make him well over six feet, and big-boned, but thin — 'gaunt' would express it, I suppose — with a sullen, neurotic face.

Evelyn went into the house, and the bald man got up and came over to sit in a chair next to me. He asked what I did, and when I told him I was on the *Globe* his red face lit up eagerly. He began asking about various newspaper people in New York, some of whom I knew, and about places — bars, restaurants and so on. You know the kind of thing — 'Is Tony's still upstairs over . . . ' When I mentioned that I lived in East 36th Street, he said, 'Well, I'll be damned. I lived at 122 for three years.' He sat back, smiling and shaking his head over this extraordinary coincidence.

At intervals, his wife, whom he called Betty, would interpolate something like, 'Oh, Johnny, Mr. Scott doesn't want to hear all that old stuff about New York! He's on a vaca-

tion.' She was the kind of woman who explains people to one another. And she wanted very much to keep Johnny's mind off New York.

Keith Harris took no part in the conversation. I was conscious of his eyes on my face; probably because of their peculiar pale color, they gave an impression of watching rather than of merely looking. When Evelyn came out, followed by a colored woman with a tray of drinks, he transferred this watchful gaze to her.

'Lib just called up,' Evelyn said to Betty. 'Frank has gone back to the sanitarium.'

'What! Why, he just came out three weeks ago.' Betty turned to her husband. 'Did you hear that, Johnny? Frank has gone back to the sanitarium.'

Keith Harris laughed.

'It's nothing to laugh at, Keith,' Evelyn said. 'It's no fun for Lib to be married to a dipsomaniac.'

'Keith will end up in the sanitarium himself, if he doesn't watch out,' Betty said cheerfully, and Johnny, staring into his highball, said, 'Who won't?'

Everybody laughed at that, and presently the servant brought out another round. I was bored already, and disappointed — although this certainly was the kind of thing I should have expected — and Betty Allen's shrill voice was getting on my nerves. Anybody who thinks Southern women have lovely voices must be tone deaf. Evelyn's voice was sweet and not irritating, but it had no color or variety.

She came over and stood leaning against the porch railing, with her small, slender feet crossed, and smiled at me. 'How have you been, darling?'

I smiled back. 'All right. How have you been?'

'Pretty good. Are you married?'

I shook my head.

'He's too busy to get married,' Betty said. 'Those men up there in New York, especially those newspaper men, they haven't got time for a wife.'

'You haven't changed any, Evelyn,' I said.

'Neither have you. I'd have known you anywhere.'

Somerset politeness. I hadn't put on any excess weight or

lost my hair, but that was as much as you could say. I was forty-one and looked it.

I saw two children coming up the path with tennis rackets in their hands, a girl of about sixteen and one a couple of years younger. As they reached the steps Evelyn turned around and said casually, 'Well, Mary Bea, did you beat her?'

The little one smiled, shaking her head. The other pushed back her soft blonde hair and asked, 'Mother, may we tell Fanny to make some lemonade?'

'I reckon so. But first say "how do you do" to Mr. Scott. Phil, these are my daughters, Alice and Mary Beatrice.'

Alice was several inches taller than her mother and had a sturdier frame. Otherwise, both were exact replicas of Evelyn.

'You'd think they were all three sisters, wouldn't you?' Betty said as the children went into the house. 'I declare, it's always a shock to me to hear them call you mother, Evelyn.'

It had been a shock to me, too, but I didn't say so. I found myself wondering what had happened to Joe London. And all the time I was aware of those pale blue eyes staring out of the sullen dark face.

'I think we should do something,' Evelyn said suddenly, setting down her glass. 'Let's go to ride.'

This odd phrase — the people of Somerset never said 'for a ride,' always 'to ride' — fell on my ears with an old familiarity.

'We might drop in on somebody,' Betty said. 'I know! Let's ride down to the Sound and see Jenkins.'

Johnny looked annoyed. 'Hell, what for?'

'Why, Johnny! Poor Jenkins. He must get so lonesome.'

'He doesn't have time to get lonesome. Every time I go down there the damned boat is so crowded it looks like rush hour in the subway.' Johnny grinned at me, the grin seeming to say that he and I were the only ones who could appreciate this simile.

'Well, he's cute,' Evelyn said. 'I think Phil would enjoy meeting him.'

'Oh, he *would*,' said Betty positively.

'Who is Jenkins?' I asked.

They all talked at once. Jenkins, I gathered, was a character. He had come to Somerset, nobody knew just why, twelve years before, and had fallen ill of infantile paralysis; when he recovered — partially, for he was permanently paralyzed below the waist — he 'cut himself off' from a family never seen in Somerset but presumed to live up north somewhere, bought a boat and moved into it. And there he had been ever since, with a Negro man to care for him; living quite comfortably and contentedly on the boat, and, for entertainment, writing a novel. Evidently he was not poor Jenkins in any literal sense.

'It certainly sounds like an ideal existence for a writer,' I said, because I had to say something. In spite of their air of regarding it as a treat for me, I did not think I would enjoy meeting Jenkins. In the first place, because the man was unable to walk, we would all have to be very careful in our choice of subject matter, and sooner or later, because of this excessive care, somebody — probably Mrs. Allen — would say something about legs or walking. If he was sensitive about his infirmity, that would be painful. If he wasn't, but was sensitive in another way, he'd hate the quick, tactful cover-up remarks that inevitably follow one of these boners.

And I was afraid somebody would persuade him to let me look at his novel.

But Evelyn had gone to get her car out of the garage. I would have preferred to take her in my roadster, letting the others follow, but since she hadn't suggested it, I said nothing. She brought the car around; the Allens got into the back and Keith Harris, with another unfriendly look at me, followed them. Until that moment I had supposed his sullenness to be due to the natural hostility of youth toward middle age or of the small-town boy toward the city slicker. But now I saw that there might be another reason.

The car's convertible top had been let down, and the combination of late afternoon sun and cool, clean air felt good. It was not, and never had been, a 'pretty' drive to the sound, for the road went through one after another huddled community of small, cheap summer shacks with names like 'Sea-

breeze' and 'We-Like-It' tacked onto the porches. But before long I smelled the sea, the most exciting smell in the world, and, to anybody with memories bound up with it, the most evocative.

A whole host of memories came to me — memories of swimming by moonlight, of fishing under a broiling sun that turned the surface of the water to a blinding sheet of brilliance, of sitting at the end of a pier, in darkness pierced by distant yellow lights, listening to the water lap against wooden piles. When the road curved suddenly and the sound spread out before us, I was startled to hear Betty Allen's shrill voice crying rapturously, 'Oh, isn't it pretty, though? I just love it!'

It was magnificent; a great expanse of blue water lying peacefully under the pale late afternoon sky. The sight and the smell of it were like keys opening a long-closed door.

But just to look at it and smell it were not enough for Mrs. Allen; she had to annotate it as well. 'Mr. Scott, isn't it wonderful? I don't mean just the water, but the trees and the lovely old houses. Some of these houses were built before the Revolution, you know. I bet you never see anything as pretty as this around New York City.'

'It's beautiful,' I said patiently. There had been Betty Allens in those days, too, and Evelyn had listened to them with this same half-smile, a smile that might have been mocking or merely appreciative; you could never tell.

I forced her to look at me. 'This hasn't changed, either,' I said. 'Everything is exactly the same.'

'I guess it's true,' she said in her light voice. 'Living with things, seeing them all the time, you don't notice. But I guess nothing in Somerset ever changes much.'

Johnny Allen overheard her. 'Nothing in Somerset ever changes at all,' he said. 'Phil, you can come back here in another twenty years, or forty years, for that matter, and you won't see any difference. The houses, and their inhabitants, will sag a little more and look a trifle grayer. Some of the piers will have rotted away. So will some of the people. That's all. The wonderful thing about Somerset is that it died a hundred years ago and nobody has ever noticed it.'

I laughed uncomfortably. If he really hated it so much, I thought, why didn't he get the hell out? If his wife refused to go with him, let him leave his wife behind.

She rushed indignantly to the defense. 'Before the Civil War Somerset was one of the most important shipping centers in the South and I'd like you to know that wasn't any hundred years ago!'

'All right,' Johnny said. 'Call it eighty. It's been dead eighty years, not a hundred.'

'Youall stop arguing,' Evelyn said pleasantly. 'Here we are.'

She shut off the motor and we got out. Jenkins' 'boat,' which I had visualized as some sort of houseboat, was a handsome small yacht. We walked out to the landing-stage, with Betty in the lead yelling, 'William! William!' In response to these cries a tall, strong-looking Negro man, very smart and immaculate in his white coat, appeared on deck and I half-expected her to ask if his master was at home. But she said, 'William, go tell Mr. Jenkins he has company.'

'Yes, ma'am, he'll be right glad to see youall.' William did not go tell Mr. Jenkins he had company, but helped Evelyn and Betty to cross the gangplank and then stood aside. Unless Mr. Jenkins was deaf, he must have known by now that he had company, anyway.

We walked into an exquisitely orderly saloon, and a soft, high-pitched voice said, 'I was thinking just a little while ago that it was time for some of you to be dropping in.'

The man in the wheel chair must have weighed two hundred and fifty pounds. He had fine, curly hair, like a baby's, and small features clustered in the center of an enormous expanse of fat. Like the servant and the yacht itself, he looked almost surgically clean — his white shirt was snowy, his pink skin shone, the expensive tan blanket that was tucked around him seemed too immaculate ever to have been touched by human hands.

'How have you been, darling?' Evelyn asked, exactly as she had asked me a little while ago, with no more and no less warmth. It was not a question but a greeting. 'Jenkins, I want you to meet Phil Scott, an old friend of mine from New York.'

Betty Allen said instantly, 'Mr. Scott is a newspaper reporter.'

'A feature writer,' corrected Johnny irritably.

'Well, a writer, anyhow. So we thought you ought to meet each other.' Betty smiled roguishly at me. 'Maybe Jenkins will let you see his novel. He'll never let anybody else even peek at it.'

As though neither of them had spoken, Jenkins said calmly, 'How do you do, Mr. Scott. Sit down, all of you. William will bring us a drink in a minute.' He chatted with the others for a while, and then William brought in a tray of frosted mint juleps — which can't be prepared in a minute. Jenkins turned to me. 'This is not your first visit to Somerset?'

'No,' I said. 'But the first in twenty years. I was here, at Camp McDougal, during the war.'

'Ah, yes. I suppose you've heard that Camp McDougal is no more. I was sorry to see it demolished — it provided us with a link to the outside world.' He blinked his small eyes at me and smiled. 'I had almost said, the real world.'

'Now, Jenkins, don't make fun of Somerset,' Evelyn said. 'You know you couldn't bear to live anywhere else.'

'You're right, Evelyn. This is where I belong.' But the little green eyes kept straying to me. 'You must have been very young in 1918, Mr. Scott,' he said.

'Pretty young,' I said. 'Nineteen.'

Keith Harris, who hadn't, to my knowledge, made a sound since laughing at the delicious joke of his alcoholic friend Frank's return to the sanitarium, now laughed again. The thought that I had once been nineteen years old evidently struck him as exquisitely funny, for when I looked at him he was grinning. A nice guy, I thought. A nice, normal guy with a sense of humor.

But no one else paid any attention to him. Jenkins was saying, 'And now you have come back. It is interesting to return to the past. Interesting, though perhaps slightly dangerous.'

'I'd say it was impossible.' My voice was brusquer than I'd intended. This phony sort of talk always irritated me.

'Yes? I don't agree. It is perfectly possible to go back in time, to recapture in every detail some experience of the past. Of course it would not be possible for everyone, but for a sensitive, imaginative person —'

'Oh, Jenkins, you're a regular old Einstein!' Betty exclaimed. She held up her glass. 'I don't know how William makes such perfect juleps. My Miriam can't seem to do it right, no matter how often I show her. And that reminds me — it will be supper time soon and we've got company coming.'

To my relief, everybody stood up — everybody, that is, except Jenkins. 'The worst thing about being crippled,' he said in an ordinary tone, 'is that when guests start to go, you invariably have an impulse to walk to the door with them, and of course you can't.'

He was certainly not what I had expected. But I didn't like him any better for that. I didn't like his mocking little green eyes or his manner, or even his excessive immaculacy. After all, there is such a thing as a pathological obsession with cleanliness. I told myself that he was a bombastic but harmless old fool showing off for the benefit of the stranger from the big city. But the fact remained that he had got under my skin.

This time, Keith Harris walked ahead with Evelyn. She got in the car and he walked around to open the door on the other side. But as he started to get in beside her, Evelyn shook her head, smiling.

'Then I'm staying here,' he said. We were still some distance behind, but his voice carried clearly on the quiet air. Then we saw him walk away, up the road.

'Oh, oh.' Betty looked significantly at Johnny, who shrugged.

'The trolley cars are still running,' he said.

'Yes, but you know Keith! We shouldn't have let him have that last drink. Heaven knows how many he'd had before he came to Evelyn's.'

'And maybe heaven cares,' Johnny said. 'I don't, so let's drop it.'

On the way into town I asked Evelyn to have dinner with me. 'Maybe we could go to a movie, later,' I said.

'Maybe. I don't know what's playing. But you'd better have dinner with me, instead.' She smiled. 'Fanny is a wonderful cook.'

'Get her to make beaten biscuit,' said Betty from the back seat. In this group there was no such thing as a private conversation. 'Mr. Scott will love Fanny's beaten biscuit.'

I picked up the roadster, went down to the Nathan Forrest — that was the 'new' hotel — and changed my clothes. At seven I drove back to Evelyn's.

The children, Alice and Mary Beatrice, dined with us. When directly addressed they answered politely, but otherwise talked only to one another, in low voices. At the end of the meal Alice asked in a quaintly formal tone, 'Mother, may we be excused?' and at Evelyn's nod the two ran upstairs.

'They're going away in the morning,' Evelyn said. 'I think they've packed and unpacked everything they own at least a dozen times.' She glanced at her wrist watch. 'Do you really want to see a movie? Because, if you do, we'll have to go right away in order to get seats.'

'I don't, really,' I said. 'Do you know what I'd like to see? Cypress Lake.'

'No, would you?' Evelyn laughed.

'If you don't mind too much.' I remembered that she had always professed to be mystified by the lake's fascination for me. 'It's nothing but a nasty old swamp,' she used to say.

But now she said, 'I don't mind at all. Come on.'

I felt a difference as soon as we turned off the main road. The short road to the lake had been improved, and there were a number of empty cars parked alongside it. But strangest of all, the horizon was flooded with brilliant white light.

'What's that, an aurora borealis?' I asked uneasily.

'The light? It's from the floodlights at the ball park.'

'Ball park! You don't mean —'

Evelyn laughed happily. 'I wanted to surprise you. Wait till you see — you won't recognize Cypress Lake.'

I recognized it. From the well-lit, fine road that had been

built around the lake, you could see the moss-hung cypress trees growing fantastically out of its dark, still waters. Set, as it was now, in the midst of an amusement park, it looked gaudily picturesque, like a lake on a colored postcard.

I stopped the car and we sat listening to the raucous blare of a popular song played on an electric gramophone in the refreshment stand on the other side of the lake.

'*This is different,*' Evelyn said. 'So, you see, Johnny was wrong when he said nothing ever changed in Somerset.'

'Yes, I see that,' I said. The record stopped, somebody dropped another nickel in the slot and we were treated to a new tune, many times magnified by a loudspeaker. Near the water, about thirty yards away, I noticed a familiar tall figure.

'Isn't that your friend Harris standing over there?' I asked.

'Yes, it's Keith.' She didn't sound surprised.

'Anybody might think he'd been following us.'

'He probably has.'

I looked at her. 'Is he in love with you?'

'I reckon so.'

'Poor kid.'

She didn't answer. I felt, suddenly, the way I used to feel when her face took on that absent look, as though she had got away from me somehow. I tried to make her turn her head, but she was staring at that motionless figure near the water.

'He *is* just a kid, isn't he?'

'About twenty-four.' She sighed. 'Such a strange boy.'

'Not much of a conversationalist, I take it. He hardly opened his mouth all afternoon.'

'Oh, Keith can talk when he wants to. He's just shy with strangers.'

'Shy' was not the word I would have chosen. But I hadn't come out here to discuss the peculiarities of Keith Harris, however fascinating. Well, what had I come for? To see Cypress Lake. And now I'd seen it. The wildness, the strangeness, the brooding suggestion of mystery and hidden, terrible things — that quality that had reminded me of far-off, savage places I had never seen, that was gone. This was an amusement park. This was Progress come to Somerset.

'Damn it, why did they do it?' I burst out. 'I loved that lake.'

Evelyn chuckled. 'I remember — we all thought it so funny the way you were always wanting to come out here. Such a nasty, swampy old place! It used to scare me.'

'It scared me, too,' I said. 'That's why I liked it, maybe.' I offered her a cigarette, which she refused, and lit one for myself. 'There's that guy again,' I said casually. 'Doesn't it get on your nerves to have him popping up every five minutes?'

She didn't answer for a minute, and when she did her voice was abstracted. 'Keith is drunk,' she said. 'I hope he hasn't got his father's car. It's not safe for him to be driving, in that condition.'

'Shall we ask him if he wants to go in with us?'

I felt rather than saw her shake her head. 'It's no use. He wouldn't go.'

'Well then forget him.' I started the car. 'Let's get out of this Godforsaken place. It depresses me.'

'You needn't turn around,' Evelyn said. 'We can drive out this way, past the ball park.'

There was a game going on under the floodlights, with a scattered handful of customers watching. The city, or whoever was responsible, must be losing money.

'Joe used to do that, too,' Evelyn said suddenly, as though continuing a conversation.

'Do what, Evelyn?'

'Follow me around when he was tight. Even after I got the divorce. Once he followed me into a restaurant and came right up to the table. When I introduced him to the man I was with — a man from out of town — he just stood there, sort of rocking, for a long time, and then he said, "I know your kind." It was awful.' She sighed deeply. 'Joe never trusted me, not even in the beginning.'

The tone in which she said all this was as matter-of-fact as though she had been commenting on Joe's taste in books. It was too bad, it was 'awful,' but there you were — that was Joe.

'But that's horrible,' I said angrily. 'If you were divorced,

he had no right in the world — why didn't you have him arrested for molesting you?'

'Oh, I couldn't do that,' she said. 'After all, he is the children's father.'

'Does he ever see them?'

'Yes, of course. They're going to Raleigh tomorrow, to spend two weeks with Joe and his wife. You know, he stayed on in Somerset for two years after the divorce —'

'Following you around all the time? That must have been delightful for both of you.'

'Well, only when he was awfully drunk. And of course he never really *did* anything. It was embarrassing, especially for people who didn't know who he was, and I guess —' she laughed softly, 'I guess he scared a few of them pretty badly. They didn't know what he might do. But I knew Joe's bark was worse than his bite. Poor old Joe! He was kind of sweet when he was sober, but somehow he didn't have the knack for making things go — in business, I mean. If it hadn't been for the property Papa left me when he died, I don't know how we would have lived. I really don't. Well, Joe sort of brooded over that, and he began drinking a lot, and when he got tight it seemed to make him crazy. Anyway, three years ago he got this job in Raleigh, and a little later he married a girl up there. I understand she won't let him drink at all.'

This was the longest speech I had ever heard Evelyn make, and from it a number of things emerged quite clearly. 'A smart girl, apparently,' I said.

I was afraid, for a minute, that she would resent that. But she only said, 'Yes, she must be. I wasn't smart. It just never occurred to me to try to influence Joe in any way.'

No, I thought, it would never occur to her to try to influence anybody.

'I think I'd like a cigarette now, please,' she said. I gave it to her and she lit it; then she asked, 'Why have you never married, *really*?'

'I don't know. Maybe Betty hit it right when she said I was too busy.'

'Is that the only reason? You must have been in love lots of times.'

I thought back. Had I? I had loved several women. But if there is a distinction between loving and being in love, the answer to the question probably was no. There had never been any thought of marriage.

'Only once,' I said.

Having found out, presumably, what she wanted to know, she didn't pursue the subject, but sat smoking her cigarette in silence until we reached the main road. Then she said, 'Turn left,' and threw the cigarette away.

'What do you want to do now?' I asked. 'Shall we stop in somewhere for a drink?'

Evelyn laughed. 'This isn't New York, darling. You can't get a drink in Somerset after the liquor stores close unless you remembered to buy a bottle first.'

'So you can't. I'd forgotten. Well, I didn't want a drink anyhow. Shall we ride down to the sound and watch the moon rise? That is, if it's going to rise. I'd like to see one of those tropical moons again, the sinister red kind. We don't seem to have them in New York.'

'We don't have them here, either, except in very hot weather. And I don't think there's going to be any kind of moon tonight. You'd better just take me home. I must be up early to get the girls off on the train.'

'Okay, if you say so.'

At the door, I said, 'Well, Evelyn — I'm glad to have found you looking so well.' It sounded terribly flat and feeble, but what was there to say? I had discovered during the ride home that I didn't want to leave her.

'Why, Phil,' she said, looking up at me, 'that sounds as though you were saying good-bye.'

'I'm afraid I must. I'm leaving in the morning.'

'You're not! You don't really have to go, do you? There's a dance at the club tomorrow night, and it will be fun. Please stay, darling.'

I smiled. 'All right. I just wanted to be coaxed.' And that, I thought, was probably the truth. 'Shall I call you in the afternoon?'

'Yes, do.'

'Evelyn —'

'Well?' There was something soft and expectant in the way she pronounced the word.

I took her in my arms and bent to kiss her. Her skin felt as smooth and cool as it looked, and gave off a faint, powdery fragrance. For a moment I felt the slim little body relax against me. But only for a moment. Then she drew back hurriedly and said in a breathless voice, 'Good night, Phil. I'll see you tomorrow.'

As I got in the car I saw a tall figure standing in front of the darkened house across the street.

There was, of course, no bar at the Beach Club, and along toward one o'clock in the morning the guests began to go around with the worried expression of people who don't know where their next drink is coming from, hunting for Al, or Pete, because it was rumored that Al or Pete had a bottle that he was trying, ungenerously, to keep for himself.

Evelyn, who wore a white satin evening dress, looked as cool and exquisite at one o'clock as she had at nine and showed no signs of weariness, although she had been dancing almost constantly for three and a half hours. The unremitting cutting-in of the young bloods kept me from utter physical exhaustion, but the heat and noise had begun to make my head ache and I decided to join the bottle-hunters.

It was a moonless night and from the veranda all that could be discerned of the ocean was a glimmer of whitecaps rising high in the air, breaking and spraying on the beach. Over the roar of the waves I could hear occasional bursts of laughter and once a woman's voice cried jubilantly, 'I found it behind a sand dune!' But the veranda was temporarily deserted and I stood there for ten minutes or so, smoking and watching the restless dark waters.

Then someone called my name and I turned to see Johnny Allen coming toward me, with his face redder than normal and his bald head shining damply. He walked up and sat on the veranda rail, facing me.

'Listen, I'm drunk,' he said. 'So listen. I want to talk to you. You think I've got no guts, don't you? You think I'm a spineless, whining damn fool.'

'No.'

'Then what do you think?'

'That people generally do the thing they want to do most,' I said.

'You mean I'd rather live here and have a wife and a comfortable home and three meals a day, every day, than starve by myself in New York. But how do you know I'd starve in New York?'

'I don't know anything about it,' I said. 'You're the one who knows, or if you don't you could find out easily enough.' I threw away my cigarette. 'It's just a matter of wanting one thing more than another.'

'I think I'd make a good newspaper man,' Johnny said. 'But what I know is that I'm a good real estate man. It runs in the family. J. C. — that's my father — is seventy-four years old and he's still a good real estate man. Allen & Son' — Johnny made me a bow — 'the best damn real estate firm in the state. You want to buy a house?'

'Describe it,' I said.

'It's just your type,' he said. 'You're going to love it. Elegant, but restrained. Air-conditioning unit, English lighting fixtures, door chimes. No neighbors. Fine water-tight mortgage.'

'Has it got an inside bathroom?'

'You're just leading me on.' Johnny shook his head. 'I don't think you want to buy a house. I think you're more the migratory type, looking for a place to spend the summer. In that case, what you want is one of our cosy Sound Road bungalows. Take Dewdrop Inn. One hundred and fifty dollars for the full season, May to October. Built-in bunks sleep four comfortably and eight if nobody cares. This charming two-room house is only ten minutes' ride to the sound and within smelling distance of the ocean itself, when the wind is right. You couldn't do better.'

He peered at me earnestly. 'But wait — I can see you're too fine for bungalow life. Now, it just happens that one of our oldest families has authorized Allen & Son to let its ancestral home to the right party — meaning a party with five hundred dollars to lay on the line. A wonderful old pre-

Revolutionary house facing the sound, handpegged doors, hand-hewn rafters, a feather bed in every chamber. Maybe Washington slept in one of them. Maybe he slept in them all, who knows? Washington slept in a lot of beds.'

Johnny held up his hand. 'But that's not all. Genuine wharf rats in the attic. Genuine sand fleas on the fine old porches. Note those sand fleas — you won't get those in Dewdrop Inn. Dewdrop Inn is a cosy little place, but it has no sand fleas because the fleas can't hop that far from the shore and they don't know enough to take a trolley. All you'll get in Dewdrop Inn are gnats — plenty of those when the wind is in the right direction, but after all, are gnats enough? No. I'd advise you to pay the extra three-fifty and take the pre-Revolutionary mansion.' Johnny got down from the porch rail. 'Let's go get a drink.'

'Does Allen & Son happen to own any of those firetraps out near the bridge?' I asked.

'But he was too drunk for that, or not drunk enough. A queer look flickered in his eyes and was gone. 'That takes time, my friend,' he said. 'What nature required a hundred years to accomplish, man can't undo in a minute.'

'All right,' I said. 'Where are we going to get this drink?'

'Where do you suppose?' He patted his pocket. 'Got to do this right, though. Got to be civilized.'

'Meaning what?'

'Meaning water.'

I followed him to the men's room, where there was quite a crowd around the water cooler, being civilized. I had a drink and went out, leaving Johnny harmonizing with three friends.

Near the dance floor, Betty was talking to a tall brunette in red. As I joined them she asked, 'Now what's become of Johnny? He certainly is a joy at a dance. Oh, I forgot — Lib Matthews, Phil Scott.'

'Hello.' The brunette looked at me with lustrous brown eyes. 'I'm dying,' she said in a slow, husky voice. 'Have you got a drink?'

'No, I'm sorry. When I left Johnny, upstairs, just now, he still had a little.'

'Then I'll wait near the stairs,' she said. 'And God help him if he comes down empty-handed.'

I asked Betty to dance, and we went on the floor. 'Poor Lib,' she said. 'She's married to a man who is a periodical drunkard —'

'Frank,' I said.

'Yes, do you know him?'

'I heard you talking about him yesterday.'

'Oh that's right. Well, Frank has been in a sanitarium for treatment four times in the past two years, and now he's gone back again. So Lib is trying to —'

She hesitated and I suggested, 'Drown her sorrow?'

'Yes, that's it. And you can't blame her, can you? She's so upset.'

'No, you can't blame her,' I agreed.

I looked around for Evelyn, and saw that she was dancing with Keith Harris. He must have come in while I was out. He danced well, much better than I did, and he was good-looking, if you liked the type. He and Evelyn made a striking pair, one so fair and the other so dark, and as I watched them she smiled up into his face. It was a rotten trick, I thought with a sudden attack of righteousness, for Evelyn to encourage a kid that age. But, looking at her, it was impossible to believe that she was old enough to be his mother, or pretty nearly. She looked as fresh as the young girls around her and was more attractive than any of them.

'I saw you out there on the veranda,' Betty said suddenly. 'I suppose Johnny was telling you his troubles. He loves to talk about how miserable he is in Somerset.'

'Maybe he really is, a little,' I said. 'When a man has lived in the city for a while, it's apt to stay in his blood. What have you got against New York, anyhow? Why don't you let him try it for a while? You can always come back, if you find you really can't stand it.'

'And have people say that Johnny was a failure, that he couldn't make a living on his own?' Betty shook her head. 'No, this is where we belong. Our home is here, our families are here. We've got roots in Somerset. Besides — he's dependable enough, as it is. Here there is nowhere to go, no

bars or anything, and even so I never know whether Johnny will get home to dinner at six or at midnight. What kind of a life would I have in New York?’

And that was it. All the rest was the prettiest kind of rationalization.

As we passed the door, Johnny and the brunette signaled us from the veranda. We went out.

‘Look.’ Lib held up a quart bottle of Bourbon, half full.

Betty squealed ecstatically. ‘Where did you get that?’

‘I found it. Never mind where.’ Lib handed the bottle to Betty, who took a drink and gave the bottle to me. I put it to my mouth and the whiskey ran down, hot and violent.

‘Look at him,’ Johnny said, ‘a boy who’s used to drinking out of a clean glass like a gentleman. It don’t take long.’

I grinned and handed over the bottle. When he had taken a long pull he put the bottle in his pocket and said, ‘Listen, a crowd of us are going up to the Greek’s for hamburgers. It will be very gay indeed. You collect Evelyn and meet us there. Just tell her the Greek’s — she’ll know.’

I went inside. There were only a few couples left on the floor now and I saw Evelyn at once, dancing with someone I didn’t know. Keith Harris was nowhere to be seen.

I cut in, and asked, ‘Does this go on all night?’

‘No, only until two, and it must be nearly that now.’ Evelyn leaned back to look at me. ‘Why? Aren’t you having a good time?’

‘I’m having a wonderful time.’ And I really was. I felt fine, and happy. ‘Johnny and some others have left for the Greek’s. He said you’d know the place he meant and that we should meet them there.’

‘All right,’ she said. ‘As soon as this number is over I’ll get my coat.’

I waited for her near the door and when she came out in her red velvet coat we went down the steps and got in the roadster.

‘It was fun, wasn’t it?’ she said.

‘It was swell. I’d forgotten how much fun that kind of thing could be.’

I noticed that she glanced back once or twice. 'If you're looking for Keith Harris,' I said, 'I may as well tell you now that if he butts in tonight he's going to have his teeth, tonsils and larynx pushed way down his throat.'

'Don't be irritable, darling,' Evelyn said.

'Who's irritable? At the present moment I am overflowing with the milk of human kindness. But people shouldn't be encouraged in snoopery. It's not nice.'

'Well, he won't follow us tonight,' she said.

'How do you know? Did you tell him not to?'

She nodded. 'I could see it bothered you last night.'

When I could stop laughing, I said, 'You're so wonderful, Evelyn.'

She looked at me. 'How am I wonderful?'

'Well, you're beautiful and adorable,' I said, 'and on top of that, you say the damndest things I ever heard.'

'I don't see why you think so,' she said. 'It *did* bother you.'

'All right, darling, skip it.'

We drove over the causeway that crossed the sound, connecting the beach with the mainland. On the other side, I asked, 'Do you really want to eat hamburgers?'

'No,' she said. 'Let's just ride.'

'I hoped you'd say that.'

I wished there were a moon, because I felt in a mood for moonlight on water. But there was no moon. As we passed Jenkins' dock I saw the pale shape of the yacht riding there.

'Doesn't the metaphysical marvel ever put out to sea?' I asked.

'What?'

'Your friend Jenkins — doesn't he ever get offshore?'

'Oh, yes, he often takes long cruises, but he always comes back to Somerset.'

After we left the sound I just drove at random. On especially good stretches I got the car up to seventy-five, and we rode along, talking a little, occasionally singing snatches of songs, but for the most part relaxing in a comfortable silence. It was just like the old days, except that now, when I looked at the soft white sand that bordered the road, I could tell Evelyn how it used to remind me of snow.

'That's cute,' she said and, after a moment, added, 'It's sort of poetic.'

'That's what I thought,' I said. 'So I was ashamed to mention it. In those days I was always afraid somebody might get the idea that I wasn't an exceedingly tough boy.'

'You weren't, though, really,' she said in that light, abstracted voice. 'You were sweet.'

I wondered if she was remembering that last night, the night that was so vivid in my mind, now, that I remembered even the sultry stillness of the air and the shape of the red moon hanging low in the sky. It was November, but the weather had turned very warm. Indian summer, they called it.

Evelyn said nothing more, and after that we drove in silence. It was four o'clock when we drew up before her house. I helped her out of the car and we went up the steps. We stood looking at each other, and now I felt neither fine nor happy.

'I don't know how I'm going to say good-bye,' I said. 'I don't want to leave you.' I took her thin, delicate hand in mine.

'Then don't.' She was smiling, but the smile was sad. 'Stay here.'

Don't go away . . . stay here. That was what she said, that night in November.

'You know I can't do that,' I said, and the words had the same strange familiarity. 'Evelyn, last night you asked me a question —'

She started to nod, and then a curious change came over her face. I turned around as she dropped my hand, and saw Keith Harris standing on the steps.

'Keith,' Evelyn said tremulously, 'you promised me —'

He didn't move. 'Where have you been?' he asked in a dead, flat voice. 'You left the club at two o'clock, and you didn't go to the Greek's with the others.'

I walked over and hit him in the face, not very hard. Because he hadn't expected it, he toppled backward off the steps, but he was up immediately. As he rose I saw something bright in his hand. He came up the steps and a

moment later I felt something cold and sharp drawn across my forehead. Then he turned and ran.

I took a handkerchief out of my pocket, touched my forehead, and looked at the handkerchief. It was red. I held it to my head and kept it there, looking after Harris until he disappeared.

Behind me, Evelyn said, 'What are you going to do?'

'Nothing,' I said. I spoke in an ordinary tone, but it sounded loud because she had whispered.

'I didn't think he would do a thing like that.'

I turned around. 'Didn't you? Did you think he was just another poor, futile Joe London? With that face and those eyes?'

'But to come here with a *knife* —'

'I don't believe he came here with the idea of slashing anybody,' I said. 'Not this time. It was just an ordinary pen-knife.'

Evelyn's eyes were wide and fearful. Such a fragile, passive little thing, I thought with a curiously remote compassion. You would have said that violence had never touched her — nor had it. She attracted violence, she inspired violence, but it had not touched her.

'You're bleeding,' she said, in the same wondering whisper.

'Naturally,' I said. 'It's only a scratch, but if you've got some iodine —'

'Of course. I'm so sorry, I didn't think —'

She opened the door and I followed her inside. While I applied iodine and court plaster she stood beside me saying anxiously, 'Are you sure you're all right? Hadn't we better call a doctor?'

'It's nothing, really,' I said. 'I'm glad it happened. Now you know what that type is capable of.'

'Oh, I'll never let him come here again,' she said.

'That's not the point exactly,' I said. 'He *is* here, and he's potentially dangerous.'

I stood looking at her. Whatever that nineteen-year-old boy had felt, I was no longer simply and entirely that boy; much had been added, and perhaps something taken away, and an old desire, hidden and repressed for twenty years, was

not enough to build on. But, for a reason that would have been incomprehensible to the boy, I still did not want to leave her here.

'Evelyn, will you go to New York with me?' I asked.

She laughed in an uncertain, nervous way. 'That's sweet of you, Phil, but — well, for one thing, there are the children to think of.'

'Exactly,' I said. 'What about their future? Do you want them to have the sort of life you have?'

I expected that to offend her, but it didn't. 'There's nothing wrong with my life, Phil,' she said gently. 'It may not appeal to you, but it has a certain — beauty, really. It is peaceful —'

'Peaceful?'

'Oh, well, that. I know now I was wrong to be kind to Keith, but you could make such a mistake anywhere. Ordinarily, life in Somerset is pleasantly uneventful. I suppose that to you it might even seem dull.'

'Not dull,' I said. 'Sterile. Barren and empty of meaning. Is that what you want for your children?'

Still she was not offended, though she refused to meet my eyes. 'I couldn't live in New York, Phil,' she said. 'People age so terribly, in cities. I don't want to grow old. I can't bear to grow old.'

'But, my God!' I said. 'You don't want to be a young girl forever, do you? Can't you see how ugly and unnatural that is?'

Now she looked at me, and every trace of color had left her face. 'Ugly! You dare say that to me? You! Have you ever looked into a mirror? Do you think it's so fine to be hard and lined and *middle-aged*?'

I had never seen her angry before, and her anger left as swiftly as it had come. 'Oh, I'm so sorry!' she said in a stricken voice. 'I didn't mean to say that! Please, please forgive me.'

'That's all right, Evelyn,' I said. 'I'm sorry, too. I shouldn't have come here.'

I walked to the door, and as I opened it I looked back. 'Good-bye,' I said.

'Good-bye, Phil.'

There were tears in her eyes, but whether they were for me or for herself, or for something else, I didn't know, and never would.

The sensible thing, I thought vaguely as I got in the car, would be to go to the hotel and sleep for an hour or two. I drove out Market Street, in the direction of the sound, with something on my mind. Although it was none of my business and had nothing to do with me, it seemed important that I know the answer before I left.

It was five-thirty when I rounded the curve in the road — that gray, melancholy moment just before dawn. I stopped, got out and walked to the end of a pier. Six o'clock would be all right, I thought; the sun would be up by then and you could reasonably call it morning. I lit a cigarette and sat down to wait. The sky brightened, the sun came up, the cold blue of the water grew warmer. It was going to be a fine day. Already the world around me had taken on its normal, cheerful early-morning appearance. Death into life, I thought. You think of peculiar things at that hour.

At six o'clock I walked down to Jenkins' landing stage. The gangplank was down and I crossed it and knocked on the saloon door.

In a very short time, a minute or two, William opened another door, further down. He looked as immaculate and wide-awake at dawn as he had at five o'clock in the afternoon.

'Good morning, William,' I said. 'Is Mr. Jenkins up?'

'Good morning, Mr. Scott,' he said. It did not seem odd that he should know my name. 'Go right in, sir.'

I went in, and in a few minutes Jenkins propelled himself into the saloon. 'Hello, there,' he said. 'Sit down. William will have some coffee ready soon.'

'Thank you, I can't stay long,' I said. And it suddenly occurred to me, now that I was here, that he must take me for a lunatic.

Jenkins looked at me for a moment, and said in his delicate voice, 'I imagine you have come to tell me you've discovered I was right.'

'About what?' I asked.

'About the possibility of reliving past experience.'

There was nothing offensive in his gaze. He was not curious, I knew that. He had simply stated a possible reason for my having intruded on him at such an hour.

'No,' I said. 'That is — you were right, yes. It was close. But that isn't why I came.'

He continued to look at me, his green eyes regarding the tape across my forehead. Then he smiled slightly. 'You seem to have been fortunate, Mr. Scott,' he said. 'But — you were saying?'

'I wanted to ask you something,' I said. 'You don't have to answer, of course. I know this much — you're an exceptionally intelligent man and you haven't stayed here for twelve years in order to get material for a novel.'

'Ah, yes, the novel. No one has ever seen that novel.' The enormously fat face wrinkled in a meditative smile. 'I have the true artist's modesty concerning my work. But I am going to show it to you, because I believe you will appreciate it.'

He wheeled himself to the desk and came back with a notebook, which he handed to me.

'Open it,' he said.

I opened it. On the first page, in ink, was written, 'The Enchanted.' The rest of the page, and all the pages following were blank.

'A beautiful title isn't it?' Jenkins said. 'The enchanted — glamour and romance, the lovely sleeping princess awaiting the coming of the prince.' He raised his eyes from the page and looked at me. 'But the enchanted I am thinking of are not like that, Mr. Scott. They are futile, empty — the saddest people in the world. The princess is not waiting for the prince, and if he came she would not permit herself to be awakened. Because for her, the dream is preferable to reality.'

He closed the notebook. 'Well, that's it. I can write a little, I might have done it, I suppose. I used to tell myself that I would begin some day but that, after all, there was no hurry. And now I think, why should I do it at all? There are so many novels in the world.'

'You haven't answered my question,' I said. 'Why have you stayed here all these years?'

'So you insist on having it in words.' His voice was still remarkable for its delicacy, but now it had the quality of wire. 'Very well. I will answer your question with another: could there be a more suitable home for a dead man?'

He looked around as the servant came in. 'Well, William, I take it breakfast is ready.' The sharpness had gone from his voice. 'If Mr. Scott will join us ——'

'Thank you, no,' I said. 'I must be on my way.' I held out my hand. 'Good-bye.'

'Good-bye,' he said. 'Good luck.'

I went to the hotel, got my things together and inquired for a telegraph office. At seven o'clock, having wired the Aldersons my regrets and apologies, I crossed the Cape Fear Bridge and headed for New York. Spiritually, Pinehurst was well on the safe side of the borderline, but at that moment it was geographically too close. And there was something else. I had a sudden, overwhelming need for noise and conflict and activity, for everything that New York stood for; I was filled with a nostalgic yearning that any fool could have recognized as homesickness.

THE LITTLE BLACK BOYS

BY CLARA LAIDLAW

I

THE little black boys, Samuel and Hamuel, were the first, indeed the only Negro children I'd ever had in my classes in Northford. I remember very well the first time I saw them, on Wednesday, the second day of school, when my freshman math class assembled for the first time.

They sidled into the room shyly, after all the white children had rushed in to begin disputing noisily over the choice seats in the back of the room. The black boys hesitated just inside the door, looking around in a bewildered way, and then they slid quickly into two empty front seats. I couldn't help noticing how bent and shriveled and small their bodies were. Obviously they were twins, but even the usual physical retardation of twin children did not explain all their difference from the robust white children. There was hunger in the shallowness of their chests, and their thin, bent shoulders told of hard work beyond their years. When they sat down, the seats were almost ludicrously large for them.

The white children buzzed and tussled until I called them to order, but the little black boys sat like twin statues, their eyes gleaming white as they stared at me, their round, fluted lips sober and still. They had cheap new dime-store tablets before them on their desks, and penny pencils, the dull brown ones with pointed erasers wedged into the tops.

When I asked them, as I had the others, if they wanted to be called by their full names or by nicknames, the frozen stillness of their faces broke for the first time, and the one nearest the blackboard said, his white teeth flashing, 'I'm Sammy. He's Hammy.'

Some of the little girls behind him began to giggle. I nodded hurriedly and said, 'All right, boys. Sammy and Hammy it shall be,' and turned quickly to take up the first lesson.

As the days and weeks went by, I paid little attention to the twins. They were quiet and sober and good. They never whispered to anyone and no one whispered to them. I grew used to seeing their black faces staring blankly up at me, or their kinky black heads bent laboriously over their work. With diminished penny pencils clutched tightly in skinny black fingers, they worked hour after hour to produce grubby papers covered with painfully worked problems, all wrong. The class was a slow one; but of all the group, Sammy and Hammy were the slowest. If, after weeks of work, they became finally convinced that if A and B, working alone, could each do a piece of work in six days, working together they could do it in three, then the next day they would be equally certain that, if one tablet cost ten cents, two would cost five.

I used to find myself scolding them occasionally, and they would look up at me with remorse in their liquid black eyes, their mouths drawn down into a mask of guilty grief.

Once I said, 'Oh, Sammy and Hammy, what am I to do with you?' and Hammy said, 'We're sorry we's so dumb, Miz Carey.' Then he smiled and Sammy smiled, like two bad little dogs trying to be ingratiating. So we were friends again, and I began writing on their papers, to their innocent delight. 'This is better than yesterday's paper,' or 'Fine! You had two problems right today' instead of the bare zeros and twenties they really earned.

One day I found a paper of Hammy's from which the comment I had written had been neatly cut.

'We saves them,' Hammy said shyly when I questioned him. 'Our mammy pastes 'em in a big book we got from the tailor shop. She say — 't ain't every boy gets him so many nice words said to him — least, not every black boy.'

2

'Those twins!' the other teachers groaned. Poor little black boys, they couldn't do anything at all. The other children shunned them, too, it seemed, and their days would have been sad indeed had they not had each other for company. Each day they brought their dinners and sat alone on the steps eating their plain bread from a paper sack, while the other children ate and played noisily in the lunchroom.

Sammy and Hammy would sit watching the antics of their fellows with eager interest and delight, whispering to each other, chuckling companionably at whatever pleased them, but never offering to join the fun. Their apparent contentment in their isolation puzzled me until one day Sammy said, concerning another matter, 'Our mammy say — you twins, so you be twins together,' and I understood what the mother was doing for them: making the gulf between white and black be their choice, guarding them thus from fear and from desire for what they couldn't have, making them self-sufficient in their twoness.

Still, their aloofness bothered me. I didn't want to make an issue of it, but when two or three boys or girls would come in to discuss class politics or the play, or to get news for the paper, or just to visit, I'd begin in a roundabout way to talk about democracy and the American dream and the Golden Rule, and finally, as offhandedly as I could, by way of illustration, I'd bring in Sammy's and Hammy's need of friends. The boys and girls would say, 'Yes, Miss Carey,' 'Of course, Miss Carey,' but the shadow would come down over their faces. They would look secretive and stubborn, and I knew they'd been talked to at home.

In a way, you couldn't blame their parents. The twins lived alone with their mother in an old shack 'way down at the shore. At first the black woman had gone about asking for work for herself and her boys, and she had done washing for a few ladies until it had got around that Cash Benson, the town's ne'er-do-well, had been seen hanging around the shack. Now she and the boys managed to live with no apparent means of support, and lately when the woman came

to town, everyone could see that she was visibly big with child. 'Cash's nigger woman,' the men on the street corners called her, guffawing as she passed. No wonder white parents kept their children from making friends with her boys.

She had gone to the Swedish Baptist Church twice when she had first come to town, taking the boys, stiff and clean in their patched Sunday suits. 'I been baptized and bred up pure Baptist,' she had told Reverend Swanson proudly, hesitantly accepting his proffered hand as he had bade her good day at the door of the church. Behind her the Swedish Baptist ladies had whispered and stared. The next Sunday, when she and the boys had taken their seats humbly in the last pew, there had begun a rustling as, one by one, some irately, some shamefacedly, the white ladies had risen and left the church. The black woman had stayed for the service, though Sammy and Hammy, watching her face, had begun to cry. She had never come again.

The way things were, there didn't seem much I could do except be especially nice to Sammy and Hammy, and that was hard too, because I certainly couldn't praise their work, and to treat them differently from the others would have antagonized the white children and made things still harder for the twins.

Toward spring it came time to have the annual freshman party. We had a class meeting, and the youngsters decided to charge twenty-five cents a ticket to pay for the lunch, and to have dancing and a program. Miss Carey, of course, was to help with the program. I always got that!

'Mr. President,' I said. (We try to teach them to observe parliamentary procedure, heaven help us!) 'Mr. President, may I say a word?'

'Keep still, you kids,' the class president yelled gallantly. 'Miss Carey's got sumpin to tell you.'

When approximate quiet had finally been achieved, I said, 'The program committee and I are going to need help, so if you can play a musical instrument, or sing, or dance, or recite, or stand on your head —' (Hoots from the class. 'Miss Carey made a joke! Listen to her!') — 'why, come and tell us. We need talent for our program.'

Then, before the tumult could get under way again, I added, remembering the time I had missed the eighth-grade picnic because my mother had been away visiting, and I had been too proud to borrow from the neighbors, 'And another thing — sometimes twenty-five cents is hard to get hold of, so if there's anyone who wants to go to the party but who hasn't the money at the time, why, you just come to me, privately, and we'll see if we can't fix it up.'

The next day after school, I was correcting papers when the door opened and the twins sidled in. My heart sank. After all, did it matter what one apple cost if a dozen cost twenty-five cents?

Sammy's black face glistened, and he moistened his lips with a pale tongue. 'Us — us —' he whispered.

'We's got us each a box,' said Hammy quickly from over Sammy's slight shoulder. His eyes rolled toward his brother fearfully. Obviously, it was not what they had intended to tell me.

'A box?' I echoed, a little relieved that the bewildering price of apples was not in question.

'A gittar,' explained Sammy, his black face deadly serious. 'We each got us a gittar. We plays us gittar music.'

'Also, us — we sings,' nodded Hammy enticingly. They obviously wanted me to say something. Their eyes begged me to say it, but I could not imagine what it was. It somehow never occurred to me that the two black boys would be coming to see me about the party.

But that was it. Sammy and Hammy wanted to go to the party, and, moreover, they wanted to be on the program.

'But I ain't got no two-bits,' said Sammy, his mouth drooping sadly.

'Nor me,' echoed Hammy. 'You said — come to you, Miz Carey —' His voice died away plaintively.

'We'll work for you — hard,' offered Sammy.

Their eyes held mine apprehensively, like spaniels' eyes, hoping for a kind word.

'That's fine,' I said with unnecessary vigor. 'Fine! I'll put you down for the program. And don't you worry about the money. Your music will pay your way.'

It was the wrong thing to say. I knew it when the boys stiffened into black statues and their faces hardened into expressionless masks.

'Our mammy say — work for what you gets,' Hammy said at last, adding with sober dignity, 'So we works for you.'

'Yes,' I said quickly, 'maybe you'd better, so the others won't be jealous and think I like you best.'

A look of blind adoration came into Sammy's face, and Hammy grinned in a pleased sort of way.

So it was fixed. I gave the boys the tickets, ostentatiously taking fifty cents out of my purse and putting it ceremoniously into the 'party box.' The work was to be done later when I needed something done.

3

As the day for the party approached, excitement began to run high in the freshman class. The twins whispered to me that they had been 'practicing up,' and the sight of their raptly pleased faces intensified in me a little feeling of doubt I'd been trying to suppress. What, I thought, if the white children should be unkind to the black boys? What if the others on the program should refuse to appear with them? And what about the dance? What little girl would dance with them — and would I want her to, if she would?

I needn't have worried about the program. Apparently no parental ultimatum had been laid down. Perhaps no one had mentioned that the black boys were to make music, or perhaps the hours of the party were to be a sort of secular Truce of God wherein even black boys with a bad mother could have their hour of fun.

The party was to begin at eight, and at seven-thirty the gym was almost filled with children, all the little girls in bright new party dresses, with their hair tortured into elaborate beauty-parlor curls, sitting shyly on one side of the decorated gym, while all the little boys, dressed uncomfortably in new suits, with their damp hair brushed to alarming neatness, were seated on the other. The problem of the first half of the evening, as far as we teachers were concerned, was

to coax the two groups, much against their wills, to consent to dance together, while the problem of the last half was to pry them apart, and get them home before irate parents began telephoning.

But first came the program. Promptly at eight, since everyone had already been there for at least a half-hour, the curtain went up, after several false starts and muffled grunts from the laboring stagehands.

Mary Ellen Adams and Jo Anne Merrill gave their usual military tap-dance, which, since Mary Ellen is short and fat and lazy, and Jo Anne tall and thin and active, was rather far from the military effect desired. Little Genevieve Johnson sang 'Ciribiribin,' which she pronounced 'See-ree-bee-ree-bean' for some unknown reason, and, with practically no encouragement, graciously added the encore 'Blues in the Night.' Glen Tillman played an excruciating violin solo, during which, mercifully, one string broke, so that the rest of the solo was, by anybody's mathematics, only three-fourths as bad as the first. Benny Norton gave a reading in Swedish dialect with occasional lapses into Irish, Yiddish, and just plain American.

Then the twins came out from the opposite side of the stage, hesitating, looking dwarfed and lonely under the flood-lights, black faces glistening and fearful, patched Sunday best pressed within an inch of its life. They clutched their cheap 'gittars,' looked out uncertainly at the darkened gym, struck a few chords, and then they sang.

I don't remember much else, not even what they sang. There was stamping of feet when they finished, and shouting. They sang song after song. They sang as the class danced, when it did dance. They sang with the Capehart and without it. They sang while the lunch was passed out until the class president himself brought them two heaped plates and clapped each of the boys on the shoulder by way of congratulation, while the class cheered through mouthfuls of sandwich and cake and waved pop bottles in the air.

They never left the stage all evening. Now, at last, something was well with them: the little black boys, for whom 3×8 was a variable, could sing.

4

After that, school was their heaven. Boys and girls who couldn't play with them outside of school never failed to call: 'Hi, Ham! Hi, Sam!' in school. Math homework papers grew mysteriously accurate, though tests still revealed the most abysmal misconceptions concerning mathematical practice. Even the seniors had them sing at their class party. They made the senior glee club, though they had feared before to try out for the junior one.

And they haunted my footsteps with a doglike persistence that came near to wearing me out.

'When we going to work out that fifty cents, Miz Carey, ma'am?'

'When the frost is out of the ground,' I explained for the tenth time. 'I want you to spade my flower garden.'

A day later: 'When that frost get outa that ground?'

'Not for two weeks, at least.'

Two days later: 'That frost gone yet, Miz Carey?'

'Not yet,' patiently.

'My! My! Sure stays a long time — that frost!'

When at last the frost did depart, the two black boys attacked my little garden spot with a vigor it had never known before. They trailed quack-grass roots to their remotest hiding places and exterminated them forever. They spaded and weeded and spaded again.

'That's a great deal of work for fifty cents,' I teased at last, a little troubled at the sight of their thin bent backs stooping over my garden so long.

'Our mammy say — work good,' Sammy said firmly, and Hammy's monkey-thin face echoed the stubborn set of his brother's jaw.

'You give us those seeds — we plant 'em,' Hammy called pleadingly.

They planted my seeds, they hovered over the new little shoots, they weeded and watered and tended. I tried to give them extra pay, but they stiffened with hurt pride.

'Our mammy say — you take good care o' Miz Carey's garden, for she been purely good to you.'

So I gave up in despair and let them do as they wished. I did all I could to get my neighbors to give them odd jobs, but only a few did, for the black boys' mother had had her baby, a girl baby, almost white, old Doctor Bates said, with hair like Cash Benson's.

In school the boys still haunted my room after class. They'd sit staring at my face, saying never a word until I had finished my work, and then not much unless I set the pace.

One afternoon I'd been reading a volume of Blake's poems, and on an impulse I asked them if they'd like me to read them a poem about a little black boy. I didn't think they'd understand a word of it, but I love to read poetry aloud, even if it's only to myself. Only after I had started to read did it occur to me that the black boys might read into it something that Blake had never intended, that I might be shaking their protective unawareness, might be emphasizing their difference in a way bad for them. But I had started and I had to go on.

They sat still as statues while I read:

My mother bore me in the southern wild,
And I am black, but O, my soul is white!
White as an angel is the English child,
But I am black, as if bereaved of light.

My mother taught me underneath a tree,
And, sitting down before the heat of day,
She took me on her lap and kissed me,
And, pointing to the East, began to say:

'Look at the rising sun: there God does live,
And gives His light, and gives His heat away,
And flowers and trees and beasts and men receive
Comfort in morning, joy in the noonday.

'And we are put on earth a little space,
That we may learn to bear the beams of love;
And these black bodies and this sunburnt face
Are but a cloud, and like a shady grove.

'For when our souls have learn'd the heat to bear,
The cloud will vanish, we shall hear His voice,
Saying, "Come out from the grove, my love and care,
And round my golden tent like lambs rejoice."'

Thus did my mother say, and kissèd me;
And thus I say to little English boy.
When I from black and he from white cloud free,
And round the tent of God like lambs we joy,

I'll shade him from the heat, till he can bear
To lean in joy upon our Father's knee;
And then I'll stand and stroke his silver hair,
And be like him, and he will then love me.

I watched their faces as I finished. They were still and solemn, but radiant.

'Our mammy say — heaven's like that,' Hammy said softly at last.

'Who that man say all that?' Sammy whispered in an awed voice.

'William Blake, a very great poet.'

'He a preacher, Miz Carey, I bet?' Hammy asked, looking at me hopefully.

'No, not exactly,' I answered, and saw the radiance in their faces dim at my words. Impulsively I added, 'But he was a man who thought he spoke with angels, and — and he wrote "as one having authority, and not as the scribes"'! And I found myself telling them how Blake, dying, sang of the glories of heaven opening before his dimming eyes.

Hammy's face shone, and his teeth flashed in a grin of solemn delight.

'He sure knew — that white man!'

'God sure told him sumpin,' Sammy affirmed, nodding deeply.

'Read it again, please, Miz Carey,' said Sammy suddenly.

I read it again, and they both sighed with one accord.

'That's better'n music,' Hammy whispered. 'Read it once more again? Huh? Please?'

I laughed and shut the book. 'No, twice is enough. Some other day, perhaps.'

But I never read it to them again.

As he went out of the door, Sammy turned. 'You like rock gardens, Miz Carey?'

'Why, yes, of course,' I said, 'but if you're thinking — You've done altogether too much —'

'We knows a place,' Hammy was saying dreamily, 'a place where there's moss like a feather bed an' little white violets that's sweet as Jesus' breath —'

5

That was the last I was ever to see them. They rowed across to the place they knew after supper that night, a marshy island not very far offshore. Folks who saw them start said the water was choppy as they were going over. Coming back the boat overturned, and before the men could get to them they were drowned.

I heard the next morning in school.

The late May sun was warm on my hair that day, when school was over and I was plodding along the beach toward the Negro woman's shack. The silvery sand filtered into my slippers and dribbled out with each difficult step. Under the slanting sun the smooth blue waves lapped the shore and retreated in little slipping movements, as if they had never known storms or death.

Around the shack the rank shore grasses had been cleared away with scrupulous care, and in the shifting sand a few drooping plants gave evidence of the twins' efforts to make a garden of their own.

She opened the rough, tar-paper covered door when I knocked — a thin, worn woman of about forty, with the fine features and liquid eyes one sometimes sees in people of her race. Her lined black face was masklike in its calm, but the eyes themselves were alive and tragic.

I don't remember what inadequate thing I said to her, but she must have felt my sorrow reaching out to hers, for she thanked me with something of the boys' doglike look in her eyes.

'They loved you so, Miz Carey,' she said strangely, and I had the feeling that behind her simple words there was something strong and seeking, something she wanted of me — wanted badly, if only I could find out what it was.

She asked me in with homely courtesy and pulled out a rough chair for me to sit on.

The one room was painfully neat and bare. In a broken tumbler on the table a small bunch of short-stemmed white violets was beginning to droop, and on the ledge of the one window I saw the purple tulips I had given Hammy two days before. A table, three old chairs — one with no back — a small camp stove, and two camp cots were the only furnishings. The floor, rough and splintered from much scrubbing, was immaculate.

That space of floor seemed to me that day to be waiting mutely — waiting for the boys, who hadn't yet been brought back in their cheap little coffins. People never knew until long afterwards that it was Cash Benson who had paid for it all, giving them the best funeral he could afford. That, at least, is to his credit, though he went off the next week and never came back. Reverend Swanson, too, came, the good old man, although he had to face the disapproval of the Swedish Baptist ladies to do it. I've thought of it often since and blessed the kindness of his gentle old heart.

But that day there were just the two of us. I sat by the table, and the afternoon sun through the only window threw the shadow of Hammy's tulips across the bare floor.

The boys' mother stood by the other side of the table, black and monumental and unweeping, staring at me with that queer tense look, seeming about to speak and then closing her lips gravely.

The baby began to cry, and she went over and picked the little thing up from the bed, blindly, as if she hardly knew what she did. After a moment she sat down opposite me, rocking the child gently in her arms.

Awkwardly I tried to comfort her, saying it was good she had the girl baby to fill a part of her heart. She looked at me strangely across the sun-mottled oilcloth, her ugly black face sharp with pain.

'But they was my true-born child'en,' she said, as if reasoning with one who was dull of understanding. Slowly she looked down at the whimpering infant in her arms. 'She white man's child, poor little thing.'

Then she looked me straight in the eyes, not doglike but womanlike.

'I was all alone,' she said simply.

I tried to speak, but there was nothing to say now.

When I started to go at last, it was with the feeling of how very futile my visit had been, of how empty sympathy and words of sympathy were to this woman.

She rose reluctantly when I did, saying softly, 'You was good as they said you was to come —' Then she added pleadingly, as if she feared I would misunderstand, 'But it ain't fitten you come no more. Besides —' Her voice caught, but she swallowed and went patiently on, 'Besides it be best you remember Hamuel and Samuel as they was — yestiday.'

I nodded mutely, and she seemed satisfied that I had not misunderstood or taken offense.

But on the doorstep she stopped me again, hesitating, uncertain, and I knew that the thing that was haunting her was still unsaid. I could feel the conflict of urgency and fear in her, the tension and the longing, but I had to watch her helplessly, hoping she would speak, afraid to ask for fear what I might say would be wrong.

She drew a deep breath then, throwing her head back nervously. Her eyes were shining and fearful, and the words, when they came, were slurred and hurried, breathless.

'Last night — suppertime — Hammy 'n Sammy, they full of some word-song you read 'em. They say — it better'n music. They go away singin' it to them two — Something about — black boys? You remember, Miz Carey, ma'am?'

Her breast rose and fell in agitation, and the child, awakening again, began to cry.

'I'll send you a copy,' I said thickly. 'A poem I read to them.'

She shook her head. 'You say it to me, please? I never did learn book-reading.'

I turned my head away, thinking of the scrapbook of 'nice words' she had kept for her boys.

What I could remember, garbled, imperfect, half-forgotten, I tried to say, remembering the two thin, black faces lifted to mine in the quiet of the dusty schoolroom.

She was very still when I had finished, but her face was bright with a faith I could never know.

And then she wept, putting her face down against the baby in her arms. 'Oh, bless God,' she whispered brokenly. 'Blessed God, make it so. Sweet Jesus, make it so.'

I touched her hand silently in farewell and went away. At the gate, when I turned and looked back, she had lifted her head, and I saw that she was looking far out over the water, gazing across at the distant shoreline of that green, marshy island where the moss is like a feather bed and the little white violets are as sweet as Jesus' breath.

LOVE IS FOR LOVERS¹

BY MARY LAVIN

AT THE noncommittal age of forty-four, Mathew Simmins began to think about marriage. Somehow or other he never thought about it before. It took up pretty nearly all his time to get a day's work done in a day because, only for him, the business would have fallen to pieces long ago. The paid workers always quit on the stroke of the hour no matter what they were doing. He was a paid hand, too, of course, but he felt like one of the firm. He took the same interest. The others went at the first stroke of the hour, not even the last stroke, but Mathew didn't feel it quite within his rights to argue the point with them. He wasn't absolutely certain whether it was the first or the last stroke which indicated exactly the termination of one hour and the commencement of the next. He kept it in mind for a considerable time to ask a jeweler, but he never had occasion to go into a jeweler's and somehow or other the thing slipped his mind, although he never lost his feeling of irritation every time the clock struck six, when he saw the shopboys reaching up behind the storehouse door for their coats and scarves.

The assistants were always down at the storehouse end of the shop, tipping up to six, so as not to lose any time. And if one of them happened to get caught with a customer, down at the street-door end, he came running back, springing a

¹ From *Tales from Bective Bridge*.

vault over the counter, as much as to say that there was no need for deference to Mathew once six had gone.

Five minutes past six the blinds were down and the counters bare, and on more than one occasion a mouse came out across the floor the minute the street door clapped after the last of the shopboys. The first time it happened Mathew thought it was a toy mouse on a string, evidencing some impertinent joke on the part of one of the boys, but it was indeed a real mouse and it had the effrontery to go at the cheese right before his eyes. That meant another delay putting muslin over the cheese and laying down traps, inside and outside the counter. There was always something. He often found figures listed up with a line drawn under them, and whoever had jotted them down had not taken time to add them up because the clock struck six. Sometimes the till wasn't even shoved back after the last coin was flung into it.

Mathew kept order during shop hours, but he didn't like to be all the time picking on the boys. They were young, after all, and they did what they were paid to do. Mathew himself received pay, too, of course, but there was a difference. Old Mr. Mahaffy slid an envelope across the dining-room table on the last day of the month, when Mathew called at his house with the account books. It was always a linen-weave envelope, not a thin yellow one, with the name of the shop on it and an advertisement for rice on the flap, like the envelopes that Mathew himself put the boys' pay into every Friday night, to have ready for handing out to them on Saturday morning. Mathew was paid, all right, but he never felt that he was a paid hand, in the general sense of the word. He practically ran the business. Without him it would have gone long ago. Mr. Mahaffy hadn't his father's ability, although he was an exceedingly nice man and was said to be one of the best chess players in the world, although he never entered any competitions or the like. Mathew was in complete charge.

On Friday nights, making up the money and sorting out the pay into the yellow envelopes, Mathew felt as if the business belonged to him. He felt that he was a partner. He was the active partner. Mr. Mahaffy was the sleeping partner.

But Mathew couldn't have done without him. He himself had a good bit of money saved up but he had made it all in Mahaffy's Stores. Twenty years ago he hadn't a penny. Where would he have been today if it hadn't been for Mr. Mahaffy? Sleeping partners were an essential. Mathew, of course, never treated Mr. Mahaffy any differently from the way he treated him twenty years ago. He was always very deferential. He kept his place. There had never been any open reference to a partnership. Mathew had never presumed. But the gratitude was there. The gratitude was there.

'You are Mahaffy's, Mathew,' Mr. Mahaffy said every time he slid the pay envelope across the mahogany to Mathew. 'You are Mahaffy's, Mathew, and Mahaffy's is you! I am only a good-for-nothing! I only cash the checks.'

On those occasions Mathew always spoke up. 'You write the checks, too, sir!'

Mr. Mahaffy liked him to say that. At that point every month, he put out his hand and gave Mathew a hearty handshake. It was always the same. Mathew knew just when to come and just when to go. He liked that. He liked to know where he was with a person. That was probably why he was so upset when Mrs. Rita Cooligan began to leave things after her on the counters and come back again in a state.

'Mr. Simmins! Where is Mr. Simmins?' she called out, as she came running back into the shop, no matter who was there. And when she saw him she always ran up to him and pushed her hat up off her forehead in a way that made her look frightened and helpless although she was so big and strong. Mr. Simmins was quite small, and thin, but he felt protective all the same, and sent the shopboys searching everywhere, although he knew they made it an excuse for bobbing under the counters and pushing and shoving and trying to trip each other up. He himself always took up the things off the counter and looked under them, and made quite a mess. Sometimes it was a handkerchief that she left behind. Sometimes it was a ring of keys. And indeed, on more than one occasion, after the whole shop had been turned topsy-turvy, Mrs. Cooligan gave a loud, rich laugh,

and called herself names for being such a featherhead, and pulled up whatever it was they had been looking for from the inside pocket of her bag! Then Mathew smiled, and the boys laughed, and Mrs. Cooligan herself had to put her arms across her chest to keep herself from shaking, she laughed so much. She was a nice woman, Mathew thought. He wondered what her husband died of, and how long he was dead. It was sad to see a sonsy woman like that, living all alone.

The minute after Mathew had formed that thought in his mind he felt ashamed. He could feel the heat creeping into his face. It wasn't like him to be coarse. In fact it was a thing he always guarded against.

One nice bright day in November, when the sun was so strong they had to remove the butter from the window, Mr. Simmins saw Mrs. Cooligan coming down the street on the other side, and crossing over. He couldn't tell whether a woman had a good figure or not; he often thought some of the young girls that came into the shop were thin and delicate, and he felt like mentioning the fact to their parents, because of course you couldn't be twenty years in a place without taking a friendly interest, especially in children you saw grow up from the pram. But the thinnest ones were often the very ones that he would hear the boys talking about, outside the door in the morning, while he was inside sliding the bolts across and opening up to let them in. But on this particular morning, when he saw Mrs. Cooligan, crossing over the shining tram rails in the sun, he said to himself that a blind man couldn't help seeing that she was a well cut-out woman. If you put her up against the other women in the street, he thought, where were they? Nowhere at all, he had to confess. And he took out his brown-spotted handkerchief and blew his nose very vehemently.

Her coat was tight and her feet were arched up on high Spanish heels, and he liked the way her leather belt was pulled tight like a man's till the top of her rose up out of it with a swell. It put him in mind of the big swan that used to be on the mill river at home, when he was a boy. It rose up off the water with a swell of its feathers, just that very

way. It was white, of course, and there was something dark about Mrs. Cooligan. Her coat was black; it may have been that which gave her a dark appearance. Her hair was dark, too. And although he had never thought about it before, Mathew noted that her skin was dark. She had an olive complexion, you might go as far as to say, he decided.

When she came into the shop Mathew stayed at the window putting one thing here and another thing there, because he felt a bit put out at having seen her coming. He pulled down the blind a few inches and then he let it up again. He was not paying very great attention to what he was doing. Suddenly the blind cord slipped out of his hand and it slapped up with a bang that brought the blood to his head. He wasn't used to taking much notice of the customers. He didn't get time, to tell the honest truth. He was nearly always attending on two people at the one time.

So he stayed at the window all the time Mrs. Cooligan was in the shop, and when he felt a wreath of Oriental perfume circle into the window space over his head, he knew that she was leaving the shop and passing out by the door near the window. He kept his head as far into the window space as possible until he heard the door slap after her as she passed into the street. But this was a mistake, because he had his head so far into the window that he couldn't draw it back again quickly enough before she passed along outside the plate glass. And what did she do? She stared straight into the window at him. Mathew knew she was staring at him but he could not see her properly because a flypaper hung down right between them. He could almost swear, however, that she knew he was avoiding her, and he wouldn't have wished that for the world.

She was one of their best customers. He would have to make amends the next time she came into the shop. Perhaps he would open a new tin of biscuits and ask her to try one. Nothing pleased customers better than that, he found. And it served a purpose as well. If they didn't buy a pound of them, there and then, they bought a pound of some other kind that they thought were better, and advised him not to

stock too much of the new ones, saying they were a bit on the sweet side, or the plain side, as the case might be. He never paid any attention to what they said, of course, because one man's meat is another man's poison. Whoever said that must have had some knowledge of the world, he thought. And he carefully lifted his right leg out of the window, and was just lifting his left leg out when the door of the shop was banged open with such force that a pile of empty tin boxes that stood behind the door was sent crashing to the floor with a fearful din.

'Oh, what have I done? What have I done?' said a rich, olive voice, and Mrs. Rita Cooligan was standing in the center of the shop, pushing back her hat from her forehead.

'Where is Mr. Simmins? I'm so upset! Mr. Simmins! Mr. Simmins!' And she ran over to Mathew, so excited, and so upset, that she caught him by the sleeve while she told him incoherently that she had left her handbag somewhere, and she couldn't remember where.

'I tried the butcher's,' she said, 'and I didn't leave it there. I tried the draper's and I didn't leave it there. And I couldn't possibly have dropped it in the street because Mr. Keane the chemist would have seen it fall. He was standing at the door, he said, and he never took his eyes off me, he said.' She threw out her hands. 'I must have left it here!'

She pushed her hat still further back off her forehead and her dark hair looked moist. She was very upset. Mathew looked at her with interest. She was a regular scatterbrain, widow and all though she was. She shouldn't be trusted with bags and purses. She was the kind of woman who needed someone with her every hour of the day. She shouldn't be alone.

'Now, don't get excited, Mrs. Cooligan,' he said. 'Perhaps you didn't bring it out with you at all!'

'Oh, I did, I did,' said Mrs. Cooligan. 'I took it with me deliberately because I came out specially to lodge a little money at the bank.'

'Perhaps you left the bag in the bank?'

'I didn't go to the bank yet!'

'This is serious,' said Mathew, lifting up paper bags and cardboard boxes from the top of the counter and telling the boys to look around on the floor.

'I hope there wasn't a large sum of money in it?' he asked, not bothering to wipe the butter off his cuff as he took his hand out from behind the slab of butter and felt underneath some balls of string that were raveling and catching on his buttons.

'Oh, it isn't the money I care about,' said Mrs. Cooligan, 'but there was a very dear souvenir in the bag; a little paper knife; a little ivory paper knife.' And to Mathew's embarrassment, her eyes filled with tears, and standing just where she was the light caught in her tears and made her look very unhappy indeed. 'I was never without it before,' she said, 'since the day it was given to me.' And it flashed into Mathew's mind that it must have been given to her by the other fellow; her husband. He was irritated by her sentimentality.

Mathew was so irritated that he walked over and waited on two other customers before he did any more searching for the bag, and even then he didn't search as thoroughly as he might have done. Why didn't she keep the thing at home where it would be safe if it meant so much to her?

Mrs. Cooligan was talking to one of the boys, but when Mathew came back she turned to him and finished what she was saying.

'It belonged to a dear friend of mine,' she said. 'We were at school together. We were the best of friends. We went everywhere linked. And now she's in Australia, and I haven't heard from her for three years.'

Mathew could have kicked himself for being so hasty in misjudging her.

'We'll get it!' he said. 'We'll get it, if we have to turn the shop upside down. If necessary I will paste a notice on the window.' He turned to one of the shopboys. 'Get a pencill!' he said, 'and write out a notice. Say we will give a reward.' Then he turned back to Mrs. Cooligan. 'That does not mean that I have given up hope of finding it here,' he said, reas-

surprisingly, and as he spoke he dragged the cash register out from the wall and ran his hand down behind it. Then he plucked a boy by the sleeve. 'Did you try the sugar bin?' he asked. 'We lost one of the weights here one day, do you remember? I forget which weight it was, the half pound or the three ounce, but whichever one it was, anyway, we were at a great loss for it. We searched everywhere and no avail. I was just on the point of sending out to buy another one to replace it, when I happened to run my hand into the sugar in the bin to see if there was enough in it for the week-end, and what do you suppose? I ran my hand against something hard. I called Joe. "Come here, Joe," I said. "There's something here! Put down your hand and see what it is." And Joe pulled up the weight there and then before my eyes.'

Joe nodded his head in affirmation of the story and then he went over to the sugar bin and ran his hand through the sugar.

Mrs. Cooligan leant over the counter and called out to him. 'Any luck, Joe?' she asked.

But Mathew couldn't help staring at her while she was leaning over the counter. She reminded him more than ever of the swan on the old mill river, the way she swelled over the counter, the rest of her hidden by the showcases.

Joe had no luck. There wasn't a sign of the bag, he said, high up or low down.

'If we get it before closing hour I'll send Joe over with it,' said Mathew.

'It's not the money I mind,' said Mrs. Cooligan, 'it's the paper knife; a little ivory paper knife, with carving on the handle. It was never out of the house before. It brought me confidence, I felt. I kept it on the table beside my bed, for luck. If there was a noise in the street in the middle of the night I always put out my hand and felt for it and kept my hand on it. It made me feel safe. But I suppose you think me very silly?' She smiled at Mathew as she spoke and when he answered her he spoke very solemnly.

'I'll do all in my power!' he said.

The tears filled into her eyes again, but this time she had her back to the light, and the tears gave Mathew a most ex-

traordinary impression. It was almost as if she was glad about something, he thought, although what there was to be glad about in having lost a bag with money in it, he could not for the life of him make out, as he readied up the counter that evening, and went to the back of the shop to take down his outdoor coat.

Mathew kept his coat on a separate nail, a little away from the nails on which the assistants hung their coats. There had to be some distinction. As he was reaching in to get down the coat he kicked against something. And as he said afterward, he almost knew what it was before he stooped to pick it up. It was Mrs. Cooligan's bag.

Mathew was delighted. The boys had searched for ten solid minutes and here now, all he had to do was walk across the shop and there was the bag under his feet as if by magic! He picked it up and saw that it was open. He carefully closed the big brass clasp. It took him a few minutes to close the clasp. There was a little trick to it.

'Very clever!' said Mathew to himself when the lock clicked into its socket. And he thought how different it was from a man's plain wallet. Women were extraordinary!

That was probably the first time that the thought of marriage entered Mathew's head, and it was a negative kind of thought at that. Certainly it was not a constructive kind of thought, because, as he dwelt upon the differences between men and women he assumed that, great and small, they were differences he would never fully explore.

As he went out through the street door and pushed it hard to make sure that the bolts were secured, it just crossed his mind that it was an odd thing that he had never thought of getting married himself. But like all thoughts about roads not taken, his thought was barren and it bred no fiery determinations. He felt just as he always did, a little chilly, a little stiff, as he went along the street to his lodgings.

It was only as he was passing Abbey Row that he realized how near he was to where Mrs. Cooligan lived. He looked down at the terrace of houses that ran off from the main street. It was a pity to keep her in suspense about the bag

until morning. It was a pity he didn't find it before the boys went home. He could have sent it to her. He could at least have sent her word that it was safe. As he crossed over the street he had a better view of the terrace. It was dark, but halfway down the terrace there was one house that had a light shining out from behind orange curtains. He imagined that was her house. He felt sure that was the color she would have around her, orange, with a touch of brown or red. She was so dark.

Mathew paused. Perhaps he ought to step to the door, it wouldn't take a second, and tell her that the bag was safe and sound, locked in the till. What a pity he had not brought it with him!

The house with the orange curtains was Mrs. Cooligan's house, as he had guessed. It was funny that such a small thing should have given him confidence, but when he saw the number on the fanlight, between the legs of the ornamental white horse that pranced without motion there, he felt that he was not a bad fellow at all to have picked out the right house from so far away.

The knocker on the door was made in the shape of a brass hand, and you banged it down on the door to gain admission, but Mathew had a certain timidity. It seemed like banging with your own fist. Fortunately there was also a bell. He decided on the bell. The bell was not one which you pressed inward with the pad of your finger. It had two small disks of metal that came out from the door rather like the wings of a metal butterfly, and to ring the bell you squeezed the disks together. Mathew put up his hand and squeezed them together gently. Instantly there was a loud twitter of sound, almost in his ear it seemed to him, and all his confidence flew off with the vanishing twitters of the bell. When the door was flung open by Mrs. Cooligan, Mathew was utterly confused.

'Your bag!' he said, and that was all that he could say for a moment. 'I came about your bag.'

But Mrs. Rita Cooligan was not at a loss for words. 'Come in!' she said, at once, before he had finished speaking, 'Come

in, Mr. Simmins. You're heartily welcome. How do you like my bell?' She pressed the disks together lightly as she spoke and filled the hallway with a twitter of bells. 'It is entirely my own invention. Have you guessed the secret? It is only a bicycle bell, but I had a hole bored through the door so it could be rung from outside. I think myself it is a splendid idea; and so economical. Come in! Come in!'

Mathew felt there was no real occasion to go inside, but he was so confused by her talk, and by the bell sounds and by the barking of a large liver and white spotted dog which sat on the stairs, that he was inside the orange-curtained room and seated on an orange-covered settee before he got as far as telling her that he had found the bag. When she heard that it was found she was delighted.

'It was so good of you to call,' she said. And then she said something else, but Mathew couldn't hear what it was because the dog began to bark again just then. He barked and barked, and he raised his eyes to the orange-shaded lamp and barked louder and louder.

'Be quiet, Pete,' said Mrs. Cooligan. But Pete went on barking.

'Stop this at once, Pete!' said Mrs. Cooligan, and she lifted him up in her arms. 'You mustn't bark at this nice gentleman. Mr. Simmins is a friend, Pete. Mr. Simmins found my bag, Pete.'

The dog yielded to the warm hold of her arms and stopped barking. He looked at Mathew with his rich brown eyes and appeared to accept Mrs. Cooligan's estimate of him.

'Pat him,' said Mrs. Cooligan. 'Take his paw. He won't bite. He's a dear. He'll make friends with you in no time. Pat him. Take his paw!'

She went to such trouble. Mathew was deeply touched. He had never patted a dog before. The dog was very silky. It was like stroking human hair. Though, as a matter of fact, he had never done that before, either, he thought, and he looked at the strong silk ripples of hair that went up from Mrs. Cooligan's smooth brow. While he was stroking Pete's paw, Mrs. Cooligan softly pulled Pete's other paw, and as

Mathew felt the jerks of her hand stir the soft flesh of the dog, he felt as if she were touching himself, and although he knew he was stupid-looking, standing there without a word, he could do nothing else. He could think of nothing to say. He was unable to raise his eyes.

But she was a tactful woman; such a tactful woman. He had often heard that women had a great gift in this respect but he had never seen it proved before. She began to talk to the dog in order to give him time to recover from his embarrassment.

'Did you ever meet such an honest man, Pete?' she said. 'He could have run away with my bag!'

Pete looked up at her while she spoke and then he looked at Mathew. Mrs. Cooligan was delighted. She hugged him.

'See!' she cried. 'He knows every word I say. He's wonderfully intelligent. He understands everything that is said to him. When my dear, dead husband knew that his days were numbered he picked up Pete one day and said that he was leaving me in his charge. "I'm glad you will have poor Pete with you, Rita, when I am gone." He knew he was going weeks before the end came. "Pete will take care of you," he said, several times. "Pete won't let any harm come to you, Rita, my darling." He was the best of husbands.'

She buried her face in the soft folds of the dog's neck then, and didn't say anything more. The silence that Mathew dreaded began to lap into the room again. He made a great effort.

'About your bag,' he said, and after he had spoken he became more nervous than ever in case he had been too abrupt in breaking in upon her sorrow. He should have referred to her grief. He felt she was a brave woman. He wished that he had told her so. He longed to tell her so. He even wondered if there was still time to say something to that effect. But Mrs. Cooligan had raised her head. She dropped Pete onto the floor softly, and she took up what he had said about the bag, quickly and courageously, speaking clearly without a trace of tears. He was filled with admiration for her self-control.

'Yes, indeed, my bag,' she said. 'I did not thank you for the trouble you have taken. I am deeply grateful. You saved me such suspense. I didn't care a fig for the ten pounds, but I would not have wished for the whole wide world to have lost my ivory paper knife . . .'

'Ten pounds?' Did she say ten pounds? Mathew was startled. The blood beat in his temples.

'Ten pounds?' he said. 'Do you mean to say there was that amount of money in the bag? Why didn't you mention the fact? Why didn't you tell me? Oh, my goodness! This is serious. The bag was on the floor. The clasp was open. I hope the money is safe!' He jumped up from the couch. He wiped his face with his brown and white dotted handkerchief.

'The money didn't matter,' she said. 'I told you the money didn't matter. It was my little souvenir I regretted. The money could have been replaced. The souvenir could never have been replaced.' She shrugged her shoulders and Mathew saw that they were firm and round because she had some kind of a lace thing on her. He wasn't reassured about the money, however. What a strange woman she was, that she didn't care about ten pounds and yet she tried to be economical by putting that awful twittering bell on her door. He still felt as if there were a fly in his ear after it.

But it was serious about the money. He was afraid it had fallen out of the bag and was lying on the floor. A mouse might chew it.

'Was it a single note?' he asked, in fright.

'I really don't remember,' she said. 'It was two fives, I think. Wait a minute. Let me concentrate. Last week it was two fives, definitely. This week I think it was in single notes. Yes! I believe it was a single note.'

He hadn't time to digest his surprise at the size of the sums because he was so worried in case the note had fallen out of the bag and was lying on the shop floor.

'Mrs. Cooligan,' he said with desperate earnestness, 'you will understand that even though you are not worried about your money, I am worried. I was not responsible for it before. I found it, but now it is in my charge and I really must go back and investigate whether or not the money is safe.'

She caught her hands together.

'I won't have it,' she said. 'I won't have that at all. You will not go back all the way to the shop. I simply refuse to allow it.' She ran to the door as she spoke, and threw her arms wide as if to prevent his leaving. She was smiling, but he knew that she was sincere. She was a charming woman. You would not have expected such a strong, mature woman to be so lightfooted, so playful.

'I insist,' he said.

'So do I!' she said.

'The money may be lying on the floor!' he said.

'Let it lie there!' she said. 'It's not worth going back all this way in the dark. If it's there tonight it will be there tomorrow morning.'

'You don't understand,' said Mathew, miserably.

'I understand one thing,' said Mrs. Cooligan. 'I understand that you are thinking of going back all that way without having had your supper! Isn't that so? You did not have anything to eat yet, after your long day's work?'

'I'm not hungry,' said Mathew.

'Nonsense,' said Mrs. Cooligan. 'I know what men are! Of course you are hungry.'

'I couldn't eat anything until my mind is set at rest,' said Mathew.

Her arms must have been tired, spread out across the panels of the door, because she lowered them suddenly, and began to ruffle the heads of the big bronze chrysanthemums that were in a vase on top of the piano. He felt she had some purpose in the way she gave in to him so impulsively.

'If you must go, you must go,' she said. 'I know what men are! I'll let you go, but,' she pointed her finger at him, 'I warn you! I will have my revenge. I have it already planned.'

She gave in to him so very swiftly that he was out in the street before he knew where he was; walking along very rapidly. He didn't feel chilly and stiff as he nearly always did in the open air. He felt warm and comfortable, and up in the sky was a rich November moon, in bright orange.

On his way back with the bag, however, he felt the first empty chewing of hunger in his stomach. And as he went up the gravel path toward the prancing white horse on Mrs. Cooligan's fanlight, he was all at once tantalized by the most delicious odor of food that he had ever smelled in his life. It was not a definite smell of one thing or another, but a rich anonymous odor of meat and beautiful meat juices. When the door was opened for him the odor of food vanished and he decided that it had come from a neighboring house. And yet there was a flush in Mrs. Cooligan's dark cheek, and through the lighted door of the room in which he had sat he could see there was a table laid for two people.

'The money is safe,' he said, and he held out the bag.

'Now for my revenge!' she said. 'You disobeyed me and the punishment is that you must stay and help me to eat my dinner.'

He didn't have time to refuse. She was talking so fast and he was a bit tired, and, above all, he had to concentrate terribly hard to keep his hunger from becoming audible, as his stomach gnawed away emptily.

'I love to have my friends stay for a meal,' she was saying. 'When I am alone I never eat properly. Pete gets the best part of my dinner every other day. Don't you, Pete?' The dog beat the floor noisily with his tail. 'When I am alone I content myself with tea. I have tea, tea, tea; nothing but tea. It does not seem worth while cooking for oneself alone, but when I have someone to cook for I do the most delicious things. Poor Arthur adored my steak and kidney pie.' She stretched out her hands as she spoke. 'Give me your scarf. Give me your gloves.'

Mathew had not fully realized that she was such a domesticated woman. That morning as he watched her crossing the tram rails he thought she was one of those strange women, as decorative as stuffed birds, who are kept as a luxury. He associated good cooking with landladies and slatternly wives.

But when he had sampled over a dozen delectable dishes in the orange-curtained room, week after week, and had several snacks in the kitchen when he had called without warning, Mathew began to ponder once again upon the differ-

ences between men and women. But this time he felt that perhaps it was not too late, after all, to investigate them more fully.

If Mr. Simmins had never thought about marriage, that did not say that he was not romantic at the white core. He was. At least he used to be. When he first came to the town he used to walk around and look at all the posters advertising soap and health salts and films for a camera. He used to imagine scenes in which one of the golden girls from a poster stepped down and linked him up the street. Ideas like that kept him from making friends as a matter of fact, and it wasn't until he began to get tied up in the shop, trying to keep it in mind to order string and one thing and another, that he lost the habit.

There was one girl in particular on a big poster, right opposite Mahaffy's Stores. The poster was advertising bicycles, and there was a glorious girl with golden hair and blue eyes, with a red tam, and lovely, long legs, pedaling toward Mathew, right against the wind. Her hair blew about, beautifully. Her eyes were the very color of the sky over her head.

Mathew, like most of his generation, was brought up in the firm belief that you cannot have everything, and so he never gave a thought to marriage from the day that Mr. Mahaffy (they used to call him Young Mahaffy in those days) took over the Stores and asked Mathew if he would carry on for him on more or less the same lines as the old man had conducted things, and not to bother him, unless for money or financial advice.

Even now he wouldn't have thought of marriage if the thought of it had not flown across his path, asking to be caught, like a beautiful, bright bird from a foreign land.

Mathew wasn't too backward to see what Mrs. Cooligan had in her mind. He would never have thought of looking for a woman for himself. He would not have known where to look. He would not have known what to say to one. He would not have had the presence of mind to think of a widow. It is likely that he would have looked for a girl like

the girl on the poster long ago. And he would be too old for a girl like that. He even doubted if such girls were to be found nowadays. You never saw tams nowadays. You never saw blowy hair. And most girls on bicycles looked coarse.

But when a woman came up to him, and smiled at him, and leant over the counter, like a big-breasted swan, and whispered a joke in his ear in a voice so low that the shop-boys couldn't hear her, well, then, then marriage seemed easy.

Mathew more or less decided to let events take their course, and so the real heat of summer overtook himself and Rita as they were thinking about tea one Saturday afternoon. It was exceptionally hot, even for the month of July, and Rita suddenly whisked the cloth from the table and ran out into the garden and held up her hand.

'There's not a sign of rain,' she said. 'I think we will have tea in the garden.' She ran back into the house. 'Come on, Mathew,' she said. 'Come on, Pete.' She pushed a cushion into Mathew's hand and gave Pete a bundle of papers to carry out in his mouth.

The sun shone steadily down on them as they drank their tea in the small garden, and the trellis belonging to the people who lived next door cast a green latticed shadow on the grass by the wall. But no green shadow fell on Mrs. Rita Cooligan. And when Mathew passed his cup for more tea he thought she looked very warm. He wondered if she would have looked cooler in something blue or green. He didn't like the ugly orange-color dress that she wore. Orange was a hot color. Why did she always wear it? It made him feel hot just to look at it, so he gazed at the sky instead. The sky was beautifully blue. A tree, in another garden farther down the road, was beautifully green. He did not know that color mattered so much, but when he looked back again at Rita, her dress made him push aside his tea and remark that he had heard that in America they iced their tea in summer-time.

'I'd give anything to go to America,' said Rita.

'It's a long trip,' said Mathew. 'You couldn't do it under a hundred and fifty pounds.'

'I might as well spend my money that way as any other way,' she said. 'Arthur said I was to have a good time. He said he was proud to leave me so well secured. He told me to be happy. But I wouldn't like to go on such a long journey alone. I don't think it would be pleasant to go alone, do you?'

'Oh, I don't know,' said Mathew.

'Would you go alone?' she challenged.

'Oh, I don't know,' said Mathew.

'Wouldn't you be lonely?' she said.

'Who would I be lonely for?' said Mathew. 'I haven't any friends.'

'Am I not a friend?' said Rita, and she looked as if she were going to cry.

'Oh, I wasn't thinking of you when I said that,' said Mathew hastily.

'Would you be lonely for me?'

Mathew was irritated. 'There isn't any question of my going,' he said, 'so what is the use of talking about it?' He passed his cup again. 'I think I will have more tea, after all,' he said.

Rita took the cup. 'Shall I spill out the cold dregs?' she said.

'Don't bother,' said Mathew.

Rita took the cup and looked into it.

'Oh, I will have to spill it out,' she said. 'There is a fly in it.' She lifted the cup from the saucer and spilled the tea on the grass. The fly was not dead. When he felt the firm grass under his feet he shook the drops from his wings and sat on a blade of grass rubbing his little hands together as if he was celebrating his release. But he celebrated it too soon. Pete saw him. Pete made a snap at him. Mathew tried to save him by kicking Pete, but Pete was too quick, fat and all as he was, and Mathew was late. The fly was swallowed.

'Why didn't you take him out with a spoon?' said Mathew, crossly.

'Who?' said Rita.

'The fly,' said Mathew.

'The fly!' said Rita and she laughed. 'But they're such a

nuisance, Mathew. They get into everything, meat, butter, jam . . .'

Mathew felt sick.

'Let's not talk about it,' he said, suddenly, and he looked up again at the blue sky. It was so cool. It was so blue. It was so remote and so crystal clear.

'Wouldn't it be fun if we could go to America together?' said Rita. 'I know I am being absurd to say such a thing, but I do think it would be fun! You are such wonderful company, Mathew. You see to everything. You are so capable. I'm sure you would make an excellent traveler. I am no use. I would get lost on the first street that I ventured on alone.'

'Oh, you'd get on all right,' said Mathew.

'Do you think I'd have a good time? Do you think I'd meet nice people?'

'I'm sure you would,' said Mathew.

'A cousin of mine went over there a few years ago and she met her fate on board ship!'

'What happened to her?' said Mathew, with a certain increase of interest.

'She met her fate!'

'So you said. But what does that mean?'

'Oh, you are funny!' said Rita. 'Did you never hear that expression? It means she met the man she was going to marry. They were married on the other side, as a matter of fact, three days after the boat docked.'

'What were they doing until then?' said Mathew.

Rita looked at him and threw back her head with a hearty laugh. 'You are so funny, Mathew. You say the funniest things!' and she laughed so much that the table shook and the cups rattled and Pete sprang up into her arms and began to bark and lick her face. Mathew didn't see what there was to laugh at, and he tried to drag Pete down from Rita's lap. But Rita put her arms around the dog and hugged him closer.

'Isn't he sweet?' she said. 'He thinks I am upset and he wants to comfort me. He wants to show how much he loves me. He's so clever. Pretend to hit me, Mathew, till you see the state he'll get into. He'll bark his head off. Pretend to

hit me. He won't bite. I won't let him bite. Just let on to attack me and you'll die laughing at the way he'll carry on!

'It's not right to irritate an animal,' said Mathew.

'Oh, Pete is hardly an animal, he's the wisest old thing. Hit me! Hit me! Let on to raise your hand at me and you'll see how wise he is. You'll see the way he'll bark and jump at your face.'

But Mathew never found it easy to pretend anything, and he said it was too hot. Rita held Pete tighter. For a while he was still but then he began to struggle and freed his head. Mathew thought that Pete had freed his head in order to jump down on the ground, but Pete had only freed his wet black snout to lick Rita's face with a long tongue that looked to Mathew like a big, greasy piece of ham. He felt such discomfort in his stomach that he looked away rapidly, and stared hard, hard as iron, at the cold blue sky.

'Don't you think it's hot to have him in your arms?' he said, without looking downward.

'Too hot to cuddle Pete?' Rita put her large hand on the dog's fat white belly and rolled it round and round. 'It's never too hot for me to cuddle poor old Pete. He's so fond of me, aren't you, Pete? I wish you'd let on to hit me, Mathew. It's so funny to see him trying to protect me. He gets so upset it's a treat to watch him, barking and jumping up to comfort me. Arthur said I could go anywhere with Pete and he'd protect me. I think I told you before, didn't I, that when poor Arthur was dying the very last thing he said was "I'm glad you have Pete. Pete will take care of you, my darling."'

'Don't cry now, Rita,' said Mathew, because he remembered that lately she cried whenever she spoke of Arthur.

'I wish you had met him, Mathew,' she said. 'I wish he had met you. I'd like you two to have met each other. Poor Arthur.'

'He's happy, Rita, he's happy,' said Mathew. 'There's no need to feel bad about him.'

And indeed, Mathew had a strange feeling of quietude at the thought that Arthur was lying in the cold dark of the grave. Arthur was still and at rest, and his eye sockets were

closed with clay. He looked up at the sky though, and not at the grass, when he told Rita not to be sad, and while he was looking up Pete sprang into his lap and began to lick his hand, and he could feel the workings of Pete's internal organs inside Pete's baggy belly.

'Get down! Get down!' he said, perhaps a little roughly.

'Come here, Pete! Come here!' said Rita, who had gone over to sit on the stone steps.

'I think you don't like Pete,' she said.

'I don't dislike him,' said Mathew.

'But you don't like him! Poor Pete!' she caught the dog by the paw. 'Never mind, Pete, my pet, I'll love you enough for two.' Pete raised his head and banged his tail on the steps half a dozen times and then let his head down again on the hot stone of the steps.

'He loves the heat of the stone. It's quite hot. Feel it!' said Rita to Mathew. 'Feel it! It's quite hot.'

He felt the stone. It was hot. Everything was hot, except the trees way down the road, and the far, blue sky. There was a heavy stillness, and then Rita said she'd clear the tea things.

'Leave them,' said Mathew.

'I would if I thought the rain would keep off!' said Rita, holding out her hand, palm upward. 'I'd hate dashing in with them if a sudden shower came down.'

'It won't rain,' said Mathew, without looking at the clouds. He knew it wouldn't rain. He felt that the cool exquisite rain was far far away. 'It won't rain,' he repeated, and he felt that he could repeat it endlessly rather than exert himself to think of anything new to say. He had a longing to close his eyes and be silent. He suddenly thought that if he was married to her he would not have to be so polite all the time. He could close his eyes once in a while, and say he didn't want to talk. But if he did that now it would hurt her feelings.

Marriage ought to be a relief in a way; silences and slumping down in a chair. Mathew pondered this thought, but as he saw Rita's hand steal out and tweak Pete's ear, he had a vague apprehension that Rita might not feel the same way as he did about marriage. He didn't know what exactly she might take marriage to mean. He wanted desperately to

know, all of a sudden, but it was a tricky subject for conversation and one on which it would be hard to talk without committing oneself.

Rita tweaked Pete by the ear again. 'Isn't he sweet? He sleeps at the foot of my bed,' she said.

'Let him sleep,' said Mathew.

'He doesn't want to sleep. Do you, Pete?' she pulled Pete up onto her lap again, but he wriggled down and lay flat on the steps. He was beginning to feel the heat. His tongue lolled out in a tremble of heavy breathing. Mathew felt that he could have done the very same himself. It was getting hotter instead of cooler as the day wore on.

'Will the butter melt?' he said, suddenly, sitting up.

'I think I'll take it inside,' said Rita. 'I think I'll clear the table after all. It will leave us more time to talk afterward.'

When Rita got up Pete got up, and when she went into the house Pete went in after her, heavily. Pete was hot, and Pete was no pup. Mathew felt sort of sorry for Pete.

But when he looked at the step where Pete had been lying and saw it flicked all over with the wet marks of Pete's lolling tongue he felt a nausea that may have been coming on for the last hour, and, although the flicks were drying out, and were hardly to be seen a minute later, Mathew felt that he would have to get away by himself somewhere, quickly, and fight off the attack. He looked up at the sky but it held no coolness for him now. His eyes were affected and the sky and the trees and the grass, and the trellis and the lattice shadow of the trellis, were all the one color; an ugly orangey brown. He could hardly see the door. He didn't even dare to call out and tell Rita that he felt sick. She'd want him to take something. She'd want him to lie down. The thought of swallowing anything was terrible. The thought of lying down on the orange couch appalled him. The dog was lying on it the night he first called at the house. He didn't wait to tell Mrs. Cooligan that he was going. He ran through the dining room into the hall, and when he got into the street he crossed at once to the shady side. He felt quite chilly almost at once, and rather stiff at the knees. But the coolness was wonderful.

The houses were cold and gray. The railings were cold and black. And when he stared at it for a moment, after passing his handkerchief over his eyes, the sky was brilliantly blue again, and clear and calm and cooling. But this time he noticed that his handkerchief was an ugly dirty color, and he stopped at a draper's, there and then, to buy a new one, a new white one, because he wanted to feel the cold white glaze that was always on new white linen.

He wanted everything to be cool and clear, and when he reached the house where he lodged he liked the clear clarion of the bell that sent a single peal through the lower part of the house and left no echo. He liked the cold air that was in his bare room, and he liked the cold feel of his laundered counterpane. And just as he hadn't thought about marriage until very recently, he hadn't thought about death either. But he thought of it then, in his cold, damp room, and the coldness and darkness of death appealed to him as the shade of a tree might do. Life was hot and pulsing and it brought out a sweat on the forehead. He didn't know anything about marriage, but it must be close and pulsing also.

The dog on the hot steps, with his warm, wet tongue, panting and smelly, had given him nausea. Life was nauseating to him. Death was cool and fragrant. Of course, he had a long time to go yet before its green shade lengthened to reach him. But, in the meantime, he could keep away from the hot rays of life, as he had always done before he got familiar with Rita.

She was the feather-breasted kind of person who wanted warmth all the time. A husband wasn't enough, she had to have a dog; she had to have cushions. He wouldn't be any good to a woman like that. He wasn't cut out for marriage. He was so thin, in the first place. His feet were icy most of the time.

But late that night, as Mathew looked out at the moon, he remembered the girl on the poster with the blowy hair and the slender legs, and he thought that he might have found marriage sweet and cool and fragrant if he had married a girl like that, but he had left the gilt sunlight of romance years and years ago, and it seemed that you couldn't ever go back.

You couldn't go back, ever. And that was what he had been trying to do. There was probably a fragrant life where love was no warmer than white winter sunlight, but since he had not found it, he wasn't going to put up with anything less, just for the sake of comfort. Death was the next important step and it was through sweet cemetery grasses, over cold gravestones.

He lay in his chill, white bed, and he watched the moon, young, slender, a beautiful cool green moon.

YOUNG MAN IN AN ASTRAKHAN CAP

BY EDITA MORRIS

AS FAR back as Lotta can remember she has studied hard, rested little, and eaten poorly. She sewed on her first button at the age of three, and at six could read, write, and add with fair accuracy. It was none too early, there was not a moment to be lost, for on her broad brow, Mother, with a firm and unwavering hand, had written the word — Career.

Neither Lotta nor her sisters have genius, nor even pronounced talents, but Mother has turned on them the fury of a sonless widow's thwarted ambition. Their various capacities, which in a milder climate probably would have dissolved and gently disappeared, are kept painfully alive in the wintry altitude where Mother dwells.

And so when the Christmas holidays arrive, the sisters are white, their tall bodies stoop, their waists are thin as bees' waists. But Mother, who foresees everything, has foreseen this also, and she has written her country relatives well in advance. So on the eve of the holidays she sends off her daughters to the station where they are to take their respective trains. 'Good-bye,' she says. 'Mind you eat a lot!' as she waves after the receding taxicab.

At the Central Station a group of hunched-up, ghostly fig-

ures shuffle about with their frozen fingers in their mouths, stamping, stamping, to keep their toes from freezing likewise. The incoming trains are frosted over like bridal cakes, and the windows of the compartments are covered with ice flowers. Not a face, not a sign of life, is to be seen behind those panes; when the locomotive whistles, everyone shudders.

In Lotta's train, the third-class compartments are rapidly filling up. She finds a seat in the last car, by the door. It already smells heavy in there, but she is immune to odors. She can refrain from breathing through her nose for almost any length of time; she learned to do so in the stuffy atmosphere of the evening classrooms where she goes to learn journalism and shorthand. How to remain immune to unpleasant smells, and to everything else unpleasant, she is teaching herself quietly, without telling a soul.

Up by the window a man in a round black hat is sitting with a small boy in his lap. Holding the boy with one arm, he stretches the other backward and upward to pull down a canvas hold-all from the rack. He settles it on his unoccupied knee and begins to fumble inside, while the boy from beneath his fringe of wheat-colored hair stares into the bowels of the hold-all, where familiar things, like his cake of soap or his nightshirt, have become strange and absorbing objects.

The man finds a little green bag of lemon drops, extracts one sweet for the boy and one for himself, then gravely hands round the bag in the compartment, offering it to the four other passengers on his own bench and to the five on the bench opposite. They all accept, say thanks with much dignity, and sit sucking silently, their eyes round and completely still, their lips pursed in an identical way because of the acid taste of the drops.

Lotta feels a shiver run down her spine as she watches them and as her own tongue presses the candy to her palate. She decides that she will, quietly and unobtrusively, get rid of it, for she has also taught herself to get rid of a good many things quietly and unobtrusively. A moment later, raising her handkerchief to her nose, she makes a quick dab at her mouth. Relieved of the sweet, she settles down to a day's

thinking in the silent compartment, where nothing but a mumbled 'Excuse me' or a 'Thank you' is heard the whole day long.

The train is five hours behind schedule. All along the line local snowstorms have impeded its progress, but at midnight, singing loudly on the frozen rails, the train runs into the town of Sala. For the last hour almost everyone in the third-class coach has been lighting matches and heating pennies to thaw peep holes in the window panes, for they are anxious to find those waiting for them on the platform; they are not used to traveling and are nervous. Lotta, her peep holes higher than the others because she is taller, spots Aunt Irma and Uncle Viktor immediately, and holding her suitcase high above her head, manages, thin as she is, to worm her way through the thronged corridor so as to reach the platform first.

'That can't be Lotta! I won't allow it! Viktor, she looks almost grown up!'

Her aunt is holding her tightly clasped to her violet-scented coat, and in that warm, perfumed atmosphere Lotta forgets the note of — well, it sounded almost like terror! — that she had detected in Aunt Irma's voice. Yes, she knows that she is very tall, and her skin is clearer and softer, more like that of a real woman, now that she has passed the age of puberty; it is less embarrassing to look people in the face. In the taxi Aunt Irma says, 'Thank goodness that you haven't put your hair up yet and still wear it loose and long. At least something of the child remains!' And she pinches, perhaps playfully, Lotta's cheek. Uncle Viktor, too, looks at Lotta's hair, then settles his gentle glance elsewhere.

The taxi stops at the side entrance of the town hall, which is likewise her aunt's and uncle's residence, and the policeman on duty, Constable Erlandson of the cat whiskers and the Charlie Chaplin feet, salutes Uncle Viktor, the Mayor, then says, 'Why, you could knock me over with a feather! To think that this is really Miss Lotta!' He salutes her too, and gives his mustache a twist, while Lotta ponders on the strange fact that of late men, young and old men, invariably

do something to their ties or their mustaches when she approaches, though only a year ago they brushed past her as if she did not exist.

'Come along in, Lotta!' Aunt Irma says, 'Don't stand there mooning.'

The door clicks to behind them, leaving the night to die death upon death in the fists of the midwinter cold. The exquisite warmth and comfort which is the keynote of Aunt Irma's house wraps itself around Lotta like an eider-down; with a little wriggling movement of the shoulders she snuggles into it, and Aunt Irma's eyes and hers meet in a deep understanding smile.

For Aunt Irma knows that nobody is as appreciative of her skill in creating an atmosphere as Lotta; she savors the homage of one whom she feels to be as apt as herself in the art of living. Arm in arm they mount the carpeted stairs, stop before the potted palm, growing huge and happy in the eternal summer weather of this house, and finally stand smiling by the dining-room table, above which the swinging glass lamp throws its glittering light over the multicolored hors d'œuvres, over the side dishes, sizzling on spirit lamps, over the decanters of schnapps and wine.

'Child, you are as pale as a whitewashed wall! You are as thin as an anchovy!' Aunt Irma says as they take their places, and Lotta does not answer. What is there to say?

At Aunt Irma's word, dishes now begin to march up to Lotta like soldiers on review, stop before her a moment, then march on, leaving her plate heaped with pickled herring, jellied grouse, and those famous little white mushrooms bubbling in cream.

At last Lotta sits back, her face burning, her forehead moist, and she says that she can't eat any more — tonight.

'Those lovely mushrooms!' she sighs.

'Yes, they were lovely,' Aunt Irma says. 'But now, Lotta, you must tell us about everything at home. How is Gudrun's music? Did she get her diploma? And Betta's law work? We hear that you're a budding journalist and doing shorthand after school hours! It's really wonderful the way your mother has set you all marching toward careers! Nothing is more

wonderful for a woman than a career. Nothing! Am I right, Viktor?’

‘Yes, Irma dear,’ Uncle Viktor says, and his eyes wander gently from the violet bouquet on Aunt Irma’s lace blouse to her expensively waved hair. Then he lowers his eyelids and his gaze remains fixed on the tablecloth. Is it Lotta’s imagination that the corners of his mouth move upward in the subtlest of smiles?

Lotta has been five days in Sala. She has slept fourteen hours every night and eaten so prodigiously that at the end of every meal old Bina, the cook, pops her head through the kitchen door just to look at her! A great many people look at Lotta nowadays, though not for the same reason. Back home in the capital, when she hurried, pale and shivering, between her school and her shorthand classes, few eyes noticed her long shining hair and her long quick legs; here, with her back straightened from rest, her face filling in, every eye seems to be nibbling at her. ‘Have I a smudge on my nose, Aunt Irma?’ Lotta says. ‘No,’ answers Aunt Irma, and walks quicker. Next day Aunt Irma tells her, ‘I don’t feel like a walk today. I think we’ll stay indoors instead of going out.’ As they sit reading in front of the fire, Lotta looks up at Aunt Irma from time to time, trying to puzzle something out, though just what it is she doesn’t yet know.

Next afternoon, after buying Aunt Irma’s violets in the flower shop, they are walking down Klara Street when somebody calls to them. ‘Oh, Aunt Irma,’ says Lotta, ‘it’s Assessor Haan!’ They stop and wait for him. The Assessor, Aunt Irma’s life-long admirer, approaches smiling, his tall astrakhan cap set at a becoming angle. He greets them, his large liquid eyes brimming over with unsaid compliments, then takes the two women by the arm and leads them up to the nearest street lamp.

‘Stand back to back,’ he commands. ‘Yes, exactly the same height! Little Lotta! I can’t believe it.’ And again he puts one hand through Aunt Irma’s arm, the other through Lotta’s, and as they walk homeward through the pitch-black town, he tells them that he had followed them from the

flower shop for quite a way, absolutely convinced that he was seeing double. 'For I knew that there was only one perfect figure in the whole world, and that was Irma's, but now there was an exact replica of it by her side!' Aunt Irma laughs, though only very little, and says quickly, 'Lotta, child, why don't you run down to the pastry shop and buy some good things for your tea?' Then she turns to the Assessor and says, 'Lotta is a serious young thing. She has a career in front of her and now she must only think of eating and resting and keeping up her strength. Besides,' Lotta hears her say to the Assessor as they walk off together, 'children are so crazy about sweet things!'

But Lotta stands on the street corner and gazes after her aunt. She looks sharply at Aunt Irma's figure, which she can see in profile as the couple cross the street. A perfect figure, is it? The legs are elegant, certainly, and so is the sweeping line of the back. The bosom is big, almost too big, but perhaps that's the very reason that her figure is thrilling — because there's such a marked contrast between the bosom and the long thin hips! And her own is an exact replica of it? How idiotic! Still for some reason she draws a deep breath. Something is beginning to take shape in her mind; soon it will come to the surface. She never tries to probe into her unconscious, but one day a decision presents itself, neat and clear, and then she acts on it.

She remembers the cakes. A tiny smile, which she neither could nor would explain, creeps into her face as she walks down the icy black street to the pastry shop, stepping with both her feet into the rectangle of light flung on to the pavement through the pastry shop window. Rows of *éclairs*, nestling under their coats of chocolate, lie squeezing each other on wooden trays. Simply hundreds of *éclairs* — and Aunt Irma could afford to buy every one of them if she wanted to. Just like that! She, Lotta, can buy one or two, because such is Aunt Irma's wish. If it weren't for Aunt Irma, she couldn't buy one *éclair*, couldn't buy *anything*! In all probability she will never in her life be able to buy luxuries, because every penny she earns snooping up *news* for some paper will go to keep her thin body and her harassed

soul together. But Aunt Irma has no career! That's why she can buy as many éclairs as she can swallow and violets by the ton, if she so desires! To say nothing of mile upon mile of wave for her hair. Lotta says, 'Hmm,' as she steps into the shop.

The kitchen stove and Bina are soothing company, Lotta finds. Particularly these holidays she thinks that the unmovable stove and the unmovable Bina are splendid. At home she, like her sisters, is a mere mechanical toy to which Mother has the key; in Aunt Irma's house she doesn't feel that she is being wound up every morning, but she is harassed none the less. Her aunt's company, however delicious, has the effect on her of a persistent tickling, nerve-racking and subtle, from which she has to escape at times.

Lotta feels unsettled these days; there is concern on her forehead. One moment she is fretting about losing her speed at shorthand during this lazy period; later, after fashioning hieroglyphics and arabesques for hours, she suddenly makes a dash for Aunt Irma's dressing table to smash handfuls of violet cream into her cheeks, or to tie a ribbon in her hair. But a little later again both occupations pall, and she only wants to sit by the warm placid kitchen stove, by the warm placid Bina, and rest. Bina doesn't care about careers, she never converses subtly, but confines herself to stating facts.

'It's cold, Lotta,' she says. 'The wolves are on their way down to eat up the town.' Or, 'This meat is as tender as little children's rumps' (smacking with her powerful paw the side of a bloody joint). And Lotta, squeezing herself into the cranny between the stove and cupboard, squats on the coal sack and watches the snow fall on the balcony outside. 'Yes, Bina,' she says. 'Yes.' And she sighs with relief.

Then Bina hands her a huge cup of coffee with a dash of rum in it, saying, 'Mind — it's hot, Lotta.' Whereupon Lotta again sighs in contentment. But before long she begins to think, a cursed habit that she has been taught by irresponsible people. 'There are many kinds of lives,' she thinks. 'Lives like Bina's — lives like those that Mother is preparing for us. Then there is Aunt Irma's kind of life. There are all

sorts, and if one could only choose the one one wanted! But perhaps one can! Yes, perhaps one can.' At this point Lotta's cup goes clattering back on to its saucer; she feels like getting up, like moving.

'I'm going out on the balcony, Bina.'

'Yes,' Bina says. 'Do. It's Saturday today. Do you remember how you used to hang over the balcony railing every Saturday about this time and watch the drunks being taken from the Black Maria to jail? My, how you used to laugh, Lotta!'

On the balcony a deer, covered over with a fine powdering of snow, hangs from its hind legs; the green pine twigs protruding from its disbowed interior smell wildly of forest. Lotta stands beside it, happily drawing a forefinger over its long dead teeth.

From the balcony she can see the county jail, and the door leading to the cellar where they throw the Saturday drunks. While she is standing there, she hears the rumbling of heavy wheels on the cobblestones, and the Black Maria drives into the yard. Constable Erlandson, his feet turning outward like the feet of a duck, hurries forward to open the door.

Lotta hears a howl from the padded interior. Erlandson and the driver seize the first drunk by the legs, hoist him up between them, and toss him down into the cellar. The other drunks howl with laughter as he goes slithering down the stairs and reaches the bottom with a thud.

It is terribly funny. Lotta is just about to laugh.

The second drunk is young, with dangling, sausagelike legs that cross like scissor blades when he tries to stand on them. Erlandson drops him in the snow and lets him lie there, mumbling, till the others are disposed of, when he too gets a kick in the behind and shoots down into the cellar. The van goes clattering off on its next trip.

She stands there without moving. No, this isn't funny — it definitely isn't funny. Hm — that's queer! It seems that one day a thing just isn't funny any more. Will other things besides watching drunks popped head-first into jail cease being funny? What is she to laugh at then? Well, she'll no longer be herself, but someone else, by that time. What she laughs at will depend on who she turns out to be.

Oh, she is back at that again — right back where she was in the kitchen! She doesn't know what she means anyhow, it is all so confusing. How those drunken men do yell! She feels a pat of snow lying on the top of her head. What an annoying kind of place a balcony is, neither properly out-of-doors, nor inside the house! A kind of in-between place. Yes — in-between. Hateful.

She swings about sharply, gives the hanging deer a slap with her hand, tries past Bina and past the stove, opens the door to the dining room, opens another door, doesn't know where to go next. . . .

Does Assessor Haan know the exact hour that Lotta goes skating on the Sala River? Or is it by chance that just as she comes shooting out of the narrow, pipelike stretch of the river and begins to swoop and swirl, cutting figures on its broader reaches, the Assessor is always standing on the shore? Every day for a week now his tall astrakhan cap has been making a dark patch against the snow-covered trees, and Lotta has waved to him and danced about on the ice until she hasn't a breath of air left in her. Then at last she has skated toward him slowly, smiling at him, in Aunt Irma's long, close-fitting coat.

'I'm standing here dreaming that I'm young!' he tells her as she skates up to him, her fair hair like a sail behind her.

'Yes, this is Aunt Irma's coat,' she says, attributing his words and the trembling of his fingers as he undoes her skates to his memories of her aunt.

'Two eyes — two skies,' he says. 'A northern woman, an eternally white night, an eternal longing.'

He's dreaming of Aunt Irma, thinks Lotta as they walk homeward, his hand in her arm. And she laughs.

'Yes, yes, laugh away,' he tells her. 'Laugh the low golden laughter of all lovely women.'

Lotta laughs again.

'I must hurry, Assessor Haan,' she says. 'Aunt Irma hates to be kept waiting.'

They walk on, the Assessor silent except for a little sigh now and then, and presently they come opposite the house.

'Oh, look, Assessor Haan!' says Lotta. 'There is Aunt Irma at the window, near the palm. Do you see her? She's looking at us.'

But what is this? The Assessor is off without even a good-bye, pulling his hand from her arm, thrusting her skates at her. He is dashing down a side street as quickly as he can go. Lotta stands staring after him, then she pulls open the front door and chases up the stairs, the skates in her hand knocking against each other so that the steel sings.

'Aunt Irma!' she calls out and then louder: 'Aunt Irma, darling!' But the figure by the window, back turned squarely to the room, is mute. Lotta lays a cheek alongside Aunt Irma's, weaves an arm through hers. 'Oh, what is it, Aunt Irma? What is it?' she says, for her aunt's arm is icy, stiff as a bough on a tree. Slowly, very slowly, that arm sinks down, falls straight down, shedding the hand that nestles in it. And now at last Aunt Irma turns her face, her eyes matching in hardness the steel of Lotta's skates. She looks at Lotta and then she leaves the room.

Above Lotta's head the town hall crashes; beams, bricks, and mortar come tumbling about her. When the thunder of that crash dies away, she opens her eyes wide and looks about her. Now she sees for the first time. So that was it! Aunt Irma is . . . jealous! Jealous of her. Aunt Irma is in a rage because she saw Lotta and the Assessor walking arm in arm. Is it possible? Why should Aunt Irma, 'the loveliest woman in the country,' feel scared of Lotta, and what does her jealousy prove? What has Aunt Irma just told her with an eloquence which would put the most flowery speech to shame? Simply that she, Lotta, is still more beautiful, more alarmingly beautiful, than Aunt Irma; that the Assessor's compliments were inspired by her, not by his memories of Aunt Irma; that those eyes staring at her in the streets had discovered something which she had never discovered about herself, busy as she had been scrambling toward a goal of Mother's choosing. Lotta sits down on a chair, as weak as if she had been drained of a whole pint of blood.

But she feels that she is smiling, smiling wickedly, deep inside. She can't help it. She closes her eyes hard and when

she opens them, colors are blurred from her having pressed her eyelids so tightly together; the funniest things happen to the pattern in the Persian carpet; the stilted, angular figures take on familiar shapes, and two of them which seem to be standing on their heads, look exactly -- yes, exactly -- like Mother and Aunt Irma.

Lotta rises and walks over them into the next room.

At two o'clock the winter day is over, the room goes black. Lotta, who has been lying face down on the sofa, thinking, jumps up and goes over to the window. She stands there looking into the square, stacked high with snow, with pigeons flying above it, people scurrying across. Lotta follows each one till a tram cuts him from view or till he vanishes into the mouth of a side street, though it is only at the women that she really looks. The women, the busy women, hastening between office and home with bleak faces, lines running deep from nose to mouth! In their eyes is an expression as if they were forever listening to the wailing of their harassed souls. Snow is coming down, thick and wet, but they must all be out. Oh, Lotta knows that story well enough! This very minute her sister Gudrun is probably tramping through the slush of the capital, clutching beneath her arm the coffin with the dead violin which Mother has promised will one day come alive and sing. In two days her own holidays will be over, in two days she too . . .

She drops the curtain and turns to peer into the room, which seems to whisper behind her in the silence. The logs are breaking and turning over in the round china stove; a small bouquet of violets breathes hard in the dark. This is Aunt Irma's home! Aunt Irma of the lazy fingers, of the perfect figure!

Lotta turns on the light and stands before the mirror, which so often must have received Aunt Irma's image. For the first time she sees herself properly, that is, with the eyes of others; she has grown consciously beautiful; her eyes are intense, light.

Thank you, Assessor Haan! she says. Thank you, Aunt Irma!

And it is at that moment that she changes the career Mother has chosen for her for the one Aunt Irma and the Assessor have pointed out. The uncertainty of the last week falls to her feet.

I'm sorry, Mother, she says.

Then she switches off the light and goes back to the window. The pigeons, their feathers on end, are still riding round and round on the wind. The door of the flower shop across the square is torn open — is it by the force of the wind? No, Lotta sees that it is the assistant, Miss Bolin, with the uneven legs, one long, one short, who has opened the door and who now comes bustling out, her arms full of flowers in glazed paper bags. Oh heavens! She has tripped! She is falling in the slush. Lotta presses her face against the pane. Oh, poor Miss Bolin! Now she is kneeling on the pavement, gathering up the soiled parcels, looking up, terrified, at the brilliantly lit hairdresser's behind her, the door of which has just swung open. Some one is leaving the shop; Miss Bolin limps away like a hurt rabbit.

But isn't that . . . Yes, it is Aunt Irma's friend, Mrs. Klas, who has come out from the coiffeur's. Lotta hopes fervently that Mrs. Klas didn't see Miss Bolin lying in the slush. A hairdresser's assistant, hand under Mrs. Klas's arm, is escorting her down the slippery steps to her car. She won't fall — not she! Isn't that unfair? Big, pink, fat Mrs. Klas with her two legs both the same length! Yes, unfair it is! Wrong! And yet a minute ago she, Lotta, had decided to throw over her career and to become like Mrs. Klas, like Aunt Irma. Had she really? Suddenly Miss Bolin, the hurrying women in the square, her own sisters, all seem wonderful compared to ladies like Mrs. Klas, smug in their layers of elegant fat upon which the skin lies creaseless. Lotta's forehead draws together; she has a moment of wild hesitation.

Though she is still standing at the window, she no longer sees anything outside; she is living within herself, is thinking hard. Her anger is rising against her mother, against Aunt Irma, against all these people and all those before them who haven't done a scrap to change things in the world, so that it is still a shame for a woman to be shabby and scraggy and

hard-working. The whole world is like this square before her, with Miss Bolins falling over and Mrs. Klases being ushered into their fine cars. Beastly!

'I'm not going to fall in the slush — not on your life,' she says, and she hears herself give one quick unhappy sob.

Next morning the station platform is alive with people who laugh and talk, their voices overpowered by the hooting and clanging of freight trains changing position down the line. But it is the big express that Sala is waiting for, the eagle which has flown down from the far white north, winging its way farther and farther south till this evening it will swoop into the capital. Lotta with her suitcase, Aunt Irma, and Uncle Viktor are soon hemmed in by a ring of acquaintances.

Lotta stands a little to one side. She is enjoying herself, is smiling at a joke of her own. Aunt Irma's long, tight-fitting coat, lent her for her stay in Sala in order to raise her to its owner's standard, has returned to its wardrobe; Cinderella, back in her old rags, is sharing a secret with the buffet mirror across the platform. That mirror, with the bland face of truth, is telling her that her mackintosh, which stops dead below her knees and yawns above her bosom, makes of her beauty something startling, incredible. The old gentlemen around Aunt Irma have begun to hem and to haw, to pretend that they are looking for something, to rub their hands together, and all at once they are by Lotta's side, fiddling with their ties and twirling their mustaches so violently that their ladies break into panic, and set in dabbing powder on their needle-sharp beaks and twittering like birds in an aviary.

Uncle Viktor has walked off and he is standing a few yards away, staring holes into his boots. Lotta gets red as a plum; she is seized with a quiet, grown-up indignation. Why won't Uncle Viktor look at her? What is the matter with him, anyway? Of course Uncle Viktor never speaks, but Lotta knows that his eyes have been open during these holidays. Is he chagrined because Lotta might turn deserter to her cause?

Well, all right, let him be! Uncle Viktor has had fifty years

to remake the world, to settle matters so that Miss Bolin and her kind should not remain forever slaves, and Aunt Irma and her kind queens. But what has he done, except marry the loveliest and the laziest of them all, the way every man has tried to do, and will always try to do. Oh, she could shake them all! She could weep with rage!

Standing there, staring at his silly boots! No wonder that the world is in the state it's in, she says behind her teeth.

'Lost in thought, Lotta?'

'Oh, yes, our Lotta has already left us,' says Aunt Irma with a fluty little laugh. 'She's far away, writing imaginary newspaper articles. Lotta is a serious young thing. All she thinks of is her career, isn't it, Lotta?'

'Yes, Aunt Irma,' Lotta says, 'that's all I think of.'

And suddenly she looks straight into Aunt Irma's eyes and gives her a smile that should not have been ready for another ten years at least. It is Aunt Irma who turns her eyes away.

'There's the train!'

'Yes, there it is! It's packed too, isn't it? I only hope you'll get a seat, Lotta.'

'I'll get a seat,' says Lotta, walking straight-backed across the station platform. The papier-mâché suitcase turns in her hand and seems to wink at the well-dressed crowd, standing looking after her. We'll get a seat, it says.

The train, like an overstuffed caterpillar, is bulging in every section. The luggage racks are sagging, the air hangs heavy as garlands on people's heads. Those lucky ones who have found places sit glassy-eyed and perspiring, for the battle has been grim. Now Lotta has fought her way through six carriages and has even entered the seventh before she sees that it is not third but first class. She is about to retreat when a young man in an astrakhan cap, as tall and curly as the Assessor's, jumps up and stands before her.

'Excuse me. There's a vacant seat in here,' he says.

'In there! But it is first class.'

'Well — yes,' he answers, 'but, you see, I can just say a word to the conductor and . . . and . . .'

Lotta is taken aback; she feels shy. Then she remembers! But is it really as simple as all that?

'Why, thank you,' she says to the young man, whose eyes begin to shine. 'Thank you most awfully.'

The train has found its legs and is running quickly out of Sala, giving the little town a blast of smoke and a shrill whistle as parting gifts. In the open window, flourishing a handkerchief at Aunt Irma, stands Lotta, and beside her is a young man in an astrakhan cap.

KNIFE-LIKE, FLOWER-LIKE,
LIKE NOTHING AT ALL
IN THE WORLD

BY WILLIAM SAROYAN

HE'LL be around any minute now, Max said. I give you my word. He'll be here.

The little man at the table nodded as Max spoke, and Max said to himself as he wiped the bar, What's he want to see a guy like Pete for?

A good-looking woman came in and ordered a Scotch and soda, and while he was getting the drink Max went on talking to the little man.

It's none of my business, he said, but what do you want to see Pete for?

I beg your pardon? the lady said.

Oh, Max said. Excuse me, lady. I was talking to the little fellow at the table over there. (Little fellow at the table? Max repeated to himself. What the hell kind of talk is that? No class. No ease. Got to study these things out and learn to be nonchalant and stuff like that.)

He's a friend of mine, the lady said.

No, no, Max said quickly. I was talking to that little gentleman over there. (Little gentleman? Why couldn't I leave out the *little* part of it?)

Well, the lady said, even so. He's a friend of mine.

Who? Max said.

Pete, the lady said.

The little man got up from the table and came over to the bar. He studied the woman carefully, trying at the same time to smile.

What's this? Max thought.

I'm his father, the little man said.

The woman turned and looked down at the little man. It seemed to Max that she didn't think very much of him, or that he, Max, didn't understand anything. (I'm a lousy judge of character, Max decided.)

His father? the woman said.

Yes, the little man said. Peter Morgan.

My name is Ethel Beede, the woman said. The way she said the last name Max knew it had an extra 'e' in it somewhere and that, most likely, as he put it, she stank. She didn't exactly stink, but she was probably no good.

Peter Morgan is my son's name, the little man said. My name is Henry.

How do you do, the woman said.

Thank you, the little man said. I came here tonight to see Pete. He hasn't been home in two weeks. Pete's always been dissatisfied, and almost anything at all out of the ordinary throws him off balance.

The woman looked at the little man almost a full minute without speaking.

Max couldn't figure out any of it.

Pete showed up every night sometime between midnight and two, but he was always alone. Tonight his father shows up at a little after ten, and a little after eleven a woman almost old enough to be Pete's mother shows up, too.

Your son, the woman said at last, is a very interesting young man.

I've known him all his life, the little man said quietly. I imagine he's *fascinating* to people who haven't.

I'm quite interested in his ambition, the woman said.

That's very kind of you, the little man said. What ambition is that?

I understand he wants to be an actor, the woman said.

He has a number of ambitions, the little man said. I'm sure you know how old he is.

He said he was twenty-one, the woman said.

He's not quite seventeen, the little man said.

Wait a minute, Max said very loudly. Not quite seventeen? He's been coming in here drinking every night for two weeks now. I can't serve drinks to minors. It's against the law. I thought he was twenty-two or twenty-three.

No, the little man said. He's not quite seventeen. He'll be seventeen August 21. He was born in 1925.

The little man waited a moment for the woman to speak. He hoped the woman would go away and give him a chance to sit down and talk with Pete alone, but the woman didn't seem to want to go.

He's not quite seventeen, the little man said again.

I heard you, the woman said.

Pete is the kind of guy who expects a great deal all the time, the little man said. Have you been giving him money?

The woman was not upset by this question, as Max expected her to be.

Yes, she said. He knows how to spend it.

You're married, the little man said.

I beg your pardon, the woman said.

Well, to put it another way, the little man said, you have children, haven't you?

I have a daughter nineteen years old, the woman said, and another seven years old. Give me another Scotch and soda.

Max made another drink for the lady. The little man wasn't drinking.

Your husband is a wealthy man, Pete's father said.

I am wealthy, the woman said. My husbands have all been — poor.

You want to adopt Pete? the little man said.

I beg your pardon, the woman said this time. She was really burned up now. Well, what do you know about that? Max thought. A crazy good-looking punk like Pete — well, for the love of Mike.

I only want to warn you, the little man said, that my son will make you unhappy, no matter what you intend to do.

I want you to know that you won't hurt *him*. He's tough. I think he's capable of doing anything. I think he could do something very great or something very strange. I think he could murder almost anybody and not feel guilty. He's very sensitive, too. I'm sure you don't know him as well as I do. I want him to take his time and after a while find out for himself what he wants to do. He's restless and bored and pretty angry deeply. I think he can do anything.

I'm afraid I don't understand, the woman said.

I'm very fond of Pete, the little man said. Maybe it's because he's not like me or his mother or any of his brothers and sisters. We're all very fond of him, but *me* most of all. Pete's ashamed of me. I'll tell you that. At the same time I think he likes me more than he likes any other person in the world. I'm sure you don't intend to marry Pete.

Well, for crying out loud, Max thought. The people you run into in a little bar.

You're about twenty years older than Pete, the little man went on.

I told you I have a nineteen-year-old daughter, the woman said.

Then, I suppose you *do* want to adopt him, the little man said.

We're going to be married day after tomorrow, the woman said.

What the hell is this? Max asked himself. Pete going to marry this high-tone society dame? That crazy kid who looked like a cross between a movie gangster and a ballet dancer? Who walked swiftly and dramatically, as if he were in a play? Who talked loudly and said the funniest things in the world! Who threw money around as if it were buttons? Going to marry this overfed dame?

I see, the little man said quietly.

He looked at the woman a moment.

I see, he said again.

We're very much in love, the woman said. She was deeply hurt. Even Max could tell that. Well, as far as Max was concerned, if she *had* to marry somebody she could pick out somebody her size, somebody like himself.

Oh oh, Max thought suddenly. One of these two ought to get out of here in a hurry. That kid will be coming in here any minute now.

He'll be coming in here any minute now, he said. He wiped the bar as he spoke, so the remark wouldn't be too bald, or whatever it was. Too naked or whatever it was.

Yes, I know, the little man and the woman said at the same time.

We're going to be married, the woman said again.

I've always encouraged Pete to do whatever he's felt like doing, the little man said. I'll pretend I didn't know, and after it's over I'll convince his mother not to interfere, too.

You're very kind, the woman said.

She was irritated and it seemed to Max a little ashamed.

I'm thinking of Pete, the little man said.

He turned and walked out of the place without another word. Max got busy with some glasses at the other end of the bar.

Give me another Scotch and soda, the woman said.

She was sore and ashamed and she looked pretty ugly all of a sudden. At first she had seemed rather beautiful, or at least striking, but now all of a sudden when Max looked at her she looked awful. I guess a crazy kid like Pete must be wonderful company for a woman like that, Max said. I guess it means a lot to her. Max put her drink down in front of her and went over to the phonograph and put in a nickel.

Max wondered if the kid would be embarrassed about Max knowing about the woman. If Max were seventeen like Pete and the woman was this woman, *he* would be embarrassed if somebody like Max saw her.

When the record ended Max put in another nickel. The kid ought to be in any minute now. He kept looking toward the door and feeling uncomfortable. The woman kept trying not to look toward the door. Max kept putting nickels in the phonograph and looking toward the door.

At two o'clock he said, It's closing time.

The woman paid for nine Scotch and sodas and began to go. Near the door she turned around and came back.

That's right, lady, Max said to himself. I'm not seventeen

and I don't walk like a dancer and I'm not the funniest young punk in the world, but I'm not so bad. I'm only forty-eight. Let's talk this thing over. If you've got to marry somebody, marry a guy your size. Marry me.

Max leaned over the bar toward the lady. She opened her handbag. Nuts, Max thought. The woman crumpled a bill in her hand and, shaking Max's hand, she left the bill in it and turned to go. At the door she stopped again and Max said to himself come on, lady. Think this thing over. You're tight and I'm big and — discreet, too. The woman came over to Max again.

We're very much in love with one another, she said. (I'll say we are, Max said. Lady, you've got no idea how much in love with one another we are. Just say the good word.)

Lady, Max said. He felt silly.

The woman moved closer to him, waiting.

Lady, Max said.

Yes? the woman said.

I'm sorry, Max said. This is the first night in two weeks that he's not been in.

It's all right, the woman said.

Can I help you to a cab, Max said.

My car's outside, the lady said.

I'd be glad to drive you home, Max said. I mean —

My chauffeur's in the car, the woman said.

The woman went out before Max had a chance to get around the bar and open the door for her. He went to the door and locked it and while he did so he saw the chauffeur open the door of the car, help the woman in, and then drive away.

Max stood at the door about three minutes, thinking. What's the matter with *me*? he thought. He returned to the bar and put away everything for the night. He put on his coat, and then poured himself a little drink, which he sipped thoughtfully.

The door rattled and he didn't even think of hollering out, Closed.

The door rattled again and then he heard the kid shout, Hey, Max. Let me in a minute.

Max turned toward the door. It would be good to see Pete again, after all this stuff. He went to the door and opened it and the kid came in, the same as on any other night.

Where the hell you been? Max asked.

Max, the kid said. Something's happened. Give me a drink.

Max poured him a drink. Pete swallowed the drink and smiled stupidly. It was a very delightful thing to see.

Max, Pete said, I'm in love.

Yeah, I know, Max said. He was a little burned-up now.

You know? the kid said. I just met her tonight.

Met *who*? Max said.

Max, I met the most beautiful girl in the world. She's just a kid, but she's wonderful. She's innocent and simple and — well, by God, I'm not ashamed to say it — wonderful.

You said wonderful before, Max said.

She's fourteen years old, Pete said. Where do you think I found her?

Max began to think.

In a movie? he said.

No, Pete said. I went home instead of keeping an appointment. (The kid busted out laughing.) So I decided to stop at the florist's on the corner and take the folks some flowers. I found her in the florist's. She's his daughter. Half Irish, half Italian. Beautiful. Quiet. Lonely. I bought the flowers and took them home and sat around talking, waiting for my father to come home. He'd gone back to the office to do some overtime. So after a while I went back to the florist's and met her father and her mother and asked them if I could take her to the neighborhood movie. After the movie I took her home and I've been walking around town ever since.

I see, Max said. That's swell.

How've things been? Pete said.

Oh so-so, Max said.

Anybody been around? Pete said.

A few people I don't know, Max said.

Any interesting barroom talk? Pete said.

Some, Max said.

I'm going to open a bar myself some day, Pete said. I like to see all kinds of people and hear them talk.

Is that so? Max said.

Yeah, Pete said. The variety, Max. All the different people alive. All the different faces. All the different ways of talking. I like to listen to the way they *laugh*, especially. Do you know how *she* laughs?

No, Max said.

Like an angel, Pete said. It breaks my heart. It makes me sadder than anything in the world. I'm in love with her, but the only trouble is the world's full of them.

That's right, Max said.

That's the only trouble, Pete said. There are so many of them.

There sure are plenty of them, Max said.

They're all over the place, Pete said. Anywhere you go. This one was in the florist's, right in my block. Think of all the other blocks. All the other cities. The hundreds of thousands of them.

Yeah, Max said. He felt old and grateful for a little place of his own and easy working hours and easy work and a place to sleep and an old indifference about the hundreds of thousands of them.

Yeah, he said. That's right, Pete.

Pete swallowed another drink and tossed a dollar on the bar.

On me tonight, Max said.

Thanks, Pete said. He began to go. See you tomor --- he began to say. He stopped. I may not be around again for a while, he said. It's about three miles from here to my neighborhood.

O.K., Max said.

So long, Pete said.

Max watched him walk away swiftly, like somebody in a hell of a big play. Max put on his hat and let himself out and locked the door, peeking in to see how it looked without him inside. It looked O.K. He began to walk slowly around the corner.

AN ARGUMENT IN 1934

BY DELMORE SCHWARTZ

IN THE year of our Western culture 1934, Noah Gottlieb went one Saturday morning to meet his friend, Harry Morton.

Harry Morton worked in the New York Public Library at 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue. Noah Gottlieb was an artificial-flower salesman.

Both young men were very much interested in the history of thought and in the arts. It was this that had brought them together.

They knew that they were intellectuals, but they disliked the title. It had for them associations with the previous decade.

It was for them a word associated with such an author as H. L. Mencken and the post-war period in America.

Yet there is no other title to describe the part they had chosen in Life. They were intellectuals, and the way in which they made their living they detested and merely endured.

'Yes, we are intellectuals,' Harry had said to Noah one day; 'it is nothing if not an unpleasant name. Yet, come to think of it, are not all the heroes of Western culture intellectuals?'

'Was not Ulysses an intellectual, as well as Hamlet?' 'Samson and Hercules were not,' Noah replied, 'don't let your preference deceive you.' 'David,' said Harry, 'Solomon, Dante, Pierre Bezukhov, Prince Myshkin, Stephen Daedalus, and Sherlock Holmes!'

On this Saturday morning in December, Noah went to meet Harry at the great library, intending to spend the afternoon with him engaged in such dialogues, which gave both of them much pleasure.

He came into the building, touched once more, without deliberate attention, by the interior, all marble like a mausoleum, unending corridors of marble and vast as Grand Central.

He felt the quiet which was like a wide sound, marked by the low sound of hats and coats being checked, the turning of the page of a newspaper, the guard examining books at the door, and the idle seated on the marble benches on the mezzanine or at the turning of the stair.

Some were waiting an appointed hour, some were gazing at nothing at all, and some were merely glad to have retired from the chill air.

Noah waited among them until Harry came. The two young men greeted each other with habitual shyness, a shyness which did not disguise from either of them the enjoyment they took in their friendship.

Harry said to Noah in a tone of apology and disdain that one of the boys who worked with him had insisted on coming with him this afternoon.

He had looked very lonely and plaintive, Harry explained, he had practically demanded Harry's company, and Harry had not had the heart to refuse.

Both young men felt a tinge of disappointment because they were unable to discuss with each other the matters which interested them most of all when other human beings were present.

Some had been hurt sometimes by the obvious change in Noah and Harry when a third being came among them. Both of them were sorry about this, yet enjoyed it. It sprang from interests and knowledge which were not common in the year 1934.

'Here he is,' said Harry as his friend Bradley Brown came up to them. 'Suppose we have lunch in the Library cafeteria.'

At this point perhaps it should be explained that Noah

and Harry ate in cafeterias much of the time. This was partly because it was inexpensive, partly because they did not come from homes to which either wanted to invite the other, and partly because a kind of cafeteria life had grown up in their lives.

It is the equivalent for America of the café life of Europe, Harry once said to Noah, and inferior to it just as the native wines are inferior: but what can we do? Where else is there to go?

The three young men descended to the cafeteria of the great Library. It was unpleasant because it was in the basement and had to be lighted in the daytime and was weakly lighted.

It was weakly lighted in order to save money. For the same reason the hours during which the Library was open were perhaps going to be curtailed.

The world-wide cause, the Depression, was the pyramid in the shadow of which these young men were walking.

II

Noah was the first one to come from the railed alley of the cafeteria and go to a table. He began to light his pipe.

Bradley Brown in a moment was upon him, holding a cup of coffee in his hand and looking panic-stricken.

'You can't smoke here!' he hissed in a furious whisper, equally afraid of offending Noah and the cafeteria authorities.

Noah shook out his pipe immediately, astonished by his anxiety. He regarded Bradley Brown with curiosity.

Bradley Brown was returning to his place in the line, his tall and frail frame shaking nervously as he took his dishes from the counter men with gestures which seemed to enact apology.

When the three were seated at the cafeteria table, Noah noticed Bradley Brown's pallor and the care with which he dressed himself.

The neat pin which held together the two wings of his collar seemed to Noah the essence of white-collar gentility.

As they began to eat, Harry felt about for a subject which would break down the strangeness between Noah and Bradley.

'Bradley knows a great deal about prints,' Harry said to Noah. Noah recognized the intention and said to Bradley, 'Have there been any good exhibitions lately?' 'Yes,' said Bradley in the lowest voice possible, a kind of acute whisper.

'But there was one print in particular which I liked very much for a personal reason. May I tell you about it?'

'Why, yes,' said Noah, unable to understand this excess of courtesy. When Bradley had received Noah's permission, he looked to Harry for his. Harry nodded his head, chewing his food.

'The subject of this print was a child sleeping in a cemetery,' Bradley continued. 'What interested me so much was that when I was a child, I too used to take my nap in the cemetery near our house.'

'It was a big cemetery and full of still unused stretches of well-cared for grass reserved by the living in anticipation.'

'My parents would take me there on Sunday afternoons in the spring and the summer and the early fall. This was two or three years before the World War.'

Harry looked at Bradley as if to say, 'Well, what of it?' and the panic-stricken look appeared again on Bradley's face.

Noah was moved to sympathy, and to help Bradley with a story which was pointless, he said to him,

'When I was a child, I would have been afraid to sleep in a cemetery, even in the daytime. And when we passed a cemetery in a car at night, I was afraid, and thought that I smelt decay in the air, and feared that I might see ghosts in the night air above the graves. I was horrified by any thought of death!'

'I was not!' said Bradley, with delight in his soft voice, as if delight in his distinction from Noah. 'I liked to sleep in the cemetery on those Sunday afternoons.'

'The stone angels and the crosses soothed me and pleased me, as if they were figures in a fairy tale. My parents left me there and looked at me from the gravel path between the graves.'

'Now I remember their serious smiling beautiful faces, as if it were last week. Both of them died a few years later, in the influenza pandemic of 1919.

'I was at a military academy when they died, too far away to come back for the funeral. For that reason I remember them mostly as they looked on those warm Sunday afternoons

'In their mature beauty,' he added quickly and in an even lower tone, as if ashamed to bare such sentiments by such words.

'If,' he continued, 'I fell asleep and did not wake up too soon, as a special treat I was taken to the bridge which crosses the Harlem River.

'There I was permitted to watch the Montreal train race by below. It was a special treat like ice cream,' he added lamely.

'What about the print?' asked Harry. 'Oh, yes, the print,' said Bradley. 'I have quite forgotten about the print.

'The print astonished me so much because it brought back to me so completely these feelings of childhood, as if the artist himself had had just such experiences in *his* childhood.'

His voice lowered itself as he became aware that Harry regarded what he was saying as pointless.

Again Noah felt sympathy and wished to help the stranger. He knew that Harry was now beginning to feel Bradley's intrusion on their afternoon more than ever.

Noah presented an instance of his own feelings about death from his own childhood. He told them how a lady book salesman had come to the door one day, in the winter, years ago.

She wanted Noah's mother to buy two big medical books. In order to persuade Noah's mother, she hinted at sexual revelations in the book. Noah was commanded to depart from the living room.

He tried to overhear what the lady book salesman was saying, but he could not. His curiosity was overwhelming and ravenous.

When she went away, the books were left in the house and an initial deposit was given to her. As soon as his mother

was out of the house, Noah took the two fat books and looked for the pages which would have sexual revelations and came upon pictures of the dead instead.

He was so appalled by them that he could not sleep at night because he saw those images. Only when the books were at last sent back, and he knew that images of the dead were not in the fat books on the bookcase in the hallway, was he relieved.

'I had many such experiences,' said Noah. 'I was afraid to pass the apartment door of the family in which someone had died.'

Bradley was profoundly interested in this story, but Harry was piqued by the whole conversation. He was about to make an ironic remark when Noah rose to forestall him.

They were finished, and as they walked from the cafeteria, Harry's impatient feeling had to be expressed.

'During my childhood,' Harry said, 'I did not know that anyone died. That is the natural normal state of mind of childhood. You two, both of you, like to cultivate your morbidity. It does not mean anything.'

'And when I was a boy and went to camp for the first time — our family was still rich — my counsellor put a fat gob of butter in his soft-boiled egg, and then I knew what sensuality was! That's what impressed *me* in childhood!'

Noah and Bradley were silent, bemused by the feelings that the conversation had unexpectedly brought to the surface.

III

The three young men started to descend the flights of steps of the Library, between the two stone lions, couchant, above Fifth Avenue.

On the steps, huddled in small groups, human beings, for the most part foreign-looking, were arguing with passionate interest. One man was speaking with the loudness which counterfeits authority.

Noah, Harry, and Bradley heard what he was saying. He was declaring with utter certainty that every act of Roosevelt and The New Deal was a crime against The Working Class.

His opponent had just maintained in a perplexed voice that some of the measures of The New Deal had helped the unemployed. He had seen that this was so. They had money with which to buy food because of Roosevelt.

'You are ignorant and short-sighted,' declared the authoritative man. 'The State is the instrument of The Ruling Class. Everything it does is an attack on The Working Class, in the long run.'

'But they had money with which to buy milk and pay the rent,' said the other man weakly but stubbornly.

'That does not mean what you think it means,' said the authority. 'Those concessions are merely tricks which pave the way to greater oppression by weakening the militancy of The Working Class!'

'But they had something to eat, at least,' said the perplexed man. 'Don't be foolish. Face the facts, don't bury your head in the sand like an ostrich,' said the authoritative man. 'The State is the instrument of The Ruling Class.'

'Abstractions blind you,' said a newcomer. 'Why don't you be concrete? Some human beings have more to eat than when Hoover was President!'

'You have to see the whole objective condition from the perspective of History. You cannot escape from History!' said the authority, recognizing in the newcomer a more difficult antagonist.

Noah, Harry, and Bradley had paused and listened with interest to this argument of 1934. They started to go away from the Library as the cowed authority was declaring that Roosevelt's subjective intentions might be very fine.

'But,' he said, 'subjective intentions do not mean anything. Only objective conditions determine the movement of History.'

'What a sad view of Life and of the human will,' said Noah as they walked out of earshot of the argument.

'Yes,' said Bradley, demurely, as they began to walk up Fifth Avenue full of the busy gay expectant mood of the last few days before Christmas. 'How sad they sound, how wrong they are about Life —'

'They speak,' Bradley continued, 'as if the world existed outside of the mind!'

'Where does the world exist,' said Harry, 'what is it this time, Bradley — Christian Science? Bradley,' Harry said with irony to Noah, 'has a kneeling acquaintance with all the more esoteric religious societies in the city of New York.'

'It is necessary to believe in something,' Bradley defended himself. 'It is true, I have tried to become acquainted with more than one *Weltanschauung*. That is the reasonable method!

'But seriously,' he continued, 'most human beings make an enormous mistake when they believe that the world exists apart from the mind. It is the cause of much unhappiness.'

Just then they crossed 44th Street. A turning car passed, making Bradley draw back nervously, it came so close. Loudly Harry emphasized this to Bradley.

'You are as naïve as Doctor Johnson,' said Bradley, serenely, sweetly, and as if with perfect conviction.

'Just what do you believe,' Noah inquired, 'do you believe that everything is what thinking makes it?'

'Not exactly,' Bradley replied, whispering amid the blare of the traffic. 'But is it not true that all experience comes to one through the medium of one's consciousness?'

'It is as if the senses were stained-glass windows, and one only saw the light through the stained-glass windows of one's senses.

'What the light is beyond the stained-glass windows, you do not know. What a thing is, apart from the way you see it, you do not know, do you? How can you?'

'You do not even know that anything exists apart from your own being. *For all practical purposes*,' Bradley said with emphasis, 'the whole world is your own private dream!'

'For all practical purposes,' said Noah, shocked by this view, 'the world is just what is not you or your mind! It continues in its brutal way to unfold its nature, *no matter what you want or think*! It is December in New York in 1934. The weather is cold and it is going to snow. Try to make it Florida, Bradley.'

'Bravo,' said Harry. 'Noah Gottlieb defends the external world on Fifth Avenue and 46th Street four days before Christmas 1934!'

'No, no,' said Bradley in passionate reply to Noah, 'I can go to Florida.' 'No, you can't,' declared Harry. 'You would lose your job and be penniless in no time.'

'That is not relevant,' said Bradley. 'I can imagine that I am there or I can go there by means of certain motions, modifications, and changes decided upon and performed by my mind. My mind!' he cried in triumph and anguish.

'It does not mean anything,' said Harry to himself. 'Then you think,' said Noah, 'that each of us is really utterly apart from every other human being?'

'Yes, I do!' said Bradley. 'Each of us is alone in his private dream. "*We are such stuff as dreams are made on!*"'

'You have taken Shakespeare's metaphor literally,' said Harry in anger. He had been annoyed with Bradley from the start because he had intruded on his afternoon with Noah. Now he was very angry for this reason and because he took such arguments very seriously.

'We are walking beside each other in parallel lines which never meet,' said Bradley serenely and complacently. 'We never see each other. You would not be made angry by this argument, Harry, if you but recognized the truth that we do not communicate with each other. It is an illusion to think that we do.'

'Do you really think that I don't exist?' said Harry, beside himself with anger. 'Am I only a figment of your mind?'

'Yes!' said Bradley serenely.

'There is only one answer to that, Noah,' said Harry in his anger. 'Let us go away from this dreamer!'

IV

There is a moment in every conflict when an overwhelming urge is felt to resolve it by making a quick departure.

This might be called the Hawaiian moment of every conflict, for it springs from the desire to escape. But it is also a very strong way of showing one's independence of being, which is so much awakened and sharpened by conflict.

The three young men had reached this moment because of Harry's anger. His anger was so great he was unable to

speak. He tugged at Noah's sleeve, to show he wanted to leave Bradley standing there.

The Fifth Avenue crowd flowed about the three young men as they stood there looking at one another. Bradley wore a deer-like look of fright.

'Don't take this argument so seriously,' said Noah to Harry, feeling sorry for Bradley and instinctively against any anger which was not his own.

'Seriously!' said Harry. 'Suppose he said the globe was flat?' This failed, even for Harry, to express what Harry felt about Bradley's foolishness. He tried again.

'Why should we walk and talk to a human being who tells us that we do not exist? It is ridiculous!'

And just then, as he said that on the corner of 47th Street and Fifth Avenue, the green light changed to red and the crowd that had started to cross the street was pressed back.

A pretty young woman who was with a young man was pressed back against Bradley, who was looking shyly at Harry. Backing up as the crowd was pressed back, she bumped into Bradley and shook him.

Bradley was startled. The heavy young man who was with the pretty young woman turned a vague and bilious eye on Bradley and saw his startled look.

'Oh,' he said, 'bumping into my girl!' It was obvious that he was drunk. 'Bumping into my girl's dignity!'

'I beg your pardon,' said Bradley politely and in the lowest possible voice. 'She backed up and bumped into me.' Nervously he drew his hands back.

'I know your kind,' said the drunkard, inspired by Bradley's nervousness and fear. 'You can't get a girl of your own, but you walk in crowds and make believe it is an accident. For two cents, I would break your head.'

Bradley recoiled, paralysed. The pretty young woman grasped her escort by the arm and said, 'Stop it, Johnny, it was an accident.' 'Now look here,' said Noah, to defend Bradley.

'Let go my arm,' said Johnny to his girl. 'I will break your head too,' he said to Noah.

Harry moved forward, 'You won't break anyone's head but your own!' Johnny was taken aback for a moment.

Harry said quickly to Noah, 'This was bound to happen, it was inevitable, the dignity of the external world was bound to make itself felt!'

'You and who else?' said Johnny to Harry. Again his girl tried to draw him away, clearly nervous and ashamed. 'Let go my arm,' said Johnny to her. 'Let go my arm.'

'Johnny, if you don't stop it this minute I am going right home,' said the girl. 'Oh,' said Johnny, 'you want to show everyone in public who wears the panties in our family!'

'Johnny!' said the girl in despair. Johnny replied, 'Maybe you like strangers to bump into your dignity. But no one is going to bump into my girl's dignity and get away with it.'

With a clumsy lunge of his arm, he punched Bradley in the nose. Harry and Noah pinioned his arms, but Bradley was knocked down as they moved forward to stop Johnny.

'Let me go,' cried Johnny. Noah, holding him, smelt the whiskey on his breath. 'Let me go, I tell you!' A crowd had gathered about them, neutral and absorbed.

Harry helped Bradley to his feet, saying, 'You have just been punched by the external world.' But then he saw that Bradley's nose was bleeding and that he was on the verge of tears, and he felt very sorry.

'Call a cop,' said Harry, seeing that Noah and Johnny's girl were having a hard time holding back Johnny. 'Arrest this truculent drunkard!' 'I hate to call in the law of our unjust society, but my mother did not bring me up to be a pugilist,' Harry said to himself, looking about for the cop.

A policeman arrived, drawn by the crowd. 'What's the matter here?' he said, in a husky authoritative unpleasant voice. 'Break it up now,' he said to the bystanders.

'Arrest this man,' said Harry. 'He's drunk and he has just knocked down someone.'

Johnny called to the policeman, 'He bumped into my girl's dignity, so I knocked him down. Anyone with red blood in his veins would knock a man down if he bumped into his girl's dignity, any American.'

The policeman saw that Johnny was drunk and that Bradley's nose was bleeding. He took Johnny sternly by the arm.

'Let me go,' said Johnny once more, 'arrest him,' pointing to Bradley, 'he's a sex-fiend!'

'Shut up,' said the policeman. 'You'll be sorry, you'll be sorry,' said Johnny. 'My uncle's a powerful politician, you'll get what's coming to you for this.'

The gazing interested crowd laughed, and the annoyed policeman felt that he must reply. 'All right, tell your uncle. There's no politics in our department.'

'There's politics in Paradise!' cried Johnny at the top of his voice, and the crowd laughed again. 'Worthy of Dante,' said Noah to himself.

The policeman drew Johnny firmly away, saying as he left to Harry, 'Come to the 49th Street station if you want to prefer charges against him.' Johnny's girl had disappeared.

Bradley was standing against a show window, trying to staunch the flow of blood from his nose and looking as if he were trying to stop himself from bursting into tears also.

'Do you still believe that the external world does not exist?' asked Harry, as the crowd broke up.

Bradley looked at him with a stony desperate look for a moment. His face began to contract as if he were now going to burst into tears. His parted lips visibly quivered. The moment of tears was near.

'Oh, go to hell,' he said, in a voice which strove in vain to sound hard and masculine. He burst into actual tears at last, and turned and left them there, making his complete departure.

Noah, maudlin with pity, wanted to go after him. Harry stopped Noah. 'What's the use? Let him go. He is a ghost. He is lost.'

The two young men walked on up Fifth Avenue, oppressed on all sides by the heights and powers of the great city, the immense buildings above them, the hurrying racketing traffic before them and beside them, the fashionable stores at one side, and the crowd which flowed ignorantly by them.

'He is damned,' said Harry, 'he is fast asleep in the cemetery on Sunday afternoon in 1912, a child regarded by his parents, who are dead.'

'When he wakes up, they will let him stand on the bridge

above the Harlem and look when the Montreal train goes by, below, far away from him.

'But he will never wake up to this,' said Harry, pointing to the great city moving about them in 1934.

PREACH ON THE DUSTY ROADS

BY IRWIN SHAW

NELSON WEAVER sat at his desk and wrote, 'Labor . . . Bridgeport plant . . . 1,435,639.77.' Then he put his sharply pointed, hard pencil down among the nine other sharply pointed, hard pencils arrayed in severe line on the right side of the shining desk, below the silver-framed photograph of his dead wife.

He looked at the leather clock on the back edge of his desk: 10:35. Robert wouldn't be along for ten minutes yet.

Nelson Weaver picked up his pencil and looked at the long sheets of paper, closely covered with typewritten figures, to his right. 'Depreciation . . . 3,100,456.25,' he wrote.

The tax sheets for Marshall & Co., Valves and Turbines, were nearly done. He had sat at this desk for thirty-five days, working slowly and carefully, from time to time deliberately putting down a number on a page, like Cézanne with his six strokes a day on a water color, until the huge, elaborate structure of Marshall & Co.'s finances, which reached from bank to bank and country to country, from Wilmington, Delaware, where it was incorporated, to Chungking, China, where it sold electrical equipment to Chiang Kai-shek — until all this sprawling, complex history of money paid and money gained and credit offered and rejected and profit and loss, palpable and impalpable, was laid bare and comprehensible on five short pages of his clean accountant's figures.

Nelson looked at the leather clock: 10:40. The train was leaving at 11:30.

Nelson looked at the '3,100,456.25' he had written. For the thousandth time he admired the delicate, tilted, book-keeper's '2' he had, early in his career, learned to make. Somehow that '2' was to him a badge of his profession, a sign of his talents, an advertisement of the difficult, rare world of figures, in which he moved skillfully and at ease, turning sweat and clamor, heat and smoke, bonanza and disaster, into clear, rigid, immutable tables.

10:43. Nelson got up and went to the window and looked out. He looked down the steel-and-granite fifty stories to the street. He laughed a little to himself when he realized he was trying to pick his son out of the hurry and confusion of Forty-Ninth Street, five hundred feet below.

He went back to his desk and sat down and picked up the sheet of paper on which he had been working. Tax sheets represented a formal and intricate game in which the players solemnly and conventionally juggled abstractions, like Spinoza proving God, to bring about very real and tangible results, like the great man who in 1932 proved that J. P. Morgan had no taxable income. Once, in 1936, Nelson, in a rare burst of capriciousness, had made up two tax sheets. One that Marshall & Co. had actually submitted to the government, and the other with a change here and there to conform more to the actual realities of iron and sweat than the formal accountant's symbolism of number and deductible percentages. There had been a difference of \$700,962.12. Nelson had carried the second sheet around with him for his private amusement for a week and then burned it, wisely.

This year, with the blossoming expansion of Marshall & Co. for war orders and the increased surplus-profits tax, the difference between the real and the formal would be immense — over a million dollars, Nelson figured. Marshall & Co. paid him \$40,000 a year. He was quite a bargain, he told himself grimly.

10:47. No Robert yet. Nelson put down the paper because the figures were beginning to jump before his eyes. More and more frequently, he found that happening to him. Well, along with the waistline that grew an inch a year and the tendency to wake at five in the morning and his lack of

shock at overhearing people calling him a middle-aged gentleman, that had to be expected of a man who had led a quiet, rather unhealthy life at a desk and was now over fifty. . . .

The office door opened and Robert came in in his new lieutenant's uniform, carrying the rawhide suitcase Nelson had given him.

'On our way, Pop,' Robert said. 'The U.S. Army is waiting on tiptoe.'

They smiled at each other, and Nelson took his beautiful gray Homburg out of the closet and put it carefully on before the mirror.

'I was afraid you wouldn't make it,' he said, delicately fingering the brim of the hat.

Robert was over at the window, staring out at New York, shining all around in the summer sun, with the Hudson a flat, blue highway against the cliff of New Jersey and the buildings piled against each other, like stiff confectionery, in the light morning air. 'Lord, Lord,' Robert murmured. 'What a place to work! You ought to be sitting here writing the Ninth Symphony, Pop.'

Nelson smiled at him and took his arm. 'I'm not writing the Ninth Symphony.' He would have liked to carry Robert's bag for him to the elevator, and even made a move for it, but Robert detected it and switched the bag without a word to the other hand.

In the elevator there was a pretty, dark-haired woman in a fine, severe black dress that looked on her as black dresses are supposed to look on smart women who work in fashionable businesses, and rarely do. She had her hair swept up for the summer morning and she looked pert and sharp and pretty and grownup all at once. She stared coolly and approvingly, Nelson noticed, at his tall son, standing beside him, very slender and straight and self-consciously handsome in his new, dark-green lieutenant's blouse, with the proud gold bar shining on each shoulder.

Robert smiled a little to himself, conscious of the cool, approving stare, helplessly and a little ashamedly pleased with himself for provoking it.

'Sometimes,' he said, as he and Nelson got out of the elevator and walked toward Fifth Avenue, with the woman lost behind them, 'sometimes, Pop, they ought to be allowed to arrest a man for the thoughts that pass through his head.'

They grinned at each other and Robert took a deep, full breath, looking around him, the smile still on his lips, before he followed Nelson into the taxicab and said, 'Grand Central, please.'

They sat quietly as the cab dodged through the streets. Nelson looked steadfastly at the shining rawhide bag. You saw bags like that, he thought, on Friday afternoons in the summertime, on station platforms where people in summer clothes gaily waited for trains going to New England, to the Adirondacks, to Cape Cod. . . . Somehow, he felt, to make the picture complete, there should be a tennis racquet lying beside it in its bright rubber case, and a girl's voice, light and excited, dominating the scene, saying swiftly, laughing, 'Olive oil and vinegar in equal parts and a few drops of glycerin and just smear yourself, darling, every hour. There was this lifeguard at Hobe Sound and he was out in the sun twelve hours a day and that was all he used and he was as brown as the outside of an old piece of roast beef. . . .'

But instead it was Robert's voice, saying, 'Five medium tanks —'

'What was that?' Nelson looked at his son, apologetically. 'I'm sorry. I didn't quite —'

'I'm in command of five medium tanks,' Robert said. 'Thirty tons apiece, with a crew of four men. They represent an investment of God knows how many hundred thousand bucks. And I've got to tell them to start, stop, go here, go there, kindly demolish that hot-dog stand to the left, would you be so good as to put six shells into that corset-and-lingerie shop five blocks down the street. It was easy enough in maneuvers. But in the real thing . . .' He grinned widely. 'The faith the U.S. Government has in me! I'm going to develop a beautiful case of stage-fright.'

'You'll do all right,' Nelson said soberly.

Robert stared at him seriously for a moment, the smile gone. 'I suppose so,' he said.

The cab wheeled into Grand Central and they got out.

'We have thirty minutes,' Robert said, looking up at the clock. 'How about one quick one, to oil the wheels?'

'Is anyone else seeing you off?' Nelson asked as they walked through the dim, shuffling, echoing vault toward the bar of the Commodore Hotel. 'No girls?'

'Nope,' said Robert, smiling. 'Can't start that. If you invite one, you've got to invite them all. It'd look like a reunion of Vassar graduates, classes of '38 to '41 inclusive.' He laughed aloud. 'I wouldn't like to make such a showy exit.'

Nelson smiled at the joke but was aware that it covered the fact that Robert had saved his final private good-bye for his father before he went to war. He wished there was some way to tell Robert he understood and was grateful, but whatever words he could think of would be clumsy and tragic, so he said nothing. They went into the Commodore and stood at the long bar, quiet now and cool and dim in the eleven-o'clock pause before the day's drinking began.

'Two Martinis,' Robert said to the bartender.

'I haven't had a drink in the morning,' Nelson said, 'since Arthur Parker's wedding — 1936.'

'What the hell,' Robert said. 'There's a war on.'

There was the pleasant sound of the ice clinking in the mixer and the faint, strange smell of the gin rising in the empty bar and the pungent, tiny smell of the lemon peel that the bartender twisted delicately over the full, cold glasses.

They lifted their drinks and Nelson looked past his son's lean, well-loved head, capped and young and martial, with the gold and leather of the United States Army shining on it. Nelson looked along the bar into the dim recesses of the low-ceilinged, long room, neat and orderly and expectant with its empty and regular tables and chairs, hushed and waiting for the day's eating and drinking. How many farewells had been said in this room, this drinking place next to the trains that spread out across the whole, huge continent. How many final good-byes. How many last kisses between husband and wife. How many gulped and tasteless drinks, how much shock of alcohol to take the first terrible edge off the pain of loss and distance. How many farewellling ghosts

sat at those regular tables, their endless, irrevocable good-byes echoing among the frivolous glasses. How full the company of grieving leave-takers, each of them tasting death in this snatched last moment over whiskey, before the trains rolled out. . . .

Nelson looked squarely, steadily, at his one child's military head. He raised his glass a little higher, touching his son's glass. 'To a quick end of the business,' he said.

They drank. The drink tasted powerful and rich and burning and immediately effective against Nelson's morning palate. Robert drank with zest, tasting the full savor of the drink happily, rolling it over his tongue. 'You'd be surprised,' he said, 'how hard it is to get a good Martini in the Tank Corps.'

Nelson watched him drink and remembered a day in the country, three years ago, when Robert was twenty. It was summertime and they were both on vacation and had a house in Vermont and Robert had been out swimming all afternoon and had come in, wet-haired, tan, barefoot, wrapped in a huge white bathrobe, with a faded blue towel swung around his shoulders, summertime printed on his freckled nose and the tan backs of his lake-washed hands. He had swung through the screen door, singing loudly, 'Stormy weather since my gal and I ain't together.' He had made — padding barefoot, leaving high-arched stains of lake water on the grass rugs — directly for the kitchen. When Nelson had gone into the kitchen he saw Robert sitting at the porcelain table, still humming 'Stormy Weather,' with a bottle of cold beer open in one hand, with the moisture condensing coolly on the glass, and in the other hand a huge, ludicrous sandwich he had made for himself with two great, jagged slices of rye bread and a quarter-pound of Swiss cheese and two mountainous slices of cold baked ham and a tremendous cold beefsteak tomato cut in three fat, meaty slices. Robert was sitting there, slowly dripping lake water, tilted back in the flimsy kitchen chair, the late-afternoon sun shining obliquely through the high, old-fashioned window on him, the giant of a sandwich and the bottle of beer in his hands, his mouth full of cheese and tomato and ham and bread and cold beer, the

song somehow working out of his throat in a bumbling, joyous monotone. He waved the sandwich airily at Nelson when Nelson appeared at the door.

'Starving,' he mumbled. 'Swam four miles. Got to keep my energy up.'

'You've got to eat dinner in an hour,' Nelson said.

Robert grinned through the food. 'I'll eat dinner. Let nobody worry.' And he took another bite from the monstrous sandwich.

Nelson watched him eat, smiling a little to himself.

'Want me to make you a sandwich?' Robert asked.

'No, thanks.'

'Great maker of sandwiches.'

Nelson shook his head. 'I'll wait for dinner.' He watched his son eat. The full, white teeth shining in the sunburnt face, biting strongly and evenly into the food, the lean muscles of the strong throat, rising out of the white bathrobe, moving calmly as he tilted the bottle back and gulped the beer. . . .

'When I was your age,' Nelson said, 'I ate just like that.'

And suddenly Robert had looked at him very soberly, as though seeing his father twenty years old — and loving him — and seeing the long years that came after with pride and pity. . . .

'Well . . . ' Robert ate the olive and put the glass down with a little flat tinkle that ran lightly through the quiet bar. 'Well, the train's waiting. . . . '

Nelson looked around and shook his head, and the Vermont kitchen and the sunburnt boy and the bottle of beer beaded with icebox cold all disappeared. He finished his drink and paid, and together he and Robert hurried across the station to the gate where Robert's train was waiting. There was an air of bustle and impatience about the gate and a soldier and his mother and two female relatives were weeping together in a sodden mass and somehow he and Robert shook hands and there was a last wave and no words, because they each knew that any word through the tortured throat would bring with it sobs . . . and Robert went down

the long incline to the dark platform below. His rawhide bag gleamed among the descending passengers and he was gone.

Nelson turned and walked slowly toward the street. As he walked he thought of the capped head and the rawhide bag going down the long incline to the waiting train, to the medium tanks, to the waiting guns, the waiting agony, going lightly and zealously and unquestioning off to war. . . .

It never occurred to me it could happen, Nelson thought, walking slowly and blindly away from the station. There was one war and that was all. It's my fault. I had a son, but I didn't take my responsibility seriously enough. I worked and I dressed him and fed him and sent him to a good college and bought him books and gave him money to take out girls and took him with me on vacations to Vermont, but I didn't take my responsibility seriously enough. I worked, and it wasn't easy, and I was poor for a long time, and only the poor know how hard it is to stop being poor. . . . I worked. . . . Nonsense! I'm guilty. . . . I should've been out stopping this. . . . I am nearly the same age as Hitler. He could do something to kill my son. . . . I should've been doing something to save him. I'm guilty. I should be ashamed to stand in the same room with my son in his lieutenant's green blouse. . . . Money. . . . I thought about the grocer, the insurance man, the electric-light company. . . . Nonsense, nonsense. . . . I've wasted my life. I'm an old man and alone and my son has gone to war and all I did was pay rent and taxes. The war was being fought for twenty years and I didn't know it. I waited for my son to grow up and fight it for me. I should've been out screaming on street corners. I should've grabbed people by their lapels in trains, in libraries and restaurants, and yelled at them. . . . 'Love, understand, put down your guns, forget your profit, remember God . . . ' I should've walked on foot through Germany and France and England and America. I should've preached on the dusty roads and used a rifle when necessary. I stayed in the one city and paid the grocer. Versailles, Manchuria, Ethiopia. Warsaw, Madrid . . . battlefields, battlefields . . . and I thought there was one war and it was over.

He stopped and looked up. He was sweating now and the salt was in his eyes and he had to rub them to see that he was standing in front of the great monument of a building, serene and immutable, in which, in war and peace, Marshall & Co. conducted its business. His charts and figures were waiting for him, all the clever, legal, evasive, money-saving numbers that a global dealer in valves and turbines could assemble in this bloody and profitable year to turn over in its solemn annual report to the government of the Republic. Depreciation . . . 3,100,456.25.

He looked up at the soaring, shining building, sharp against the soft summer sky.

He stood there, before the graven entrance, and people jostled him and came and went, but he didn't go in.

MY PUBLIC

BY MARGARET SHEDD

KENCOTT, king of the dunghill; but dungle to rhyme with jungle, the Jamaicans pronounced it. She drove past fast, to escape the stench of human sludge. He had sat on his dungle trying to tell them something, yelling at everybody. They never did find out what he said. One day a deaf man had climbed the dungle in search of food scraps, and Kencott had chopped him in half and then had run down into Spanish Town road and cut off the heads of two more innocents walking by.

Finally they had had him spread-eagled on a coconut cart, eight of them to fasten him down; and they had brought him yowling and still unintelligible back past his dungle, and they had made up a sad song about him and sung it at his hanging. And they still drummed it on guitars along Spanish Town road, or in the little group listening to the blind minstrel at the harness shop. She had not yet written King Kencott's story; there were so many other curious tales to remember and broken fragments of people to dissect.

Today her car hurried by them, casting up the mud and rotten bananas from the wheel ruts. The crowds, which never used the sidewalk, gave her passage because her progress was intent and irrefutable. And anyway she was not spurning them; simply this was the day that she could not think about them, had not time to note the items of gait and laughter. Something more important had happened.

Past Duppy Market, whose compressed hot smell and din made a warp for the shrieks of an urchin beaten. The boy ran shrilly into Woppin Boppin, behind the church of old Saint Jago, a cul-de-sac where ganga flamboyantly circulated, and across whose mouth two policemen ambled sedulously blind. The constables reached the shade of Jago's buttresses, and the boy's screams died away quickly because, passing, she had added speed.

Today had been mail day. Not letters arriving with uniformed anonymity in a box at the front door; no, here the mail plane sang from afar. At the Myrtle Bank swimming pool she had raised her eyes and heart to the stalwart grace of this courier who might be bringing her the message for which she had been waiting. And the plane had brought it: Dear Miss So-and-So, Here is your chance to say those things you have been thinking and shaping, the words that have whimpered in your heart like children shut up in a quiet room. Now you may send out your words to play. Sections 15b and 11 of this contract say that we shall house your words in black and white with a picture on the jacket and that we shall help you find your public. Signed very sincerely.

Very sincerely she had signed her name too and hurried the contract back across the little glistening shore waves and into heaven as deep a blue as joy. And after she had watched the plane take off she had got into her car and begun to drive out of Kingston on the Spanish Town road. She could still see the ship, outlined unfaltering, brash, small, and yet a proper complement to the ancient skies. And from it she too felt winged. How swiftly from here to there saying the eager yes, yes.

Saying yes was wonderful, or the saying of any clear-heard syllable. She had never doubted there were many waiting for her words, who without some incandescent phrase of hers, some precise clothing that she could give their love or longing, would be left with lives not quite lived, gesture in mid-air. Now lay ahead the felicity of speech, and the trust to enunciate exactly; so that listener and sayer both could be requited, the alchemy of human contact set in motion, the mutual flowering. Skillfully threading among the country

drays loaded with khuskhus root and human lives, she saw that her hands on the gearshift and her feet on the floor were already more precisely functional; one foot leaned suavely on the gas pedal to give the car not abrupt hurry but a quickening as valid as growth.

Freedom unfolded on the road before her. The wind whipped her hair out of her hat. The highway was almost empty now, drays, pedestrians had flocked to the market. One young Negro woman leaned against a telegraph pole and shouted to herself, a beauty frighteningly disheveled, challenging pity. But the woman in the car was only aware of acceleration on the open road knit into the heartbeats, into the fine articulation of finger joints guiding the wheel, into the wind that beat on eye socket and cheekbone; and the lone figure against a telegraph pole was at the microscopic far end of a great cone of increasing speed. Bees careened against the glass, their flight unlike hers too slow and out of timing with the stars. In a gully a whole lazy tribe of day moths climaxed their brief span against the wind wings of her car.

She was going to the mountains and she could see them ahead, Cockpit, John Crow, and Moneague, whose pinnacles stood up like lustrous dreams. The air did that, tropical purity and side by that the rain, half-solvent; so that a peak would stride out from the surrounding mist and gleam there as if it were the promised reward for a good life, infinite loveliness habited from the dark valleys below to the top in bamboo, whose moving soft plumes tenderly animated the dark ascents.

She wanted to record that vision on her mind, to reflect on it while she drove; she wanted to see her new joy set like a topaz in the green-gold clarity of the peaks. She wanted to forget the heat and crusted sores that filled the city, a stinking laboratory, a microcosm which pulsed, screamed, surged — and fearsome. In those mountains she could come into serenity, find without effort the first word she had to say now that her chance had come; up there the quiet was so harmonious that even birds' voices did not sound out with startling, piercing beauty. Rather their notes touched the

ear as if some part before and after the heard song will be and was already present, inaudible only because it had melted into the rich texture of peace.

She looked up once full at the mountains, leaving the car without eyes. But she had confidence in herself, knew that now she could gauge time with its crescendos and retardations to the split second, in perfect timing could reach and pass the tangle of lorries ahead. And when she brought her eyes back to the road she saw she had been right in this self-trust; there was no danger for her now driving fast.

The road began to curve against the hills, cutting along the mountain flank. The car roared proudly. She had walked here and remembered the earth odors, always more pungent at the foot of mountains than anywhere else; but now she could only smell the car. Someone had shown her near this very spot where the best withes grew for basketry, down by the stream. She saw the headkerchiefs of market women, who were clambering off the road and toward the river. For some reason against her own apt hands guiding the exhilaration of upward and noisy progress she momentarily set the patient dark hands of the basketweavers in the market place; but the thought of that slow emergence of form and pattern, and implicit in this the silent generations of submissive women, wearied her. Fast up now.

She came around a bend, and the hewn line of rock swept by as true and satisfying as the changing postures of a fast dance. Grace of road's curves derived from the river it followed, and she could hear the water even above the car's noise. It was an intent and narrow stream bringing down the glad spirit of those mountains in which it took root. Soon to reach them now: one great sweep to the ocean and on the other side little valleys underfoot. And now, she remembered, was the time for these to bloom, filling the whole fold of the hill — red lilies. She had seen this first in the fog. She had come onto a promontory of land above the lilies, not knowing they were there, a jutting pile of rocks. That was no docile mist, but swirling wind-swept from higher voids. And then the odor of lilies came up, a scent-mirage untrace-

able, and the terrible coils of fog around her were delicately edged with that tender smell. Presently the fog had opened and given her a valley at her feet, red flowers through the white mist, wisps still wandering among the lower crevices.

Now the road crossed the stream. A bridge came up suddenly ahead; always a sweet and pleasant sight yet not too homely, the nicely proportioned span over a deep river bed and a hut beside it. Just before she reached the bridge a drove of donkeys loaded with water urns came jogging and nudging around her car, and the two little boys with them, expertly albeit in terror drove their beasts against the rock wall. She scarcely had to retard her pace for them. But at the other end of the bridge, as if they belonged to the hut, there were three people in the middle of the road.

There was a child, naked except for a shirt which did not reach his navel. The woman and the man had the distilled animation of having just violently emerged from the house, and while the car approached the woman staggered from a remembered or expected blow, an old stringy woman with big neck cords. The man was one-legged, a stump, a crutch, and a face crossed between suffering and brutal anger. These were the three.

She saw that much from the other end of the bridge; as usual the details of bodies' expression recorded on her mind mechanically, like the opening and closing of a light shutter over a lens. She was not thinking of them as people singly nor as a quarreling family, but simply in terms of her arrival at the bridge. The car, entirely in her control, was going as fast as it possibly could on such a road. She had known the bridge was coming, was not meeting it unaware; but she had assumed that the three people would draw over to the side of the road as the donkeys had. She supposed that the woman would pick up the child.

No one picked up the child. The old slattern stood impaled on some uprush of invective from her own mouth; the woman in the car could see the words on her lips. The one-legged man did belatedly reach for the little boy and almost lost his balance on his crutch. But the child ran straight toward the car.

She did what she had to, and smashed battering into the iron rail, abrading the hills' quiet with crush and crash of wrecking steel, wild protest to function ruptured, a hurtling intemperate finale. The shattering tumult of her car's death came horrible to her ears, strident cacophony of waste instead of the clean upward beat of the minute before. But there came another sound too: the river surging over the rocks.

That was pause, with the water's voice to mark it. And then the crumpled machine, which for that moment had monstrously hovered out over the river, broke one by one the final tendons of the rail and burst its way down into the bed, all in the proper timing.

It struck the dry land above the stream. It was an open car and she could get out; she thought this reiteratively to herself. I can get out. I can get out. But she did not get out. Whether or not she made the effort she was unable to tell; all she could do was to push against a something with the strength of her hands, which in its turn was pressing on her with inexorable weight. She thought if she could get her hair out of her eyes she could see what the weight was, and at the same time she vaguely identified her legs and feet with a pain off key and at some excessive ear-splitting pitch. But she could not fix that anguish in time or space; legs, shrill pain, that was as far as she went.

She heard another sound, a step, pause, a step, pause, and in the pause a fumble. One foot, one human foot approached her. She tried to move her head to see. That was impossible. Her head was whirling elsewhere in space. Then she tried to move her neck, just one deliberate motion controlled; that would be comforting. But she could not do that either. Still the step, the step. Now she was conscious of her forehead; it was that which seemed to tell her of the foot's approach. Her forehead was pushed against the earth, or at least something firm, a pressure that hurt but not with the same focused horror which had now crept up from her legs to include her ribs.

If her forehead rested on the earth then she must be partly out of the car. She knew she must not faint until his footstep

reached her; it must extricate her. And now muffled through a curtain of diffuse but intimate noises, blood pounding and the voice of the river, she heard him directly above her. She must speak to him, tell him to hurry and lift her out.

The pressure seemed greatest against her forehead and eyes; her mouth was somewhat free. She tried to use her lips. There was no sound. Her mouth was full of a foreign substance, blood maybe mixed with dirt. She heard the running footsteps of the woman. Both of them were moving around her now.

'She daid,' and the man's voice came from the far distance of life that was actually being lived, breath, the sunlight sifting through bamboo; and while he spoke a bird sang, a nightingale, a sparrow, a crow — it could not possibly matter what name — but a bird singing. So she knew there was still a world alive.

She determined once more to form a word against the slime in her mouth. Not dead, not dead, she longed to say, but that was past possibility. That involved the tongue in a dozen finicky tricks. Maybe it was her tongue which itself filled her mouth. But her lips still had some relation to themselves; she brought them together and apart, pushing breath through them at the same time. Then she knew she could not possibly do that again. That effort of forcing out breath against the shocking pressure on her ribs was a feat beyond repetition. Now she waited, holding herself from oblivion with all the strength she could muster, waiting desperately to learn whether sound had emerged from herself, and waiting to see if the man and woman would recognize the sound as life.

But she heard nothing, was only aware of clutching, in a red haze, a high rock precipice which at the same time she was trying to push away from her. Finally the woman's voice came to her, very slowly.

'Look, man, she breat'.'

'Na, na, her daid. She bruck 'bout unoo steer-wheel lak chinaman doll.'

Their voices wavered in and out to her, and the time between each word was a burbling eternity.

'You mebbe speakin' feh true, man, but we shoullda likely lif' her out, anyhaow.'

'Noa. Me don' feel feh lif' out dead buckra 'oman. Eh-eh, dis man cain't lif' hisself. Constable him come afore night. Let he do.'

So she knew that, no matter what, she had to breathe again, had to push once more against that load on her chest. The woman had heard her, but they did not really want to hear. That she had saved their child's life was still no never-mind of theirs. They were tired and marred and sick; easier for them if she was dead and they did not need to pull and haul to get her out. Then she knew that breath itself was not enough; a word was necessary. She had to speak to them, they human and she still human too.

The woman was leaning over her, because she felt a hand, a pressure remote but benign along the back of her head.

'Her warhm yit,' and the voice was almost in her ear.

'Feh true, 'oman, dese buckra cold slow. We poor is cold afore daid. Leave she be. How may I, after I hab no laig, and unoo chawed by your belly's fire, lif' off dis ting? Cum.'

But the hand was still on the back of her head, and now the fingers reached round her cheek to her jawbone. The woman's voice was in her very marrow, whether a shout or a whisper was irrelevant and impossible to distinguish.

'If her move or breat' we no can leave she so, man.'

She was buried in a subterranean passageway of obscure pain, but unwavering, unmitigated. Or was it the inside of a whale, surrounded by layers of blubber and hide and hide. The entrails are red and the passageway is filled with the crimson fog of agony. But motion. Under piled crags of sharp rock or under the unbearable load of all the waters of the earth, still she began to think of motion; the beginning of upheaval or the beginning of speech or the day before creation. It was the effort before the word, anguished impediment of communication. It shot down into her chest with roots of fire. She drew her breath from a hidden cavern of strength and loosed her tongue from its cleavage, and she said one word, 'Yes,' bursting it out in a wave of sound, far more than the little word needed.

Beyond that she did not know anything. She did not know how a sick woman and a one-legged man and a naked baby pulled her out of the car's wreckage. Before they were through the boys with the donkeys came, and the market women who had been picking withes. They made a stretcher instead of baskets.

Consciousness came back to her as the scent of earth, the cool night smell of water trickling on a rock, and the smell of ferns clinging to the rock with their small tenacious fingers. She was moving along the road carried on a stretcher. Pain from her broken body drove into her consciousness now, but it was bearable. The road's wall followed dark and steadfast alongside. There were a good many people around her, going with her. The jerking shadow of a man on a crutch jogged up among them. A torch lighted the faces nearest her and all of them were gnarled or weary. The old woman with the stringy neck leaned over: 'You bettah now, missis? Us haste feh reach de city. Speak if you hab need; us can hear.'

CHIP OFF THE OLD BLOCK¹

BY WALLACE STEGNER

SITTING alone looking at the red eyes of the parlor heater, Chet thought how fast things happened. One day the flu hit. Two days after that his father left for Montana to get a load of whisky to sell for medicine. The next night he got back in the midst of a blizzard with his hands and feet frozen, bringing a sick homesteader he had picked up on the road; and now this morning all of them, the homesteader, his father, his mother, his brother Bruce, were loaded in a sled and hauled to the schoolhouse-hospital. It was scary how fast they all got it, even his father, who seldom got anything and was tougher than boiled owl. Everybody, he thought with some pride, but him. His mother's words as she left were a solemn burden on his mind. 'You'll have to hold the fort, Chet. You'll have to be the man of the house.' And his father, sweat on his face even in the cold, his frozen hands held tenderly in his lap, saying, 'Better let the whisky alone. Put it away somewhere till we get back.'

So he was holding the fort. He accepted the duty soberly. In the two hours since his family had left he had swept the floors, milked old Red and thrown down hay for her, brought in scuttles of lignite. And sitting now in the parlor he knew he was scared. He heard the walls tick and the floors creak. Every thirty seconds he looked up from his book, and finally he yawned, stretched, laid the book down, and took a stroll

¹ Copyright, 1942, by Wallace Stegner.

through the whole house, cellar to upstairs, as if for exercise. But his eyes were sharp, and he stepped back a little as he threw open the doors of bedrooms and closets. He whistled a little between his teeth and looked at the calendar in the hall to see what day it was. November 4, 1918.

A knock on the back door sent him running. It was the young man named Vickers who had taken his family away. He was after beds and blankets for the schoolhouse. Chet helped him knock the beds down and load them on the sled. He would sleep on the couch in the parlor; it was warmer there, anyway; no cold floors to worry about.

In the kitchen, making a list of things he had taken, Vickers saw the keg, the sacked cases of bottles, the pile of whisky-soaked straw sheaths from the bottles that had been broken on the trip. 'Your dad doesn't want to sell any of that, does he?' he said.

Chet thought briefly of his father's injunction to put the stuff away. But gee, the old man had frozen his hands and feet and caught the flu getting it, and now when people came around asking. . . . 'Sure,' he said. 'That's what he bought it for, flu medicine.'

'What've you got?'

'Rye and bourbon,' Chet said. 'There's some Irish, but I think he brought that special for somebody.' He rummaged among the sacks. 'Four dollars a bottle, I think it is,' he said, and looked at Vickers to see if that was too much. Vickers didn't blink. 'Or is it four-fifty?' Chet said.

Vickers's face was expressionless. 'Sure it isn't five? I wouldn't want to cheat you.' He took out his wallet, and under his eyes Chet retreated. 'I'll go look,' he said. 'I think there's a list.'

He stood in the front hall for a minute or two before he came back. 'Four-fifty,' he said casually. 'I thought probably it was.'

Vickers counted out twenty-seven dollars. 'Give me six rye,' he said. With the sack in his hand he stood in the back door and looked at Chet and laughed. 'What are you going to do with that extra three dollars?'

Chet felt his heart stop while he might have counted ten. His face began to burn. 'What three dollars?'

'Never mind,' Vickers said. 'I was just ragging you. Got all you need to eat here?'

'I got crocks of milk,' Chet said. He grinned at Vickers in relief, and Vickers grinned back. 'There's bread Ma baked the other day, and spuds. If I need any meat I can go shoot a rabbit.'

'Oh,' Vickers's eyebrows went up. 'You're a hunter, eh?'

'I shot rabbits all last fall for Mrs. Rieger,' Chet said. 'She's 'nemic and has to eat rabbits and prairie chickens and stuff. She lent me the shotgun and bought the shells.'

'Mmm,' Vickers said. 'I guess you can take care of your self. How old are you?'

'Twelve.'

'That's old enough,' said Vickers. 'That's pretty old, in fact. Well, Mervin, if you need anything you call the school and I'll see that you get it.'

'My name isn't Mervin,' Chet said. 'It's Chet.'

'Okay,' Vickers said. 'Don't get careless with the fires.'

'What do you think I am?' Chet said in scorn. He raised his hand stiffly as Vickers went out. A little tongue of triumph licked up in him. That three bucks would look all right, all right. Next time he'd know better than to change the price, too. He took the bills out of his pocket and counted them. Twenty-seven dollars was a lot of dough. He'd show Ma and Pa whether he could hold the fort or not.

But holding the fort was tiresome. By two o'clock he was bored stiff, and the floors were creaking again in the silence. Then he remembered suddenly that he was the boss of the place. He could go or come as he pleased, as long as the cow was milked and the house kept warm. He thought of the two traps he had set in muskrat holes under the river bank. The blizzard and the flu had made him forget to see to them. And he might take Pa's gun and do a little hunting.

'Well,' he said in the middle of the parlor rug, 'I guess I will.'

For an hour and a half he prowled the river brush. Over on the path toward Heathcliff's he shot a snowshoe rabbit, and the second of his traps yielded a stiffly frozen muskrat. The weight of his game was a solid satisfaction as he came

up the dugway swinging the rabbit by its feet, the muskrat by its plated tail.

Coming up past the barn, he looked over towards Van Dam's, then the other way, toward Chapman's, half hoping that someone might be out, and see him. He whistled loudly, sang a little into the cold afternoon air, but the desertion of the whole street, the unbroken fields of snow where ordinarily there would have been dozens of sled tracks and fox-and-goose paths, let a chill in upon his pride. He came up the back steps soberly and opened the door.

The muskrat's slippery tail slid out of his mitten and the frozen body thumped on the floor. Chet opened his mouth, shut it again, speechless with surprise and shock. Two men were in the kitchen. His eyes jumped from the one by the whisky keg to the other, sitting at the table drinking whisky from a cup. The one drinking he didn't know. The other was Louis Treat, a halfbreed who hung out down at the stable and sometimes worked a little for the Half-Diamond Bar. All Chet knew about him was that he could braid horsehair ropes and sing a lot of dirty songs.

'Aha!' said Louis Treat. He smiled at Chet and made a rubbing motion with his hands. 'We 'ave stop to get warm. You 'ave been hunting?'

'Yuh,' Chet said automatically. He stood where he was, his eyes swinging between the two men. The man at the table raised his eyebrows at Louis Treat.

'Ees nice rabbit there,' Louis said. His bright black button eyes went over the boy. Chet lifted the rabbit and looked at the frozen beads of blood on the white fur. 'Yuh,' he said. He was thinking about what his father always said. You could trust an Indian, if he was your friend, and you could trust a white man sometimes, if money wasn't involved, and you could trust a Chink more than either, but you couldn't trust a halfbreed.

Louis' voice went on, caressingly. 'You 'ave mushrat too, eh? You lak me to 'elp you peel thees mushrat?' His hand, dipping under the sheepskin and into his pants pocket, produced a long-bladed knife that jumped open with the pressure of his thumb on a button.

Chet dropped the rabbit and took off his mitts. 'No thanks,' he said. 'I can peel him.'

Shrugging, Louis put the knife away. He turned to thump the bung hard into the keg, and nodded at the other man, who rose. 'Ees tam we go,' Louis said. 'We 'ave been told to breeng thees wisky to the 'ospital.'

'Who told you?' Chet's insides grew tight, and his mind was setting like plaster of Paris. If Pa was here he'd scatter these thieves all the way to Chapman's. But Pa wasn't here. He watched Louis Treat. You could never trust a halfbreed.

'The doctor, O'Malley,' Louis said. Keeping his eye on Chet, he jerked his head at the other man. "Ere, you tak' the other end.'

His companion, pulling up his sheepskin collar, stooped and took hold of the keg. Chet, with no blood in his face and no breath in his lungs, hesitated a split second and then jumped. Around the table, in the dining room door, he was out of their reach, and the shotgun was pointed straight at their chests. With his thumb he cocked both barrels, click, click.

Louis Treat swore. 'Put down that gun!'

'No, sir!' Chet said. 'I won't put it down till you drop that keg and get out of here!'

The two men looked at each other. Louis set his end gently back on the chair, and the other did the same. 'We 'ave been sent,' Louis said. 'You do not understan' w'at I mean.'

'I understand all right,' Chet said. 'If Doctor O'Malley had wanted that, he'd've sent Mr. Vickers for it this morning.'

The second man ran his tongue over his teeth and spat on the floor. 'Think he knows how to shoot that thing?'

Chet's chest expanded. The gun trembled so that he braced it against the frame of the door. 'I shot that rabbit, didn't I?' he said.

The halfbreed's teeth were bared in a bitter grin. 'You are a fool,' he said.

'And you're a thief!' Chet said. He covered the two carefully as they backed out, and when they were down the steps he slammed and bolted the door. Then he raced for the

front hall, made sure that door was locked, and peeked out the front window. The two were walking side by side up the irrigation ditch toward town, pulling an empty box sled. Louis was talking furiously with his hands.

Slowly and carefully Chet uncocked the gun. Ordinarily he would have unloaded, but not now, not with thieves like those around. He put the gun above the mantel, looked in the door of the stove, threw in a half-scuttle of lignite, went to the window again to see if he could still see the two men. Then he looked at his hands. They were shaking. So were his knees. He sat down suddenly on the couch, unable to stand.

For days the only people he saw were those who came to buy whisky. They generally sat a while in the kitchen and talked about the flu and the war, but they weren't much company. Once Miss Landis, his schoolteacher, came apologetically and furtively with a two-quart fruit jar under her coat, and he charged her four dollars a quart for bulk rye out of the keg. His secret hoard of money mounted to eighty-five dollars, to a hundred and eight.

When there was none of that business (he had even forgotten by now that his father had told him not to meddle with it), he moped around the house, milked the cow, telephoned to the hospital to see how his folks were. One day his dad was pretty sick. Two days later he was better, but his mother had had a relapse because they were so short of beds they had had to put Brucie in with her. The milk crocks piled up in the cellarway, staying miraculously sweet, until he told the schoolhouse nurse over the phone about all the milk he had, and then Doctor O'Malley sent down old Gundar Moe to pick it up for the sick people.

Sometimes he stood on the porch on sunny, cold mornings and watched Lars Poulsen's sled go out along the road on the way to the graveyard, and the thought that maybe Mom or Bruce or Pa might die and be buried out there on the knoll by the sandhills made him swallow and go back inside where he couldn't see how deserted the street looked, and where he couldn't see the sled and the steaming gray horses

move out toward the south bend of the river. He resolved to be a son his parents could be proud of, and sat down at the piano determined to learn a piece letter-perfect. But the dry silence of the house weighed on him; before long he would be lying with his forehead on the keyboard, his finger picking on one monotonous note. That way he could concentrate on how different it sounded with his head down, and forget to be afraid.

And at night, when he lay on the couch and stared into the sleepy red eyes of the heater, he heard noises that walked the house, and there were crosses in the lamp chimneys when he lighted them, and he knew that someone would die.

On the fifth day he sat down at the dining room table determined to write a book. In an old atlas he hunted up a promising locale. He found a tributary of the Amazon called the Tapajos, and firmly, his lips together in concentration, he wrote his title across the top of a school tablet: 'The Curse of the Tapajos.' All that afternoon he wrote enthusiastically. He created a tall, handsome young explorer and a halfbreed guide obscurely like Louis Treat. He plowed through steaming jungles, he wrestled pythons and other giant serpents which he spelled 'boy constructors.' All this time he was looking for the Lost City of Gold. And when the snakes got too thick even for his taste, and when he was beginning to wonder himself why the explorer didn't shoot the guide, who was constantly trying to poison the flour or stab his employer in his tent at midnight, he let the party come out on a broad pampa and see in the distance, crowning a golden hill, the lost city for which they searched. And then suddenly the explorer reeled and fell, mysteriously stricken, and the halfbreed guide, smiling with sinister satisfaction, disappeared quietly into the jungle. The curse of the Tapajos, which struck everyone who found that lost city, had struck again. But the young hero was not dead. . . .

Chet gnawed his pencil and stared across the room. It was going to be hard to figure out how his hero escaped. Maybe he was just stunned, not killed. Maybe a girl could find him there, and nurse him back to health. . . .

He rose, thinking, and wandered over to the window. A

sled came across the irrigation ditch and pulled on over to Chance's house. Out of it got Mr. Chance and Mrs. Chance and Ed and Harvey Chance. They were well, then. People were starting to come home cured. He rushed to the telephone and called the hospital. No, the nurse said, his family weren't well yet; they wouldn't be home for three or four days at least. But they were all better. How was he doing? Did he need anything?

No, Chet said, he didn't need anything.

But at least he wasn't the only person on the street any more. That night after milking he took a syrup pail of milk to the Chances. They were all weak, all smiling. Mrs. Chance cried every time she spoke, and they were awfully grateful for the milk. He promised them, over their protests, that he would bring them some every day, and chop wood and haul water for them until they got really strong. Mr. Chance, who had the nickname of Dictionary because he strung off such jaw-breaking words, told him he was a benefactor and a Samaritan, and called upon his own sons to witness this neighborly kindness and be edified and enlarged. Chet went home in the dark, wondering if it might not be a good idea, later in his book somewhere, to have his explorer find a bunch of people, or maybe just a beautiful and ragged girl, kept in durance vile by some tribe of pigmies or spider men or something, and have him rescue them and confound their captors.

On the afternoon of the eighth day Chet sat in the kitchen at Chance's. His own house had got heavier and heavier to bear, and there wasn't much to eat there but milk and potatoes, and both stores were closed because of the flu. So he went a good deal to Chance's, doing their chores and talking about the hospital, and listening to Mr. Chance tell about the Death Ward where they put people who weren't going to get well. The Death Ward was the eighth-grade room, his own room, and he and Ed Chance speculated on what it would be like to go back to that room where so many people had died — Mrs. Rieger, and old Gypsy Davy from Poverty Flat, and John Chapman, and a lot of people. Mrs. Chance

sat by the stove and when anyone looked at her or spoke to her she shook her head and smiled and the tears ran down. She didn't seem unhappy about anything; she just couldn't help crying.

Mr. Chance said over and over that there was certainly going to be a multitude of familiar faces missing after this thing was over. The town would never be the same. He wouldn't be surprised if the destitute and friendless were found in every home in town, adopted and cared for by friends. They might have to build an institution to house the derelict and the bereaved.

He pulled his sagging cheeks and said to Chet, 'Mark my words, son, you are one of the fortunate. In that hospital I said to myself a dozen times, "Those poor Mason boys are going to lose their father." I lay there — myself in pain, mind you — and the first thing I'd hear some old and valued friend would be moved into the Death Ward. I thought your father was a goner when they moved him in.'

Chet's throat was suddenly dry as dust. 'Pa isn't in there!' 'Ira,' said Mrs. Chance, and shook her head and smiled and wiped the tears away. 'Now you've got the child all worked up.'

'He isn't in there now,' said Mr. Chance. 'By the grace of the Almighty —' he bent his head and his lips moved, 'he came out again. He's a hard man to kill. Hands and feet frozen, double pneumonia, and still he came out.'

'Is he all right now?' Chet said.

'Convalescing,' Mr. Chance said. 'Convalescing beautifully.' He raised a finger under Chet's nose. 'Some people are just hard to kill. But on the other hand, you take a person like that George Valet. I hesitate to say before the young what went on in that ward. Shameful, even though the man was sick.' His tongue ticked against his teeth, and his eyebrows raised at Chet. 'They cleaned his bed six times a day,' he said, and pressed his lips together. 'It makes a man wonder about God's wisdom,' he said. 'A man like that, his morals are as loose as his bowels.'

'Ira!' Mrs. Chance said.

'I would offer you a wager,' Mr. Chance said. 'I wager

that a man as loose and discombobulated as that doesn't live through this epidemic.'

'I wouldn't bet on a person's life that way,' she said.

'Ma,' Harvey called from the next room, where he was lying down. 'What's all the noise about?'

They stopped talking and listened. The church bell was ringing madly. In a minute the bell in the firehouse joined it. The heavy bellow of a shotgun, both barrels, rolled over the snowflats between their street and the main part of town. A six-shooter went off, bang-bang-bang-bang-bang-bang, and there was the sound of distant yelling.

'Fire?' Mr. Chance said, stooping to the window.

'Here comes somebody,' Ed said. The figure of a boy was streaking across the flat. Mr. Chance opened the door and shouted at him. The boy ran closer, yelling something unintelligible. It was Spot Orullian.

'What?' Mr. Chance yelled.

Spot cupped his hands to his mouth, standing in the road in front of Chet's as if unwilling to waste a moment's time. 'War's over!' he shouted, and wheeled and was gone up the street toward Van Dam's.

Mr. Chance closed the door slowly. Mrs. Chance looked at him, and her lips jutted and trembled, her weak eyes ran over with tears, and she fell into his arms. The three boys, not quite sure how one acted when a war ended, but knowing it called for celebration, stood around uneasily. They shot furtive grins at one another, looked with furrowed brows at Mrs. Chance's shaking back.

'Now Uncle Joe can come home,' Ed said. 'That's what she's bawling about.'

Chet bolted out the door, raced over to his own house, pulled the loaded shotgun from the mantel, and burst out into the yard again. He blew the lid off the silence in their end of town, and followed the shooting with a wild yell. Ed and Harvey, leaning out their windows, answered him, and the heavy boom-boom of a shotgun came from the downtown district.

Carrying the gun, Chet went back to Chance's. He felt grown up, a householder. The end of the war had to be

celebrated; neighbors had to get together and raise cain. He watched Mrs. Chance, still incoherent, rush to the calendar and put a circle around the date, November 11. 'I don't ever want to forget what day it happened on,' she said.

'Everyone in the world will remember this day,' said Mr. Chance, solemnly, like a preacher. Chet looked at him, his mind clicking.

'Mr. Chance,' he said, 'would you like a drink, to celebrate?'

Mr. Chance looked startled. 'What?'

'Pa's got some whisky. He'd throw a big party if he was home.'

'I don't think we should,' said Mrs. Chance dubiously. 'Your father might . . .'

'Oh, Mama,' Mr. Chance said, and laid his arm across her back like a log. 'One bumper to honor the day. One leetle stirrup-cup to those boys of the Allies. Chester here is carrying on his father's tradition like a man.' He bowed and shook Chet's hand formally. 'We'd be delighted, sir,' he said, and they all laughed

Somehow, nobody knew just how, the party achieved proportions. Mr. Chance suggested, after one drink, that it would be pleasant to have a neighbor or two, snatched from the terrors of the plague, come and join in the thanksgiving; and Chet, full of hospitality, said sure, that would be a keen idea. So Mr. Chance called Jewel King, and when Jewel came he brought Chubby Klein with him, and a few minutes later three more came, knocked, looked in to see the gathering with cups in their hands, and came in with alacrity when Chet held the door wide. Within an hour there were eight men, three women, and the two Chance boys, besides Chet. Mr. Chance wouldn't let the boys have any whisky, but Chet, playing bartender, sneaked a cup into the dining room and all sipped it and smacked their lips.

'Hey, look, I'm drunk,' Harvey said. He staggered, hic-coughed, caught himself, bowed low and apologized, staggered again. 'Hic,' he said. 'I had a drop too much.' The three laughed together secretly while loud voices went up in the kitchen

'Gentlemen,' Mr. Chance was saying, 'I give you those heroic laddies in khaki who looked undaunted into the eyes of death and saved this ga-lorious empire from the rapacious Huns.'

'Yay!' the others said, banging cups on the table. 'Give her the other barrel, Dictionary.'

'I crave your indulgence for a moment,' Mr. Chance said. 'For one leetle moment, while I imbibe a few swallows of this delectable amber fluid.'

The noise went up and up. Chet went among them stiff with pride at having done all this, at being accepted here as host, at having men pat him on the back and shake his hand and tell him, 'You're all right, kid, you're a chip off the old block. What's the word from the folks?' He guggled liquor out of the sloshing cask into a milk crock, and the men dipped largely and frequently. About four o'clock, two more families arrived and were welcomed with roars. People bulged the big kitchen; their laughter rattled the window frames. Occasionally Dictionary Chance rose to propose a toast to 'those gems of purest ray serene, those unfailing companions on life's bitter pilgrimage, the ladies, God bless 'em!' Every so often he suggested that it might be an idea worth serious consideration that some liquid refreshments be decanted from the aperture in the receptacle.

The more liquid refreshments Chet decanted from the aperture in the receptacle, the louder and more eloquent Mr. Chance became. He dominated the kitchen like an evangelist. He swung and swayed and stamped, he led a rendition of 'God Save the King,' he thundered denunciations on the Beast of Berlin, he thrust a large fist into the lapels of new arrivals and demanded detailed news of the war's end. Nobody knew more than that it was over.

But Dictionary didn't forget to be grateful, either. At least five times during the afternoon he caught Chet up in a long arm and publicly blessed him. Once he rose and cleared his throat for silence. Chubby Klein and Jewel King booed and hissed, but he bore their insults with dignity. 'Siddown!' they said. 'Speech!' said others. Mr. Chance waved his hands abroad, begging for quiet. Finally they gave it to him, snickering.

'Ladies and gen'lemen,' he said, 'we have come together on this auspicious occasion . . .'

'What's suspicious about it?' Jewel King said.

' . . . on this auspicious occasion, to do honor to our boys in Flanders' fields, to celebrate the passing of the dread incubus of Spanish influenza . . .'

'Siddown!' said Chubby Klein.

' . . . and last, but not least, we are gathered here to honor our friendship with the owners of this good and hospitable house, Bo Mason and Sis, may their lives be long and strewn with flowers, and this noble scion of a noble stock, this tender youth who kept the home fires burning through shock and shell and who opened his house and his keg to us as his father would have done. Ladies and gen'lemen, the Right Honorable Chester Mason, may he live to bung many a barrel.'

Embarrassed and squirming and unsure of what to do with so many faces laughing at him, so many mouths cheering him, Chet crowded into the dining room door and tried to act casual, tried to pretend he didn't feel proud and excited and a man among men. And while he stood there with the noise beating at him in raucous approbation, the back door opened and the utterly flabbergasted face of his father looked in.

There was a moment of complete silence. Voices dropped away to nothing, cups hung at lips. Then in a concerted rush they were helping Bo Mason in. He limped heavily on bandaged and slippered feet, his hands wrapped in gauze, his face drawn and hollow-eyed and noticeably thinner than it had been ten days ago. After him came Chet's mother, half-carrying Bruce, and staggering under his weight. Hands took Bruce away from her, sat him on the open oven door, and led her to a chair. All three of them, hospital-pale, rested and looked around the room. And Chet's father did not look pleased.

'What the devil is this?' he said.

From his station in the doorway Chet squeaked, 'The war's over!'

'I know the war's over, but what's this?' He jerked a bandaged hand at the uncomfortable ring of people. Chet swallowed and looked at Dictionary Chance.

Dictionary's suspended talents came back to him. He strode to lay a friendly hand on his host's back; he swung and shook his hostess' hand; he twinkled at the white-faced, big-eyed Bruce on the oven door.

'This, sir,' he boomed, 'is a welcoming committee of your friends and neighbors, met here to rejoice over your escape from the dread sickness which has swept to untimely death so many of our good friends, God rest their souls! On the invitation of your manly young son here we have been celebrating not only that emancipation, but the emancipation of the entire world from the dread plague of war.' With the cup in his hand he bent and twinkled at Bo Mason. 'How's it feel to get back, old hoss?'

Bo grunted. He looked across at his wife and laughed a short, choppy laugh. The way his eyes came around and rested on Chet made Chet stop breathing. But his father's voice was hearty enough when it came. 'You got a snootful,' he said. 'Looks like you've all got a snootful.'

'Sir,' said Dictionary Chance, 'I haven't had such a delightful snootful since the misguided government of this province suspended the God-given right of its free people to purchase and imbibe and ingest intoxicating beverages.'

He drained his cup and set it on the table. 'And now,' he said, 'it is clear that our hosts are not completely recovered in their strength. I suggest that we do whatever small jobs our ingenuity and gratitude can suggest, and silently steal away.'

'Yeah,' the others said. 'Sure. Sure thing.' They brought in the one bed from the sled and set it up, swooped together blankets and mattresses and turned them over to the women. Before the beds were made people began to leave. Dictionary Chance, voluble to the last, stopped to praise the excellent medicinal waters he had imbibed, and to say a word for Chet, before Mrs. Chance, with a quick pleading smile, led him away. The door had not even closed before Chet felt his father's cold eye on him.

'All right,' his father said. 'Will you please tell me why in the name of Christ you invited that God damned windbag and all the rest of those sponges over here to drink up my whisky?'

Chet stood sullenly in the door, boiling with sulky resentment. He had held the fort, milked the cow, kept the house, sold all that whisky for all it was worth, run Louis Treat and the other man out with a gun. Everybody else praised him, but you could depend on Pa to think more of that whisky the neighbors had drunk than of anything else. He wasn't going to explain or defend himself. If the old man was going to be that stingy, he could take a flying leap in the river.

'The war was over,' he said. 'I asked them over to celebrate.'

His father's head wagged. He looked incredulous and at his wits' end. 'You asked them over!' he said. 'You said, "Come right on over and drink up all the whisky my dad almost killed himself bringing in."' He stuck his bandaged hands out. 'Do you think I got these and damned near died in that hospital just to let a bunch of blotters . . . Why, God damn you,' he said. 'Leave the house for ten days, tell you exactly what to do, and by Jesus everything goes wrong. How long have they been here?'

'Since about two.'

'How much did they drink?'

'I don't know. Three crocks full, I guess.'

His father's head weaved back and forth, he looked at his wife and then at the ceiling. 'Three crocks. At least a gallon, twelve dollars' worth. Oh Jesus Christ, if you had the sense of a piss-ant . . .'

Laboriously, swearing with the pain, he hobbled to the keg. When he put his hand down to shake it, his whole body stiffened.

'It's half empty!' he said. He swung on Chet, and Chet met his furious look. Now! his mind said. Now let him say I didn't hold the fort.

'I sold some,' he said, and held his father's eyes for a minute before he marched out stiff-backed into the living room, dug the wad of bills from the vase on the mantel, and came back. He laid the money in his father's hand. 'I sold a hundred and twenty-four dollars' worth,' he said.

The muscles in his father's jaw moved. He glanced at Chet's mother, let the breath out hard through his nose. 'So

you've been selling whisky,' he said. 'I thought I told you to leave that alone?'

'People wanted it for medicine,' Chet said. 'Should I've let them die with the flu? They came here wanting to buy it and I sold it. I thought that was what it was for.'

The triumph that had been growing in him ever since he went for the money was hot in his blood now. He saw the uncertainty in his father's face, and he almost beat down his father's eyes.

'I suppose,' his father said finally, 'you sold it for a dollar a bottle, or something.'

'I sold it for plenty,' Chet said. 'Four-fifty for bottles and four for quarts out of the keg. That's more than you were going to get, because I heard you tell Ma.'

His father sat down on the chair and fingered the bills, looking at him. 'You didn't have any business selling anything,' he said. 'And then you overcharge people.'

'Yeah!' Chet said, defying him now. 'If it hadn't been for me there wouldn't 'ave been any to sell. Louis Treat and another man came and tried to steal that whole keg, and I run 'em out with a shotgun.'

'What?' his mother said.

'I did!' Chet said. 'I made 'em put it down and get out.'

Standing in the doorway still facing his father, he felt the tears hot in his eyes and was furious at himself for crying. He hoped his father would try thrashing him. He just hoped he would. He wouldn't make a sound; he'd grit his teeth and show him whether he was man enough to stand it. . . . He looked at his father's gray expressionless face and shouted, 'I wish I'd let them take it! I just wish I had!'

And suddenly his father was laughing. He reared back in the chair and threw back his head and roared, his bandaged hands held tenderly before him like helpless paws. He stopped, caught his breath, looked at Chet again, and shook with a deep internal rumbling. 'Okay,' he said. 'Okay, kid. You're a man. I wouldn't take it away from you.'

'Well, there's no need to laugh,' Chet said. 'I don't see anything to laugh about.'

He watched his father twist in the chair and look at his

mother. 'Look at him,' his father said. 'By God, he'd eat me if I made a pass at him.'

'Well, don't laugh!' Chet said. He turned and went into the living room, where he sat on the couch and looked at his hands the way he had when Louis Treat and the other man were walking up the ditch. His hands were trembling, the same way. But there was no need to laugh, any more than there was need to get sore over a little whisky given to the neighbors.

His mother came in and sat down beside him, laid a hand on his head. 'Don't be mad at Pa,' she said. 'He didn't understand. He's proud of you. We all are.'

'Yeah?' said Chet. 'Why doesn't *he* come and tell me that?'

His mother's smile was gentle and a little amused. 'Because he's ashamed of himself for losing his temper, I suppose,' she said. 'He never did know how to admit he was wrong.'

Chet set his jaw and looked at the shotgun above the mantel. He guessed he had looked pretty tough himself when he had the drop on Louis Treat and his thieving friend. He stiffened his shoulders under his mother's arm. 'Just let him start anything,' he said. 'Just let him try to get hard.'

His mother's smile broadened, but he glowered at her. 'And there's no need to laugh!' he said.

DEATH AND MY UNCLE FELIX

BY ALISON STUART

MY UNCLE FELIX was small and sorrowful, and in Triana the gypsies nicknamed him El Milagro — Felix the Miracle. He moved as lightly as the swallows which dipped in the brown river near the bridge, and sometimes, to appear taller on the street, he walked almost on tiptoe. *Hombre*, he was a great matador, my Uncle Felix, with all his smallness and sadness. But not once did he let me go to the bullfights.

In those years before the Republic there were many great bullfighters: Soldadito, Niño de Aragón and of course Felix El Milagro. I believed that Uncle Felix was the greatest of them all. I believed this with the stubbornness of a child, and my brother Manolo believed it too, although he was no longer a child, but nineteen years old and a *banderillero* for Uncle Felix.

We all lived together in the house with the big court on the Calle de la Buena Fortuna: my father, who was Uncle Felix's sword handler, my mother, Manolo, Uncle Felix and I. Manolo told me that Uncle Felix had bought our house with much money. 'He is very rich, little sister,' Manolo said. 'He is so rich that he could pave the Street of Good Fortune down to the river with gold pieces, shining in the sun.'

I thought that Manolo spoke with some exaggeration. I hoped that Uncle Felix would not pave the street with gold,

because I liked it as it was, narrow and steep, twisting like a rope between the houses. I liked to look up between the blue or white walls of the houses and see the high sky. When the sirocco blew, the smells from the river were most evil.

Uncle Felix told me when I was very young that he also liked the Street of Good Fortune. 'It is good,' he said, 'to live there. It is perhaps fortunate.' We were walking in the spring morning down to the corner, and Uncle Felix held me by the hand. The damp fog drifted along beside us, and no one was on the street.

'You do not think I am superstitious, Consuelo, about the good fortune?'

I did not know what superstitious meant but I knew what Uncle Felix wanted me to say, so I said, 'No, Uncle Felix.'

'That's it,' he said. 'No, I am not superstitious like that Soldadito who is half crazy to begin with, so that if he sees a one-eyed man or a woman with a squint he makes the Sign of the Horns so that he may not be caught by a bull on the next windy day.'

We walked along for a moment in silence. Uncle Felix's footsteps made no sound on the sidewalk near me. I asked, 'Are you afraid of the wind, Uncle Felix?'

He replied, 'The wind blows across the straits here and carries hot, evil smells from the river. On a day with wind, one must pour water from the jug on the edge of his cape and scuff it in the sand to make it heavy. Then it swings clumsily, tiring the wrists, but even so, in a gust of wind it is hard to control.'

'Is Soldadito more afraid of the wind than you are?' I asked.

'What do you mean?' he said. 'I am not afraid of the wind, nor of anything which Soldadito fears. He is only an ignorant gypsy.' We stood a moment on the corner before turning back. The mist was beginning to clear, and sunlight slanted between the tiled roofs. Uncle Felix smiled at me. 'An ignorant gypsy,' he repeated, 'but a great matador — perhaps the greatest of us all.'

At home we met my mother coming out of her small chapel-room. She was very religious, and it seemed to me that

she prayed nearly all day. Her face was as pale as some white flower, and I loved her because she was like a kind stranger in our house. Uncle Felix went to her and kissed her very formally, as befitted brother to sister, before he walked out to the court.

'What do you pray for, Mamacita?' I said. 'Do you pray for me?'

'Sometimes,' she answered, 'when you are stubborn and rebellious. When you splash in the fountain and get your white dress wet.'

'Do you pray for Uncle Felix?'

'Sometimes I do,' she said. I waited for her to say more, but she was silent. Standing beside her in the dark stone hall, I asked a question which I knew at the moment I should not ask.

'Mamá, Uncle Felix will not die, will he?'

'Why do you ask me, Consuelo? Who has been saying things to you?'

'No one. But I think he is afraid of the wind. Manolo thinks that even Soldadito is a little afraid of it, but never Uncle Felix. "Those who are not sometimes afraid," he said, "are those who are not acquainted with death."'

'Manolo never said that,' my mother told me. 'It was your Uncle Felix.'

She smiled sadly. 'Manolo is a bullfighter, not a mystic. Your uncle, unhappily, is both. It is a rare and unfortunate combination.'

She shook her head. 'No, Consuelo, you must not think such things. Uncle Felix is not going to die.'

I believed what she said and I was very happy.

They used to come back to the Street of Good Fortune, my father, Manolo and Uncle Felix, after long summer months of bullfights in the north. Late some afternoon, they came, still in their bullfighting clothes, for they drove all night when the last fight of the season was over, and their gold-encrusted jackets were tarnished with dust, and gray dust was in their hair. Uncle Felix's eyes were bloodshot, and my father's chin was shadowed with black stubble.

I was always allowed to stay up later than usual the night they came home. We sat around the dark mahogany table in the dining-room, and I watched Manolo while he cracked nuts from the bowl in the middle of the table. He smiled, showing his white teeth.

'Oye, little sister,' he said, 'I was good at Pamplona this year — brilliant, the papers said. And Uncle Felix, you should have seen him — one afternoon the crowd carried him on their shoulders all over town.'

'Manolo is good with the sticks,' said Uncle Felix. 'And stylish, too.' He sighed then, deeply. 'Soldadito was in Pamplona, too.'

My father half rose from the table and pounded it with his fist. 'Soldadito!' he shouted. 'That crazy gypsy! He looks like a puppet strung together with wire. He has no style.'

'He has much style,' Uncle Felix said. 'With the straight charging bulls he has a great tragic style like Legartijo.'

'Caray!' shouted my father and clapped his hand over his mouth lest my mother should hear him swear. '*Que va!*' he said more quietly, 'Soldadito is a vulgar gypsy.' My father was an obstinate little man with a rare knowledge of the bulls, everyone said. I do not think that God or the Devil could have made him change his mind.

Manolo said gloomily, 'The crowd likes Soldadito because he is a fool and takes chances. He is a gypsy clown.'

Uncle Felix did not seem to be listening. He looked very small, sitting across the table from me. There was a paleness beneath his brown skin that gave him a fragile, china-like appearance. 'Uncle Felix,' I said. But he only shook his head and smiled with an inner sorrow. 'He is great, the gypsy clown,' he said softly. 'He is most well acquainted with death, and I — I am not.' He left the dining-room without another word.

My father shrugged. 'Consuelo,' he said suddenly, 'go to bed now. It's late.'

I kissed my father and Manolo good night, then I walked reluctantly down the long hall. As I passed the carved door of the chapel-room, I hesitated. Perhaps I thought that my

mother was in the chapel; anyway, I felt that someone was there. I pushed open the heavy door slowly, so it would not creak, and peered into the dim room.

All the candles on the altar-table were burning, and shadows wavered on the walls and over the blue-and-white wooden statue of the Virgin. And then I noticed Uncle Felix, in a dark corner, swinging his heavy bullfighting cape in a slow semicircle around him. His head was down as I watched him pivot on his heels, swinging the cape a little ahead of him, the big cape billowing out in the air, and the candle flames flickering. He turned quickly, bringing his right hand close to his hip so the cape wound high and flat like a disk around him. Then he saw me and stood motionless. The cape fell into limp folds, a lifeless thing.

For a moment I did not say anything, because I had seen him practise before in front of the mirror in the hall. But here there was no mirror; only shadows and the cold smell of stone floor. I said, 'Uncle Felix, how can you practise here without a mirror?'

He looked at me. 'Come here, Consuelo,' he said. The candle flames burned brightly now the air was not stirred by the cape. 'I am not practising,' Uncle Felix said, 'I am remembering. I am remembering Pamplona.'

I saw that his face was white and wet with sweat in the candlelight. 'You would not know from what Manolo says, but Soldadito is a great matador.'

I forgot that it was a chapel, and I turned and spat hard upon the floor. I had seen the Triana gypsies, who loved Uncle Felix, spit when someone mentioned Soldadito although he was of their own people. Uncle Felix shook his head. 'No, Soldadito is truly great.'

'You are great, Uncle Felix.'

'Yes, my little angel,' he said. 'I *must* be great, because Soldadito is great. But I would not be great without him.'

He smiled his shy, embarrassed smile. 'In Pamplona, you know, I was better than Soldadito, so much better that he swore at his *cuadrilla* in a jealous fury. Yet that afternoon I felt death close to me, close to my sword hand. But it did not touch me, and it was neither my friend nor my enemy.'

I did not like all this talk of death. Death was an evil word, and my father and Manolo never uttered it. Manolo crossed himself when he heard it in the street. *La muerte*, why did Uncle Felix say it to me?

'Uncle Felix, Mamacita said you were not going to die.'

He dropped the cape and put his hands on my shoulders. 'No,' he said, 'she is right. I know she is right.' His voice was very unhappy. 'Consuelo,' he said, 'look at me. You must never see Manolo and me with the bulls. You do not know what death is: it is a strange and miraculous thing, and children must not see it. Look at me with your solemn gray eyes; you would not be afraid to look at anything that way but you must not see us in the ring, because then death is a part of us. It has never been a part of you, my little one.'

I began to understand. But I thought of Manolo with his quick smile. 'Manolo is alive,' I said. 'Very alive.'

'Yes,' he answered. 'Manolo forgets death, but I cannot. I am not afraid, yet I cannot understand it, and it is always with me.'

'Now, Uncle Felix?' I asked. 'Not now?'

'No,' he replied, holding me tightly by the shoulders, 'not now. Not now because you are here. You do not know death.' He straightened up then, pleased and a little embarrassed with what he had said. 'I speak nonsense,' he said suddenly. '*Locuras*. Run away now, Consuelo. You must forget all this. Death is an ugly word, and you must forget it, Consuelito.'

'Yes,' I said, 'I will forget it, Uncle Felix.'

I walked out of the dim chapel-room without looking behind me. But although I had not understood much of our talk, I did not soon forget it.

The next afternoon the air was motionless, and the sun shone glaringly on our tiled roof.

It was late before Uncle Felix came down to the court, rubbing his eyes in the sunlight, for he had been upstairs asleep. He pulled off his rope-soled shoes and sat beside me on the edge of the fountain, dangling his feet in the water. We made a game of rescuing some of the insects which

floated unhappily on the water. Uncle Felix was much quicker at catching the floating bugs than I. He scooped them up with one hand and shook them on the stones of the court to dry.

He said, 'The season in the north is all over, and I have only one more fight. This Sunday — a benefit in Seville.'

'Then we will go on a picnic?' I said. Every year we all celebrated the end of the season by hiring a big wagon on the outskirts of town and driving up the river into the gray, rolling country.

'*Cómo no?*' he said. 'Of course we'll go. To the same place, near those olive orchards of Martinez, where we can sit in the shade and see the river sparkling in the sun and the flocks of goats on the hill.' I gazed at my feet, white and wavering under the water of the fountain.

'We'll have more to eat than ever,' said Uncle Felix, 'loaves and loaves of bread, bunches of onions, cheese and your father's favorite big sausages.' I closed my eyes tight in rapture, and at that moment the iron gate on the street slammed, the echo reverberating through the court. As I opened my eyes, Manolo came running across the court toward us, his black hair blowing on his forehead. He was panting heavily. 'I came,' he said, 'from the café. You do not know — Uncle Felix, Soldadito was killed in Malaga this afternoon.'

'Ay, Manolo,' I said, and my feet grew suddenly cold in the water.

'The news just came,' Manolo blurted. 'They telephoned from Malaga. There was a wind. The cape blew against him, and the bull caught him against the *barrera*. No one could do anything — it happened so fast.' Manolo crossed himself, and his hand was trembling.

For a long time Uncle Felix did not speak. His face was more sorrowful than I had ever seen it. 'So now,' he said slowly, 'so finally Death has taken sides with Soldadito.'

Manolo and I stared at him stupidly, for we did not know what to say. Uncle Felix slid off the edge of the fountain, leaned down and picked up his shoes. He walked across the court into the house on tiptoe, carrying his shoes. He looked very small indeed.

Uncle Felix went to Madrid for Soldadito's funeral, which was held impressively in the rain. The newspapers showed pictures of the long procession winding down the Gran Vía, where the fronts of buildings and lampposts were draped in black. It was a great state occasion, my mother told me as she stood at the dining-room window watching the rain — 'Jose Rafael Fuentes,' she murmured, 'Soldadito, a simple-minded gypsy, is buried like a king. Death is a great friend to bullfighters, Consuelo, if they only knew it.'

On Sunday morning Uncle Felix came home because he had to fight in the benefit that afternoon. I did not see him, for he went straight to his room and slept until only an hour before the fight. I saw Manolo, who had also been to Madrid, and my father, and they patted my head in a kindly and detached way. I knew from their sober faces that they were hoping for good bulls. They always hoped for good bulls in Seville, because that was their town.

My mother made me sit upstairs in her room. She said I was not to bother Manolo and Uncle Felix as they waited, silently, in the hall downstairs, for my father to drive up outside with the rest of the *cuadrilla*. I stayed by myself until after I heard the cheers from the passersby when Uncle Felix ran across the sidewalk and climbed into the car. I watched from Mother's window as the black, shining automobile disappeared slowly down the narrow street. For the first time that I could remember, I was afraid for Uncle Felix.

Much later, when the air was cool with the sharp coolness of a late autumn afternoon, I went down into the court. I sat on the edge of the fountain and trailed one hand in the water. Mother was in the chapel, praying as she always did during a bullfight. I wanted to pray that Uncle Felix would have good bulls but I could not keep my mind on prayers. I began to listen for them to come back — so many times they had come back from across the river, with people cheering and clinging to the running board of the car. Crowds would surround the house and climb on the iron grille of the gate like monkeys, while Uncle Felix stood in the hall, bowing, smiling, perhaps pointing shyly at the front of his jacket,

where a bull's horn had ripped off the gold embroidery and made a ragged tear in the brocade underneath.

'Blessed Virgin, make him be great this afternoon,' I murmured. But the words seemed to have no meaning. I felt sad and alone, and my heart was like a stone with all its weight.

Then the iron gate on the street slammed so sharply that I was startled. I heard someone coming along the hall in the house, and the gate closed a second time more quietly. I slid off the edge of the fountain. 'Uncle Felix!' I shouted. 'Uncle Felix.' My voice sounded high and strange.

My father hurried into the court, carrying the leather sword case. He would not have seen me if I had not shouted, 'Papá!' Manolo was right behind him and pushed past us both without saying a word. 'Papá,' I said, 'what is the matter? Where is my Uncle Felix?'

My father stopped reluctantly. 'He's here, Consuelo. Let me alone.'

'But what's the matter?' I repeated. 'Papá, what is it?'

'Nothing,' said my father. 'Uncle Felix would not kill the bulls, that's all. Would not go near them. He was *afraid*. Uncle Felix was afraid.'

'What happened?' I asked, the words sticking to my tongue.

'What should happen? Uncle Felix would not leave the *barrera*, would not go into the ring. He would not listen to Manolo and me. "No, no," he kept saying, and he hid his face in his hands and would not look at us. And finally Niño de Aragón had to kill his bulls for him.' My father's shoulders sagged, but he kept his old stubbornness. 'It was something strange,' he said. 'He will be all right again. Uncle Felix is great — he will be all right next time.' He hurried across the court and into the other part of the house.

I stood motionless, not hearing the small trickle of the water running in the fountain. And then I felt that Uncle Felix was standing beside me. I had not heard his footsteps but I knew he was there.

I turned around, 'Ay, Uncle Felix.'

He stood very straight beside the fountain and spoke

quietly. 'Soldadito was a great fighter, and I also was great. Greater than he, for whatever he could do, I could do it better. I always worked closer to the bulls, everyone saw it. And, Consuelo, he had no respect for death, as I did. He had no respect for anything — not even for me, El Milagro.' His eyes shone with sorrow, and he said, 'But Soldadito has won, because death was on his side. I could do whatever Soldadito could do; I could follow wherever he led with his gypsy insolence. But now he is dead, I cannot follow. *No puedo seguirle.*'

He looked at me; the tears were slowly running down his face. 'I do not want to die,' he said unsteadily. 'Consuelo, I do not want to die.'

'No, Uncle Felix,' I said.

'Death is a great friend,' he said, 'to a bullfighter; I know that. I was not afraid of it while Soldadito was alive. But now that Soldadito is dead, I do not want to die.' He wiped his eyes hard with the backs of his hands. Then with dignity, he pulled a handkerchief from the pocket of his gold jacket and wiped his hands. 'But you believe that I am great, don't you, my little one?'

'I believe you are, Uncle Felix.'

'Yes,' he said. 'It was only this time. I will be great again — El Milagro. It is only — ' and his voice was very soft, 'it is only that I do not want to die.'

I gazed into the smooth silver water of the fountain. Uncle Felix did not want to die, and I wished I were dead. I wished it but I knew I would not die, nor Uncle Felix either, for a long time.

'You believe it, don't you, Consuelito, that I will be great again?'

I did not look up from the fountain. I knew it was a lie as I answered. 'Yes, Uncle Felix. You do not need death on your side. You will be great — without it.'

DAWN OF REMEMBERED SPRING

BY JESSE STUART

BE CAREFUL, Shan,' Mom said. 'I'm afraid if you wade that creek that a water moccasin will bite you.'

'All right, Mom.'

'You know what happened to Roy Deer last Sunday!'

'Yes, Mom!'

'He's nigh at the point of death,' she said. 'I'm going over there now to see him. His leg's swelled hard as a rock and it's turned black as black-oak bark. They're not looking for Roy to live until midnight tonight.'

'All water moccasins ought to be killed, hadn't they, Mom?'

'Yes, they're pizen things, but you can't kill them,' Mom said. 'They're in all of these creeks around here. There's so many of them we can't kill 'em all.'

Mom stood at the foot-log that crossed the creek in front of our house. Her white apron was starched stiff; I heard it rustle when Mom put her hand in the little pocket in the right upper corner to get tobacco crumbs for her pipe. Mom wore her slat bonnet that shaded her sun-tanned face — a bonnet with strings that came under her chin and tied in a bowknot.

'I feel uneasy,' Mom said as she filled her long-stemmed clay-stone pipe with bright-burley crumbs, tamped them down with her index finger, and struck a match on the rough bark of an apple tree that grew on the creek bank by the foot-log.

'Don't feel uneasy about me,' I said.

'But I do,' Mom said. 'Your Pa out groundhog huntin' and I'll be away at Deers' — nobody at home but you, and so many pizen snakes around this house.'

Mom blew a cloud of blue smoke from her pipe. She walked across the foot-log — her long clean dress sweeping the weed stubble where Pa had mown the weeds along the path with a scythe so we could leave the house without getting our legs wet by the dew-covered weeds.

When Mom walked out of sight around the turn of the pasture hill and the trail of smoke that she left behind her had disappeared into the light blue April air, I crossed the garden fence at the wild-plum thicket.

Everybody gone, I thought. I am left alone. I'll do as I please. A water moccasin bit Roy Deer but a water moccasin will never bite me. I'll get me a club from this wild-plum thicket and I'll wade up the creek killing water moccasins.

There was a dead wild-plum sprout standing among the thicket of living sprouts. It was about the size of a tobacco stick. I stepped out of my path into the wild-plum thicket. Barefooted, I walked among the wild-plum thorns. I uprooted the dead wild-plum sprout. There was a bulge on it where roots had once been — now the roots had rotted in the earth. It was like a maul with this big bulge on the end of it. It would be good to hit water moccasins with.

The mules played in the pasture. It was Sunday — their day of rest. And the mules knew it. This was Sunday and it was my day of rest. It was my one day of freedom, too, when Mom and Pa were gone and I was left alone. I would like to be a man now, I thought, I'd love to plow the mules, run a farm, and kill snakes. A water moccasin bit Roy Deer but one would never bite me.

The bright sunlight of April played over the green Kentucky hills. Sunlight fell onto the creek of blue water that twisted like a crawling snake around the high bluffs and between the high rocks. In many places dwarf willows, horse-weeds, iron weeds, and wild grapevines shut away the sunlight and the creek waters stood in quiet cool puddles. These little puddles under the shade of weeds, vines, and willows were the places where the water moccasins lived

I rolled my overall legs above my knees so I wouldn't wet them and Mom wouldn't know I'd been wading the creek. I started wading up the creek toward the head of the hollow. I carried my wild-plum club across my shoulder with both hands gripped tightly around the small end of it. I was ready to maul the first water moccasin I saw.

'One of you old water moccasins bit Roy Deer,' I said bravely, clinching my grip tighter around my club, 'but you won't bite me.'

As I waded the cool creek waters, my bare feet touched gravel on the creek bottom. When I touched a wet water-soaked stick on the bottom of the creek bed, I'd think it was a snake and I'd jump. I'd wade into banks of quicksand. I'd sink into the sand above my knees. It was hard to pull my legs out of this quicksand and when I pulled them out they'd be covered with thin quicky mud that the next puddle of water would wash away.

'A water moccasin,' I said to myself. I was scared to look at him. He was wrapped around a willow that was bent over the creek. He was sleeping in the sun. I slipped toward him quietly — step by step — with my club drawn over my shoulder. Soon as I got close enough to reach him, I came over my shoulder with the club. I hit the water moccasin a powerful blow that mashed its head flat against the willow. It fell dead into the water. I picked it up by the tail and threw it upon the bank.

'One gone,' I said to myself.

The water was warm around my feet and legs. The sharp-edged gravels hurt the bottoms of my feet but the soft sand soothed them. Butterflies swarmed over my head and around me — alighting on the wild pink phlox that grew in clusters along the creek bank. Wild honey bees, bumble bees, and butterflies worked on the elder blossoms, the shoe-make blossoms and the beet-red finger-long blossoms of the ironweed and the whitish pink covered smart-weed blossoms. Birds sang among the willows and flew up and down the creek with four-winged snakefeeders in their bills.

This is what I like to do, I thought. I love to kill snakes. I'm not afraid of snakes. I laughed to think how afraid of

snakes Mom was — how she struck a potato-digger tine through a big rusty-golden copperhead's skin just enough to pin him to the earth and hold him so he couldn't get under our floor. He fought the potato-digger handle until Pa came home from work and killed him. Where he'd thrown poison over the ground it killed the weeds and weeds didn't grow on this spot again for four years.

Once when Mom was making my bed upstairs, she heard a noise of something running behind the paper that was pasted over the cracks between the logs — the paper split and a house snake six feet long fell onto the floor with a mouse in his mouth. Mom killed him with a bed slat. She called me once to bring her a goose-neck hoe upstairs quickly. I ran upstairs and killed two cow snakes restin' on the wall plate. And Pa killed twenty-eight copperheads out of a two-acre oat field in the hollow above the house one spring season.

'Snakes — snakes,' Mom used to say, 'are goin' to run us out'n this Hollow.'

'It's because these woods ain't been burnt out in years,' Pa'd always answer. 'Back when I's a boy the old people burnt the woods out every spring to kill the snakes. Got so anymore there ain't enough good timber for a board tree and people have had to quit burning up the good timber. Snakes are about to take the woods again.'

I thought about the snakes Pa had killed in the cornfield and the tobacco patch and how nearly copperheads had come to biting me and how I'd always seen the snake in time to cut his head off with a hoe or get out of his way. I thought of the times I had heard a rattlesnake's warning and how I'd run when I hadn't seen the snake. As I thought these thoughts, plop a big water moccasin fell from the creek bank into a puddle of water.

'I'll get you,' I said. 'You can't fool me! You can't stand muddy water.'

I stirred the water until it was muddy with my wild-plum club. I waited for the water moccasin to stick his head above the water. Where wild ferns dipped down from the bank's edge and touched the water, I saw the snake's head rise

slowly above the water — watchin' me with his lidless eyes. I swung sidewise with my club like batting at a ball. I couldn't swing over my shoulder, for there were willow limbs above my head.

I surely got him, I thought. I waited to see. Soon, something like milk spread over the water. 'I got 'im.' I raked in the water with my club and lifted from the bottom of the creek bed a water moccasin long as my club. It was longer than I was tall. I threw him upon the bank and moved slowly up the creek — looking on every drift, stump, log, and sunny spot. I looked for a snake's head along the edges of the creek bank where ferns dipped over and touched the water.

I waded up the creek all day killing water moccasins. If one were asleep on the bank, I slipped upon him quietly as a cat. I mauled him with the big end of my wild-plum club. I killed him in his sleep. He never knew what struck him. If a brush caught the end of my club and caused me to miss and let the snake get into a puddle of water, I muddied the water and waited for him to stick his head above the water. When he stuck his head above the water, I got him. Not one water moccasin got away from me. It was four o'clock when I stepped from the creek onto the bank. I'd killed fifty-three water moccasins.

Water moccasins are not half as dangerous as turtles, I thought. A water moccasin can't bite you under the water for he gets his mouth full of water. A turtle can bite you under water and when one bites you he won't let loose until it thunders, unless you cut his head off. I'd been afraid of turtles all day because I didn't have a knife in my pocket to cut one's head off if it grabbed my foot and held it.

When I left the creek, I was afraid of the snakes I'd killed. I didn't throw my club away. I gripped the club until my hands hurt. I looked below my path, above my path, and in front of me. When I saw a stick on the ground, I thought it was a snake. I eased up to it quietly as a cat trying to catch a bird. I was ready to hit it with my club.

What will Mom think when I tell her I've killed fifty-

three water moccasins? I thought. A water moccasin bit Roy Deer but one's not going to bite me. I paid the snakes back for biting him. It was good enough for them. Roy wasn't bothering the water moccasin that bit him. He was just crossing the creek at the foot-log and it jumped from the grass and bit him.

Shadows lengthened from the tall trees. The Hollow was deep and the creek flowed softly in the cool recesses of evening shadows. There was one patch of sunlight. It was upon the steep broomsedge-covered bluff above the path.

'Snakes,' I cried, 'snakes a-fightin' and they're not water moccasins! They're copperheads!'

They were wrapped around each other. Their lidless eyes looked into each other's eyes. Their hard lips touched each other's lips. They did not move. They did not pay any attention to me. They looked at one another.

I'll kill 'em, I thought, if they don't kill one another in this fight.

I stood in the path with my club ready. I had heard snakes fought each other but I'd never seen them fight.

'What're you lookin' at, Shan?' Uncle Alf Skinner asked. He walked up the path with a cane in his hand.

'Snakes a-fightin'.'

'Snakes a-fightin'?'

'Yes.'

'I never saw it in my life.'

'I'll kill 'em both if they don't finish the fight,' I said. 'I'll club 'em to death.'

'Snakes a-fightin', Shan,' he shouted, 'you are too young to know! It's snakes in love! Snakes in love! Don't kill 'em — just keep your eye on 'em until I bring Martha over here! She's never seen snakes in love!'

Uncle Alf ran around the turn of the hill. He brought Aunt Martha back with him. She was carrying a basket of greens on her arm and the case knife that she'd been cutting greens with in her hand.

'See 'em, Martha,' Uncle Alf said. 'Look up there in that broomsedge!'

'I'll declare,' she said. 'I've lived all my life and I never saw this. I've wondered about snakes!'

She stood with a smile on her wrinkled lips. Uncle Alf stood with a wide smile on his deep-lined face. I looked at them and wondered why they looked at these copperheads and smiled. Uncle Alf looked at Aunt Martha. They smiled at each other.

'Shan! Shan!' I heard Mom calling.

'I'm here,' I shouted.

'Where've you been?' she asked as she turned around the bend of the hill with a switch in her hand.

'Be quiet, Sall,' Uncle Alf said. 'Come here and look for yourself!'

'What is it?' Mom asked.

'Snakes in love,' Uncle Alf said.

Mom was mad. 'Shan, I feel like limbing you,' she said. 'I've hunted every place for you! Where've you been?'

'Killin' snakes,' I answered.

'Roy Deer is dead,' she said. 'That's how dangerous it is to fool with snakes.'

'I paid the snakes back for him,' I said. 'I've killed fifty-three water moccasins!'

'Look, Sall!'

'Yes, Alf, I see,' Mom said.

Mom threw her switch on the ground. Her eyes were wide apart. The frowns left her face.

'It's the first time I ever saw snakes in love,' Aunt Martha said to Mom.

'It's the first time I ever saw anything like this,' Mom said. 'Shan, you go tell your Pa to come and look at this.'

I was glad to do anything for Mom. I was afraid of her switch. When I brought Pa back to the sunny bank where the copperheads were loving, Art and Sadie Baker were there and Tom and Ethel Riggs — and there were a lot of strangers there. They were looking at the copperheads wrapped around each other with their eyes looking into each other's eyes and their hard lips touching each other's lips.

'You hurry to the house, Shan,' Pa said, 'and cut your stove wood for tonight.'

'I'd like to kill these copperheads,' I said.

'Why?' Pa asked.

'Fightin',' I said.

Uncle Alf and Aunt Martha laughed as I walked down the path carrying my club. It was something — I didn't know what — all the crowd watching the snakes were smiling. Their faces were made over new. The snakes had done something to them. Their wrinkled faces were as bright as the spring sunlight on the bluff; their eyes were shiny as the creek was in the noonday sunlight. And they laughed and talked to one another. I heard their laughter grow fainter as I walked down the path toward the house. Their laughter was louder than the wild honey bees I had heard swarming over the shoe-make, alderberry, and wild phlox blossoms along the creek.

THE WOMEN

BY RICHARD SULLIVAN

MAYBE night is the time when women come into their power. Men are strong in the bright sun, but darkness is for women. Barnaby thought of this afterward, when he was going to sleep. When he was putting Julie to bed, early, he first realized that he was the only man in the house; and he felt a sudden unexpected excitement even then in thinking about the three women, his daughter, his wife, and his mother: he thought of his relations to each of them, of how some way, with a kind of bewildering rightness, just by the fact of existing himself, he had made these three into a unity which had some sort of strange meaning, some significance so deep and involved that at last it merged into mystery.

He had been disappointed that his father wasn't home. His mother had run out onto the side porch when they drove in the driveway. 'Hello!' she cried, 'hello! *hello!* Oh, *honey!*' He had stopped the car by this time and Julie had scrambled out over all the bags and packages in the back seat, and now his mother was rocking her tall body sideways hugging Julie on the bottom porch step. 'Oh, *honey!*' she cried. 'How *are* you? My, how *big* you're getting!' She tried to get free of clinging Julie, who was squealing, 'Gramma, Gramma, where's Shep? Is my Shep here? I want my doggie!' It was just dusk and he was struck with how joyous and familiar his mother looked in the sunless air, trying to get past their squealing little girl

to them. 'My, my!' she cried. 'You look *good!*' She hugged Nell, who was out of the car ahead of him. 'How're you feeling, Nell?' she asked anxiously. 'You stand the drive all right? You didn't get any *bouncing*, did you — Oh, *Tommy!*' she cried, as he seized her and whirled her around in a full circle. 'You let me *down!* What way is that to treat your own ma! Come on, come *on* in the house! Oh, I'm so *glad* to see you, I was beginning to get *worried*. Your letter didn't say what time, Tom. I didn't know what time you'd get here. I kind of figured for supper, but earlier than this, *earlier*. We're going to have chicken and it's all *brown* now, but you'll have to eat it anyhow. Come on, come *on!* We'll talk while we eat. I've got a girl in to help me.'

The old collie Shep was prancing in slow circles, whining with Julie hanging on his neck, and Barnaby was unpacking bags from the car, and his mother was running on as she always did, her excitement spilling out in a chattering flow of words, and Nell was standing there waiting, looking tired, calling to Julie to be careful of the dog — 'He hasn't seen you for a long time now. Don't tease him!' — and in the dark trees you could hear the birds against all the open quiet, and out on the road the distant putter of a car. Then, 'Dad isn't here,' he heard his mother saying. 'They wanted him out in the country, I don't know what it is out there, he tried to get the other agent to go, but his wife's expecting any minute, she's further along than you, Nell! and he had to go, there was no getting out of it but he felt so bad, said I should tell you how bad he felt and to give Julie a great big squeeze for him, and he'll be back by noon tomorrow sure, he said, whatever's wrong out there!'

He had expected his father to be here. During the hot afternoon, driving through sun-haze on the flat cement, he had looked forward to sitting on the side porch at dusk with his father; they used to sit out there half an hour before supper, talking, watching the sun go down, drinking beer slowly out of bottles icy-wet from the old brown icebox in the back hall. But then this afternoon there had been three detours, and he knew they'd be lucky to get home before dark; and now they were here but his father was gone.

He was disappointed, but it wasn't until later that he had begun to think about his father's absence as somehow emphasizing the women's presence. During supper Julie, who was overtired, fussed and whimpered and then right at the end of the meal upset the glass of milk she had refused to drink. He nervously slapped her fingers; he didn't mean to punish her for what was really an accident, but all this talking and the knowledge that Nell was worn out made him nervous.

Nell got up. 'I'll get her ready for bed,' she said. 'She's out on her feet.'

He stood up too. 'Tom,' his mother said in a low voice, 'I wonder, Greta's out there in the kitchen. Dad always drives her home at night. They live on the Green Bay road, you don't know the family, I guess. Johnsons? No, they moved there since you went away.'

'You want me to drive her over?' He glanced quickly at Nell; sometimes she liked him to help with Julie at night.

'Would you?' his mother said. 'It's over a mile, I don't like to have her walk. It's kind of late, I thought I'd tell her to stack the dishes, she can do them in the morning. I don't usually keep her this late.'

He had met Greta when first they came in, his mother proudly introducing them all; she was a big girl in a washed-out billowing dress; he had heard her moving around out in the kitchen while they were eating.

When she came out to him waiting in the car he was disturbed. She had changed her dress; she was wearing a dark skirt now and a fresh white blouse with a sailor collar. As she stood on the porch outside nodding to what his mother inside the doorway was saying, he, in the car, saw her as for the first time: saw the flaring skirt, the good long legs, the big stateliness of the girl; then realized uneasily, almost with alarm, that she was not really a girl, that that was just his mother's word; she was not adolescent at all, but grown, mature. Turning his head he stared at the tiny darting insects whirling in the white brilliance of the car's headlights; over the low pulse of the motor he could hear the leaves moving in the night wind. You got to a certain age

and you thought maybe now thank God the fever and sensitivity were gone, or at least focussed, you were old enough certainly, and then a strange woman is going to get in the car with you for a mile-ride home and it all starts again, with the crazy bugs in the headlights and the soft stir of the wind and the low steady motor. If she'd been a girl, a kid, it'd be nothing; he was old enough so young girls couldn't trouble him. But this woman —

He opened the car door for her. 'Now you'll have to tell me the way, Greta. It's been a long time since I travelled the side roads around here.' In the light from the dashboard he noticed the blue stars on her white collar, the rounding blue braid encircling her bare firm arm at the sleeve edge. He moved far to his side of the front seat and lit a new cigarette from the butt of his old one. I'm a married man, he said to himself, what's the matter with me —

They drove through the darkness; the fields were sweet beside the road; they passed a low place where frogs croaked; it was a thick night, no stars, the air heavy and tremulous as before rain. Her voice was clear, polite, distant; she told him where to turn; it was only a little way; soon they were there. 'Well, thank you very much, Mr. Barnaby.' She had long brown lashes and her face was plain and pale. Twisting the door handle she leaned momentarily toward him; he caught the faint sharp fragrance of sachet, so feminine, so familiar; then with a little movement she was out of the car. 'Good night, Greta!' He watched her running swiftly over the grass to the small lighted house.

Backing the car around he felt relieved, then exultant. It hadn't been anything. You worried and were nervous and then it was nothing. Attraction, that was all, the instant automatic tug; it didn't have to mean anything; you just ignored it. He had her placed in his mind now, as the trees by the roadside here were placed, known marks against the night landscape, always to be recognized; not strange any more, but known and scrupulously to be admired, at a distance, though, at a distance. He let his arm hang out the car window, feeling the soft pressure of heavy darkness splitting and flowing around him. It was good to be home.

Nell called from upstairs as he came into the house, 'Tom!' His mother was in the kitchen washing the dishes she had said she'd leave stacked for Greta in the morning. 'Hi!' he called to her. 'See you in a minutel' And he went up to Nell in the dark bedroom.

She was lying across the foot of their bed, her legs stretched out to Julie's cot: the smooth quicksilver flow of light on silk — 'Daddy! Daddy!' cried Julie, bouncing on her pillow. 'You have to tell me a story!' He bent over Nell; she did not move; in the light from the hall he could see the moist brown hair curling loosely at her temple — it always waved in the damp weather; he could not see her eyes looking up at him; but the shadows on her face changed when she spoke: 'I'm so tired, Tom. I just couldn't tell her a story.'

'You feel sick?'

'Tired.'

'Sure? Anything wrong? — Be *quiet*, Julie! — The drive too much for you?'

'No.'

He put one hand out toward her: her slim and delicate knees, he thought, this lovely line of bone and rounding flesh. But she quickly sat up. 'No, don't. I've got to help your mother do dishes.'

'You *don't* have tol' he told her angrily. 'Go to bed if you're tired!'

'I want to help her.' She stood up, brushed slowly, provocatively past him in the narrow space between cot and big bed; then she stood in the doorway, watching him look at her, outlined in profile against the hall light, small, fragile, very trim in her coarse green linen but swelling in the faint and beautiful curve of early pregnancy; the light caught the clean straight line of her nose, her vivid lips; she turned slightly and it marked one breast and shoulder.

'Did you have a nice ride?' she asked mockingly.

Nodding he said: 'It's getting ready to rain.'

'Have a good talk with Greta?'

'She told me where to turn,' he said. 'I wish you'd go to bed.'

He sat on the cot beside Julie, who was beating her heels

savagely on the mattress. 'Daddy! — Please!' He turned to her. 'Shhhhh!' When Nell spoke again he was surprised; he thought she had gone.

'Well, she was certainly excited about getting a ride from you,' Nell said. 'The way she talked to your mother anyhow!' Slowly as he watched she shifted her weight from one hip to the other, and the pattern of light on her dress changed. She laughed lightly, intimately. 'Are you glad to be home, Tom?'

'Yes, I'm glad.'

'As glad as you thought you'd be?'

'I don't know,' he said. 'Yes, I guess so. Why?'

'I just wondered.' She laughed again with the same light intimate suggestion of being in on a secret. Laughing she went down the hall.

'Daddy!'

He looked out of the dark room into the empty bright doorway where Nell had stood.

'All right, honey. Once upon a time,' he said vaguely, and stopped.

'Dad-dy!'

'Once upon a time there was a little girl named Esmeralda.'

'Not that one! I-didn't-want-that-one!'

She was spiteful and tired. He looked down at her for the first time since Nell had gone. She lay angrily staring up at him, her arms coming out of the puffy sleeves of her nightgown in sturdy right angles, out and up, dark on the pillow, like a frame for her head. As he bent over her she grabbed his face with both her hands. 'I-want-the-island!' she hissed at him. Under the bedcover she thrashed her legs furiously and squirmed. Head down, he smiled. The terrific femininity of the child! Her small fingers were digging into his cheeks; with complete and angry confidence she was demanding things of him, prepared to be sweet if he was obliging, ready to weep if he refused. My God, he thought, slipping his arm under her, some day she'll get married, some little squirt of a boy so high now will grow up and marry her; I suppose it's all right, there's nothing I can do. Hugging her,

he rocked back and forth with her, remembering his mother hugging her on the bottom porch steps when they came, rocking with her. She was warm, talcum-fragrant, and tiny; she had Nell's fragility. Now she twisted in his arms. 'All right, all right,' he murmured, hugging her, 'I'll tell you the island.' She settled back and he sat up. 'Once upon a time in the middle of the ocean there was a little island, and in the centre of the island there was a high hill . . .'

He spoke the familiar words of the story without really thinking of them, yet hearing them, like someone else's words, a kind of slow murmurous background beyond his thoughts. He thought of the three women, his mother, his wife, and his daughter; he thought of mirrors, a hall of mirrors, down which reflections went glancing in light. Out of my mother's womb, he thought, and felt a little embarrassed; — and then in my wife's contemporary womb I perpetuate my parents. Julie wriggled beneath the covers: bone, he thought, and flesh — and he wondered if the child Nell was carrying would be a girl or a boy. He spoke the words of the story to his daughter, and thought of Greta Johnson: she was in another continuity, outside this house; here there was only mother and wife and child together with him, and everyone else was far off, even his father. He finished the story and glanced at Julie. She lay quiet with closed eyes. He sat there beside her: reflections glancing in a long hall of mirrors, he thought; and, puzzled, he groped in his memory for some faint tantalizing clue, and suddenly remembered looking as a boy, in this very room or maybe in the kitchen, at a magazine cover on which was a man looking at the cover of the very same magazine on which was a tiny man looking at the tinier cover of the very same magazine on which — It was like that now, yes, overwhelming and elusive. He felt a little giddy, yet was pleased at recapturing the memory. It was good to be home, curious to be remembering what in this very same room or maybe in the kitchen —

Softly he stood up. Julie sighed deeply in her sleep. He waited, crouching over the cot-head. Then slowly he backed away. At the door he stopped, glancing at the open window across the room, then went back and gently drew the cover up closer around Julie's neck.

Then he went out of the bedroom and downstairs to Nell and his mother.

They had finished the dishes and were sitting at the kitchen table talking. Bright light glittered on the porcelain table top, but out of the back hall and the pantry spilled the brown gloom he remembered there; and the scalloped edge of oilcloth on the pantry shelves thrust its old design out at him with a sudden urgency: once he had pulled a chair over to stand on to get something from one of those scalloped shelves, the chair had tipped, he had bruised his head or his hand, his mother had rocked him —

Both women looked at him as he came toward the table, his mother sitting angularly back in a straight chair with her hands in her lap, Nell leaning forward.

'Now look, good ladies,' he said, 'I don't want to cut in on you, but you're going to have the next twelve days for talking. It's nine o'clock now and *you*' — he pointed to Nell — 'are going to bed!'

His mother took off her glasses. 'Can't he leave us alone?' she said to Nell.

'Quiet! Quiet!'

'Is he always so bossy?'

'Always,' said Nell. But she stood up.

'I'd run away from him,' said his mother. 'I'd leave him. I'd get another man.'

Nell laughed. 'Tomorrow,' she said. 'I'll do it tomorrow. But right now I'll humor him and go to bed. I am tired.'

'What he needs is a talking to and I'm his ma. Come here, Tom Barnaby!'

He pushed Nell toward the door. 'Go on!' he said. 'I've got to argue with my mamma.'

Nell slipped away from him and kissed his mother good night.

'I'll be up to see you in a minute,' he called to her as she went out.

He sat down at the table; his mother laughed with gladness. 'You oppus!' she said.

'How're you feeling, Mother?'

'Good.'

'I mean honestly now.'

'Sure, honestly — good.'

'Have you had any more trouble?'

'No-o-o!' she snorted contemptuously.

'I'll find out from Dad anyhow. You might as well tell me.'

'Stop doubting your mother! — Oh, I'm *glad* you're home, Tommy!'

'Well, I'm glad to be home.'

'I wish Dad was here. He felt so bad going away when you were coming. Honestly he just did everything to get out of it, but that other agent, I don't know whether you know him, he's a new one, Eberhardt his name is, and I guess I told you his wife is — —'

'Wait, Mother,' he told her, getting up. 'I'll be back in a minute. I want to hurry Nell along up there.'

Before she could answer he hurried from the kitchen. Nell was up in the bedroom undressing in the dark. From the doorway he watched her swift pale movements. 'I'm getting *big*,' she whispered.

'Good reason.'

Mincingly she came close to him, on tiptoe, her bare feet and the flowing ankle-length gown making her seem very tiny. 'You don't really like me this way,' she murmured.

'Oh yes.'

'Well, you seemed pretty much interested in giving that girl a ride home!'

He laughed. 'She's in another continuity, Nell.'

'*What?*'

'She's in another continuity.'

'Well, I don't like her,' Nell said, 'and I never will. She better keep away from you while we're here!'

'What's the matter with you?' He tried to hold her but she twisted away; he caught the fresh bright fragrance of her perfume.

'She's a big dumb blonde,' said Nell; she waited; he said nothing. 'Do you think she's good-looking?' she said.

'No-o-o!'

'She's big as a house. I'd hate to see her if *she* got pregnant.'

He laughed. 'Look,' he said, 'why don't you go to bed?'

Slowly she sidled up to him, very small, very yielding when he seized her. But she pressed him back after a moment. He tried to hold her, his face in her hair. 'What's that you've got on?' he murmured breathing in deep.

'Do I smell good?'

'Umm.'

'I swiped some of your cologne.' Laughing softly she slid out of his arms and ran on tiptoe to the bed, her gown full and floating. He was after her at once, but she lay primly under the sheet, smiling up at him. 'No, Tom, don't. I *am* tired.'

'Yes,' he said, standing over her, 'you're tired. Why don't you let me alone if you're so tired?'

'I'm a disturber of the peace,' she said. 'When are you coming to bed?'

'Oh, in a little while. I'll talk to Mother for a while now.'

'Well, of course, if you'd rather do that —'

'Don't,' he said.

'You'd better come soon,' she said.

He kissed her. 'You're no good,' he whispered. 'I'm going over to see Greta.'

'What did you say about her before? About a continuity?'

'She's not in our continuity,' he repeated.

'Oh,' said Nell.

'But she's our contemporary,' he added.

'Oh, yes!' said Nell. 'Good night now.'

He looked over at Julie in the cot, remembering again with uneasiness that one day she would probably be taken away from him by one of her contemporaries, and there was nothing to do about it. At the door he waved to Nell. Then, shutting it quietly behind him, he went downstairs to his mother.

She was in the front room in the old big chair beside the dimly humming radio. The newspaper was in her lap, and the light beside her was bright; at the window beyond her

he heard a pinching bug bump the screen once and then sluggishly buzz. But it was not till he was directly in front of her that he saw she was not reading. Her head was tilted forward and her eyes were closed. At that moment she looked her age, a gaunt stringy gray woman; from her he got his big loose bones, his ranginess; he looked at her hand lying limp on the chair arm, her blunt large-knuckled fingers with the wiry sinews stretching across sunken freckled flesh. Then instantly her hand quickened; her eyes opened and smiled at him; and at once her whole body was revitalized; energy came from her with an almost electrical urgency.

'Ha!' she said. 'Taking my nap.'

'Did you take your nap this afternoon?'

'No.'

'You wrote me you were supposed to take one every day.'

'A-a-h!' she cried, waving her hand at him. 'That was a month ago!'

He laughed at the excited contemptuous face she was making.

'Nell all right?' she demanded, leaning toward him.

'Sure. She was tired, that's all. It was awfully hot driving.'

'How's she been?'

'Well . . . pretty sick for a while there. I wrote you. She's all right now.'

'I hope it's a boy,' she said, grinning suddenly.

'Yes, we hope so too. But you can't do much about that.'

She brooded. 'Nell drinking much milk?' she demanded.

'What the doctor told her,' he said. 'I forget just what it is. Milk and orange juice.'

'She ought to have a lot of milk and vegetables. All kinds of vegetables, raw if she can take 'em that way. I remember with you, all I wanted was milk and carrots. *Raw* carrots. I used to scrape them and soak them in cold water. Dad thought I was crazy, but it was the best thing I could have eaten. Old Doctor Adamson told me afterward I couldn't have —'

'It's not that it really matters about it's being a boy,' he interrupted. 'I mean we really don't care.'

'Oh, no!' she said emphatically. 'No, *of course!* But still with Julie now it'd be nice if this time —'

'You and Nell,' he said, 'you both want boys. So does Julie, she wants a brother. Me, I'll stick to girls. I don't care.'

'You always did like the girls, didn't you, Tom?' she grinned.

'Sure!'

'I *wish* Dad was here,' she said, as if this was what they had been talking about all along, or was so intimately connected with the subject as not to make any real break. 'You know that other agent, that Eberhardt, I think he shoves off all the *hard* work on Dad. I can't say anything, you know how Dad is. But now you take last month, it was just like this, Eberhardt was supposed to go out to Silver Lake . . .'

Her voice went on in its strong old familiar rhythm; he found himself listening to its sound, not its words. Then he realized that it was like his own voice earlier this night, a background to his thoughts, an unobtrusive steady flow of sound beyond him; he could listen to it or not, as he liked; and even without listening he could be aware of it without any distraction to the stream of his own thoughts. With Julie he could do this same thing, hear her and yet not hear her. But not with Nell; her voice was never a background; you had to listen when Nell talked. Maybe it was something in the blood, the way the blood flowed, the same blood in his mother and him and his daughter. And thinking of blood he let himself listen again; his mother was almost whispering now; she was leaning toward him, her eyes intent, her glasses upraised in one hand. ' . . . and so Dad says, "Well, if the doctor wants it that way why don't you get that Greta Johnson to do the real hard work for you, she's real nice and she's had experience, she can even stay with you while I'm out on trips." But of course after I'd heard about her I didn't know what to do. Still, I had to get somebody.'

'How long have you had her, Mother?'

'About four months. Since Easter. I wrote you when I got her but of course I didn't want to put things like this in a letter. You see nobody knows if she was ever married to

this man, her mother says they were married and then separated, but she never says anything herself, not a word has that girl said since she's been in this house about that man or her having the baby —'

'This is Greta you're talking about?'

'Sure, Greta. You'd never think, would you? But I *must* say, if all girls were as good workers as she is, and so *nice* to talk to —'

'How long ago was all this? I mean —'

'Oh, the boy's two years old now. I kind of wish she'd mention him sometime to me, I'd like to send him something. *You* know —'

'Does he live with her, at her folks?'

'Sure. And the best-looking little boy, Dad says. He sees him sometimes when he drives Greta home at night. I've never seen him. You didn't see him tonight, did you?'

'No . . .'

Just then Julie cried in the bedroom.

'Well, it was late tonight, maybe his grandma put him to bed.'

Julie cried again. Barnaby got up and ran on tiptoe to the foot of the stairs. He stood there a few seconds listening. Another continuity, he thought, she certainly is in another continuity. My contemporary —

His mother clicked off the almost inaudible radio. 'Julie *sick?*' she whispered tensely.

He shook his head, waited an instant more at the stairs, then crossed the room to her. 'She wakes up that way,' he explained, softly. 'I don't know what it is, dreams or indigestion or what. She goes right back to sleep, though.'

His mother stood up. 'We better go to sleep too,' she whispered. 'We disturb her, jabbering this way.'

'Well, I'll lock up and put the lights out,' he told her. 'We'll jabber some more tomorrow.'

She started toward the stairs, then checked herself contemptuously. 'Every *night!*' she cried. 'Every night I start climbing those stairs. Can't remember I sleep down here now!'

When she had gone out of the room he started snapping

lights; he latched the front door; then, unbuttoning his shirt, went out on the side porch and stood looking up at the sky. There were no stars, only a kind of faint low-hanging luminosity. A damp wind blew. He was tired. Sometimes too much happened. He felt secure. Glad to be home. All mixed up and good. Tomorrow have to sort out his thoughts. About his mother and wife and daughter and Greta, yes, Greta. Thoughts about everything, mirrors and continuities. Tomorrow Julie will marry and my father will come home, tomorrow. He shut his eyes and the wind blew on his face.

Inside the house he heard his mother call him. She wants my father home and the baby a boy. 'Here I am,' he called, and went in.

She wore a flannelette gown; her hair hung in two sparse braids. He put his arm around her and led her to her bedroom. She smelled faintly of camphor or menthol.

'Go to bed now,' she told him as he tucked her in.

In the darkness he could not see her face, but he bent down and her groping hand found him and patted his cheek.

He kissed her. 'Good night, Mamma.'

'Good night, Tommy!'

He shut the door quietly.

Then Julie cried again upstairs and undressing as he went he hurried to her.

It was warm and black in the bedroom, warm and black, and he stumbled toward Julie's cot. 'What is it, honey?'

She wailed something wordless; he stretched out his arms to find her in the black room. 'It's all right, honey, it's all right,' he whispered. 'We don't want to wake Mamma honey.'

'Story,' said Julie, and sat up mumbling. 'Story,' she said.

He pressed her gently back on the pillow. 'Once there was a little girl named Esmerelda,' he murmured, 'and she asked her daddy to tell her a story. "All right," he said, "I'll tell you a story. Once there was a little girl named Esmerelda and she asked her daddy to tell her a story. "All right," he said, "I'll tell you a story. Once there was a little girl — "'

He slowed up and stopped. She lay quiet. Hurriedly he pulled off the rest of his clothes in the darkness.

In the big bed Nell sat slowly up. 'Wha's a matter?' she whispered sleepily.

'Nothing. It's all right.' He climbed into bed.

Very low and rich and intimate her laughter came in the secret darkness. 'Silly story,' she murmured. 'Esmerelda.'

She rolled away from him, her sleep-warm fragrance filling all the darkness. Faraway, faraway he heard the wind, and on the roof now slow black rain dropped quietly. Home, he thought, and secret darkness. Then she laughed again. 'Silly,' she explained drowsily, 'same old thing, goes on an' on.'

He felt sleep in the dark room hover over him, soft and compelling. 'That's right,' he murmured to her, 'goes on and on.' And beside him in the darkness Nell laughed with rich and sleepy delight.

THE CATBIRD SEAT

BY JAMES THURBER

*M*R. MARTIN bought the pack of Camels on Monday night in the most crowded cigar store on Broadway. It was theatre time and seven or eight men were buying cigarettes. The clerk didn't even glance at Mr. Martin, who put the pack in his overcoat pocket and went out. If any of the staff at F & S had seen him buy the cigarettes, they would have been astonished, for it was generally known that Mr. Martin did not smoke, and never had. No one saw him.

It was just a week to the day since Mr. Martin had decided to rub out Mrs. Ulgine Barrows. The term 'rub out' pleased him because it suggested nothing more than the correction of an error — in this case an error of Mr. Fitweiler. Mr. Martin had spent each night of the past week working out his plan and examining it. As he walked home now he went over it again. For the hundredth time he resented the element of imprecision, the margin of guesswork that entered into the business. The project as he had worked it out was casual and bold, the risks were considerable. Something might go wrong anywhere along the line. And therein lay the cunning of his scheme. No one would ever see in it the cautious, painstaking hand of Erwin Martin, head of the filing department at F & S, of whom Mr. Fitweiler had once said, 'Man is fallible but Martin isn't.' No one would see his hand, that is, unless it were caught in the act.

Sitting in his apartment, drinking a glass of milk, Mr. Martin reviewed his case against Mrs. Ulgine Barrows, as he had every night for seven nights. He began at the beginning. Her quacking voice and braying laugh had first profaned the halls of F & S on March 7, 1941 (Mr. Martin had a head for dates). Old Roberts, the personnel chief, had introduced her as the newly appointed special adviser to the president of the firm, Mr. Fitweiler. The woman had appalled Mr. Martin instantly, but he hadn't shown it. He had given her his dry hand, a look of studious concentration, and a faint smile. 'Well,' she had said, looking at the papers on his desk, 'are you lifting the oxcart out of the ditch?' As Mr. Martin recalled that moment, over his milk, he squirmed slightly. He must keep his mind on her crimes as a special adviser, not on her peccadillos as a personality. This he found difficult to do, in spite of entering an objection and sustaining it. The faults of the woman as a woman kept chattering on in his mind like an unruly witness. She had, for almost two years now, baited him. In the halls, in the elevator, even in his own office, into which she romped now and then like a circus horse, she was constantly shouting these silly questions at him. 'Are you lifting the oxcart out of the ditch? Are you tearing up the pea patch? Are you hollering down the rain barrel? Are you scraping around the bottom of the pickle barrel? Are you sitting in the catbird seat?'

It was Joey Hart, one of Mr. Martin's two assistants, who had explained what the gibberish meant. 'She must be a Dodger fan,' he had said. 'Red Barber announces the Dodger games over the radio and he uses those expressions — picked 'em up down South.' Joey had gone on to explain one or two. 'Tearing up the pea patch' meant going on a rampage; 'sitting in the catbird seat' meant sitting pretty, like a batter with three balls and no strikes on him. Mr. Martin dismissed all this with an effort. It had been annoying, it had driven him near to distraction, but he was too solid a man to be moved to murder by anything so childish. It was fortunate, he reflected as he passed on to the important charges against Mrs. Barrows, that he had stood up

under it so well. He had maintained always an outward appearance of polite tolerance. 'Why, I even believe you like the woman,' Miss Paired, his other assistant, had once said to him. He had simply smiled.

A gavel rapped in Mr. Martin's mind and the case proper was resumed. Mrs. Ulgine Barrows stood charged with willful, blatant, and persistent attempts to destroy the efficiency and system of F & S. It was competent, material, and relevant to review her advent and rise to power. Mr. Martin had got the story from Miss Paired, who seemed always able to find things out. According to her, Mrs. Barrows had met Mr. Fitweiler at a party, where she had rescued him from the embraces of a powerfully built drunken man who had mistaken the president of F & S for a famous retired Middle Western football coach. She had led him to a sofa and somehow worked upon him a monstrous magic. The aging gentleman had jumped to the conclusion there and then that this was a woman of singular attainments, equipped to bring out the best in him and in the firm. A week later he had introduced her into F & S as his special adviser. On that day confusion got its foot in the door. After Miss Tyson, Mr. Brundage, and Mr. Bartlett had been fired and Mr. Munson had taken his hat and stalked out, mailing in his resignation later, old Roberts had been emboldened to speak to Mr. Fitweiler. He mentioned that Mr. Munson's department had been 'a little disrupted' and hadn't they perhaps better resume the old system there? Mr. Fitweiler had said certainly not. He had the greatest faith in Mrs. Barrows' ideas. 'They require a little seasoning, a little seasoning, is all,' he had added. Mr. Roberts had given it up. Mr. Martin reviewed in detail all the changes wrought by Mrs. Barrows. She had begun chipping at the cornices of the firm's edifice and now she was swinging at the foundation stones with a pickaxe.

Mr. Martin came now, in his summing up, to the afternoon of Monday, November 2, 1942 — just one week ago. On that day, at 3 P.M., Mrs. Barrows had bounced into his office. 'Bool!' she had yelled. 'Are you scraping around the bottom of the pickle barrel?' Mr. Martin had looked at her

from under his green eyeshade, saying nothing. She had begun to wander about the office, taking it in with her great, popping eyes. 'Do you really need *all* these filing cabinets?' she had demanded suddenly. Mr. Martin's heart had jumped. 'Each of these files,' he had said, keeping his voice even, 'plays an indispensable part in the system of F & S.' She had brayed at him, 'Well, don't tear up the pea patch!' and gone to the door. From there she had bawled, 'But you sure have got a lot of fine scrap in herel' Mr. Martin could no longer doubt that the finger was on his beloved department. Her pickaxe was on the upswing, poised for the first blow. It had not come yet; he had received no blue memo from the enchanted Mr. Fitweiler bearing nonsensical instructions deriving from the obscene woman. But there was no doubt in Mr. Martin's mind that one would be forthcoming. He must act quickly. Already a precious week had gone by. Mr. Martin stood up in his living room, still holding his milk glass. 'Gentlemen of the jury,' he said to himself, 'I demand the death penalty for this horrible person.'

The next day Mr. Martin followed his routine, as usual. He polished his glasses more often and once sharpened an already sharp pencil, but not even Miss Paired noticed. Only once did he catch sight of his victim; she swept past him in the hall with a patronizing 'Hi!' At five-thirty he walked home, as usual, and had a glass of milk, as usual. He had never drunk anything stronger in his life — unless you could count ginger ale. The late Sam Schlosser, the S of F & S, had praised Mr. Martin at a staff meeting several years before for his temperate habits. 'Our most efficient worker neither drinks nor smokes,' he had said. 'The results speak for themselves.' Mr. Fitweiler had sat by, nodding approval.

Mr. Martin was still thinking about that red-letter day as he walked over to the Schrafft's on Fifth Avenue near Forty-Sixth Street. He got there, as he always did, at eight o'clock. He finished his dinner and the financial page of the *Sun* at a quarter to nine, as he always did. It was his custom after dinner to take a walk. This time he walked down Fifth Avenue at a casual pace. His gloved hands felt moist and

warm, his forehead cold. He transferred the Camels from his overcoat to a jacket pocket. He wondered, as he did so, if they did not represent an unnecessary note of strain. Mrs. Barrows smoked only Luckies. It was his idea to puff a few puffs on a Camel (after the rubbing-out), stub it out in the ashtray holding her lipstick-stained Luckies, and thus drag a small red herring across the trail. Perhaps it was not a good idea. It would take time. He might even choke, too loudly.

Mr. Martin had never seen the house on West Twelfth Street where Mrs. Barrows lived, but he had a clear enough picture of it. Fortunately, she had bragged to everybody about her ducky first-floor apartment in the perfectly darling three-story red-brick. There would be no doorman or other attendants; just the tenants of the second and third floors. As he walked along, Mr. Martin realized that he would get there before nine-thirty. He had considered walking north on Fifth Avenue from Schrafft's to a point from which it would take him until ten o'clock to reach the house. At that hour people were less likely to be coming in or going out. But the procedure would have made an awkward loop in the straight thread of his casualness, and he had abandoned it. It was impossible to figure when people would be entering or leaving the house, anyway. There was a great risk at any hour. If he ran into anybody, he would simply have to place the rubbing-out of Ulginé Barrows in the inactive file forever. The same thing would hold true if there were someone in her apartment. In that case he would just say that he had been passing by, recognized her charming house, and thought to drop in.

It was eighteen minutes after nine when Mr. Martin turned into Twelfth Street. A man passed him, and a man and a woman, talking. There was no one within fifty paces when he came to the house, halfway down the block. He was up the steps and in the small vestibule in no time, pressing the bell under the card that said 'Mrs. Ulginé Barrows.' When the clicking in the lock started, he jumped forward against the door. He got inside fast, closing the door behind

him. A bulb in a lantern hung from the hall ceiling on a chain seemed to give a monstrosly bright light. There was nobody on the stair, which went up ahead of him along the left wall. A door opened down the hall in the wall on the right. He went toward it swiftly, on tiptoe.

'Well, for God's sake, look who's here!' bawled Mrs. Barrows, and her braying laugh rang out like the report of a shotgun. He rushed past her like a football tackle, bumping her. 'Hey, quit shoving!' she said, closing the door behind them. They were in her living room, which seemed to Mr. Martin to be lighted by a hundred lamps. 'What's after you?' she said. 'You're as jumpy as a goat.' He found he was unable to speak. His heart was wheezing in his throat. 'I — yes,' he finally brought out. She was jabbering and laughing as she started to help him off with his coat. 'No, no,' he said. 'I'll put it here.' He took it off and put it on a chair near the door. 'Your hat and gloves, too,' she said. 'You're in a lady's house.' He put his hat on top of the coat. Mrs. Barrows seemed larger than he had thought. He kept his gloves on. 'I was passing by,' he said. 'I recognized — is there anyone here?' She laughed louder than ever. 'No,' she said, 'we're all alone. You're as white as a sheet, you funny man. Whatever *has* come over you? I'll mix you a toddy.' She started toward a door across the room. 'Scotch-and-soda be all right? But say, you don't drink, do you?' She turned and gave him her amused look. Mr. Martin pulled himself together. 'Scotch-and-soda will be all right,' he heard himself say. He could hear her laughing in the kitchen.

Mr. Martin looked quickly around the living room for the weapon. He had counted on finding one there. There were andirons and a poker and something in a corner that looked like an Indian club. None of them would do. It couldn't be that way. He began to pace around. He came to a desk. On it lay a metal paper knife with an ornate handle. Would it be sharp enough? He reached for it and knocked over a small brass jar. Stamps spilled out of it and it fell to the floor with a clatter. 'Hey,' Mrs. Barrows yelled from the kitchen, 'are you tearing up the pea patch?' Mr. Martin gave a strange laugh. Picking up the knife, he tried

its point against his left wrist. It was blunt. It wouldn't do

When Mrs. Barrows reappeared, carrying two highballs, Mr. Martin, standing there with his gloves on, became acutely conscious of the fantasy he had wrought. Cigarettes in his pocket, a drink prepared for him — it was all too grossly improbable. It was more than that; it was impossible. Somewhere in the back of his mind a vague idea stirred, sprouted. 'For heaven's sake, take off those gloves,' said Mrs. Barrows. 'I always wear them in the house,' said Mr. Martin. The idea began to bloom, strange and wonderful. She put the glasses on a coffee table in front of a sofa and sat on the sofa. 'Come over here, you odd little man,' she said. Mr. Martin went over and sat beside her. It was difficult getting a cigarette out of the pack of Camels, but he managed it. She held a match for him, laughing. 'Well,' she said, handing him his drink, 'this is perfectly marvellous. You with a drink and a cigarette.'

Mr. Martin puffed, not too awkwardly, and took a gulp of the highball. 'I drink and smoke all the time,' he said. He clinked his glass against hers. 'Here's nuts to that old wind-bag, Fitweiler,' he said, and gulped again. The stuff tasted awful, but he made no grimace. 'Really, Mr. Martin,' she said, her voice and posture changing, 'you are insulting our employer.' Mrs. Barrows was now all special adviser to the president. 'I am preparing a bomb,' said Mr. Martin, 'which will blow the old goat higher than hell.' He had only had a little of the drink, which was not strong. It couldn't be that. 'Do you take dope or something?' Mrs. Barrows asked coldly. 'Heroin,' said Mr. Martin. 'I'll be coked to the gills when I bump that old buzzard off.' 'Mr. Martin!' she shouted, getting to her feet. 'That will be all of that. You must go at once.' Mr. Martin took another swallow of his drink. He tapped his cigarette out in the ashtray and put the pack of Camels on the coffee table. Then he got up. She stood glaring at him. He walked over and put on his hat and coat. 'Not a word about this,' he said, and laid an index finger against his lips. All Mrs. Barrows could bring out was 'Really!' Mr. Martin put his hand on the doorknob. 'I'm

sitting in the catbird seat,' he said. He stuck his tongue out at her and left. Nobody saw him go.

Mr. Martin got to his apartment, walking, well before eleven. No one saw him go in. He had two glasses of milk after brushing his teeth, and he felt elated. It wasn't tipsiness, because he hadn't been tipsy. Anyway, the walk had worn off all effects of the whiskey. He got in bed and read a magazine for a while. He was asleep before midnight.

Mr. Martin got to the office at eight-thirty the next morning, as usual. At a quarter to nine, Ulgine Barrows, who had never before arrived at work before ten, swept into his office. 'I'm reporting to Mr. Fitweiler now!' she shouted. 'If he turns you over to the police, it's no more than you deserve!' Mr. Martin gave her a look of shocked surprise. 'I beg your pardon?' he said. Mrs. Barrows snorted and bounced out of the room, leaving Miss Paired and Joey Hart staring after her. 'What's the matter with that old devil now?' asked Miss Paired. 'I have no idea,' said Mr. Martin, resuming his work. The other two looked at him and then at each other. Miss Paired got up and went out. She walked slowly past the closed door of Mr. Fitweiler's office. Mrs. Barrows was yelling inside, but she was not braying. Miss Paired could not hear what the woman was saying. She went back to her desk.

Forty-five minutes later, Mrs. Barrows left the president's office and went into her own, shutting the door. It wasn't until half an hour later that Mr. Fitweiler sent for Mr. Martin. The head of the filing department, neat, quiet, attentive, stood in front of the old man's desk. Mr. Fitweiler was pale and nervous. He took his glasses off and twiddled them. He made a small, bruffing sound in his throat. 'Martin,' he said, 'you have been with us more than twenty years.' 'Twenty-two, sir,' said Mr. Martin. 'In that time,' pursued the president, 'your work and your — uh — manner have been exemplary.' 'I trust so, sir,' said Mr. Martin. 'I have understood, Martin,' said Mr. Fitweiler, 'that you have never taken a drink or smoked.' 'That is correct, sir,' said Mr. Martin. 'Ah, yes.' Mr. Fitweiler polished his glasses. 'You may describe what you did after leaving the office yesterday, Mar-

tin,' he said. Mr. Martin allowed less than a second for his bewildered pause. 'Certainly, sir,' he said. 'I walked some. Then I went to Schrafft's for dinner. Afterward I walked home again. I went to bed early, sir, and read a magazine for a while. I was asleep before eleven.' 'Ah, yes,' said Mr. Fitweiler again. He was silent for a moment, searching for the proper words to say to the head of the filing department. 'Mrs. Barrows,' he said finally, 'Mrs. Barrows has worked hard, Martin, very hard. It grieves me to report that she has suffered a severe breakdown. It has taken the form of a persecution complex accompanied by distressing hallucinations.' 'I am very sorry, sir,' said Mr. Martin. 'Mrs. Barrows is under the delusion,' continued Mr. Fitweiler, 'that you visited her last evening and behaved yourself in an — uh — unseemly manner.' He raised his hand to silence Mr. Martin's little pained outcry. 'It is the nature of these psychological diseases,' Mr. Fitweiler said, 'to fix upon the least likely and most innocent party as the — uh — source of persecution. These matters are not for the lay mind to grasp, Martin. I've just had my psychiatrist, Doctor Fitch, on the phone. He would not, of course, commit himself, but he made enough generalizations to substantiate my suspicions. I suggested to Mrs. Barrows, when she had completed her — uh — story to me this morning, that she visit Doctor Fitch, for I suspected a condition at once. She flew, I regret to say, into a rage, and demanded — uh — requested that I call you on the carpet. You may not know, Martin, but Mrs. Barrows had planned a reorganization of your department — subject to my approval, of course, subject to my approval. This brought you, rather than anyone else, to her mind — but again that is a phenomenon for Doctor Fitch and not for us. So, Martin, I am afraid Mrs. Barrows' usefulness here is at an end.' 'I am dreadfully sorry, sir,' said Mr. Martin.

It was at this point that the door to the office blew open with the suddenness of a gas-main explosion and Mrs. Barrows catapulted through it. 'Is the little rat denying it?' she screamed. 'He can't get away with that!' Mr. Martin got up and moved discreetly to a point beside Mr. Fitweiler's chair. 'You drank and smoked at my apartment,' she bawled at Mr.

Martin, 'and you know it! You called Mr. Fitweiler an old windbag and said you were going to blow him up when you got coked to the gills on your heroin!' She stopped yelling to catch her breath and a new glint came into her popping eyes. 'If you weren't such a drab, ordinary little man,' she said, 'I'd think you'd planned it all. Sticking your tongue out, saying you were sitting in the catbird seat, because you thought no one would believe me when I told it! My God, it's really too perfect!' She brayed loudly and hysterically, and the fury was on her again. She glared at Mr. Fitweiler. 'Can't you see how he has tricked us, you old fool? Can't you see his little game?' But Mr. Fitweiler had been surreptitiously pressing all the buttons under the top of his desk and employees of F & S began pouring into the room. 'Stockton,' said Mr. Fitweiler, 'you and Fishbein will take Mrs. Barrows to her home. Mrs. Powell, you will go with them.' Stockton, who had played a little football in high school, blocked Mrs. Barrows as she made for Mr. Martin. It took him and Fishbein together to force her out of the door into the hall, crowded with stenographers and office boys. She was still screaming imprecations at Mr. Martin, tangled and contradictory imprecations. The hubbub finally died out down the corridor.

'I regret that this has happened,' said Mr. Fitweiler. 'I shall ask you to dismiss it from your mind, Martin.' 'Yes, sir,' said Mr. Martin, anticipating his chief's 'That will be all' by moving to the door. 'I will dismiss it.' He went out and shut the door, and his step was light and quick in the hall. When he entered his department he had slowed down to his customary gait, and he walked quietly across the room to the W20 file, wearing a look of studious concentration.

HOMECOMING

BY JESSIE TREICHLER

*W*E'RE almost to Cottonwood, Ma'am,' the conductor said in Cora's ear. 'You wanted me to tell you.'

Cora Gray nodded. She was too tired after the long trip from Iowa to Montana by day coach with three children even to smile at him. She looked out the window at the flat, sagebrush-studded, coulee-scarred country of eastern Montana, bright and dry beneath the late August sun, and tried to realize that in this land would be their new home.

It was so different from the oak-topped knolls of the country she had known that she could in no way identify herself with it. It was a land of brown and gray and white with no green to relieve its glare. Light-brown tufts of grass pushed up from parched brown earth. Parched brown earth was cut through by coulees of still deeper brown, with bits of mica sparkling on their dry banks. Stretches of dead-white alkali land where nothing grew made the glare from the sun more intense. Greenish-gray sagebrush was everywhere — an ugly weed, thought Cora. Cacti — mean, stunted plants that clung tightly to the unsustaining earth and rocks — were almost as plentiful as the bushes of sage.

Cora turned away from the window to meet the gaze of her oldest child, a quiet, thin-faced boy of twelve with her own gray eyes.

'Joe, we're almost to Cottonwood. You wrap up that lunch

box, and pick up the children's books and crayons and put them in that basket. Help Barbie into her coat.'

Joe shut his book resignedly and turned to his dark and scowling five-year old sister. 'Here we are, Sis. We're going to see Papa in just a few minutes.'

Barbie showed no signs of pleasure. 'You said there'd be lots of Indians in Montana, and we haven't seen a one yet. You told a big fib, Joe.'

Cora leaned over her other son, Jeff, the baby of the family. While Cora patted and shook him into unhappy consciousness, she handed articles of clothing and baggage to Joe to assemble on the seat across the aisle, mentally checked the things they had brought with them, sighed over the things they had left behind, and worried over whether the dishes and bedding sent ahead had arrived.

Cora had thought it was a wild and foolish thing Will Gray was doing when he decided to leave their home and relatives in southeastern Iowa to go to Montana. She had felt a sense of insecurity from that first winter night in 1908 when he came home with a newspaper telling about the thousands of Easterners pouring into Montana to prove up on dry land farms.

'It says the great cattle days are over, but there's still a great new land out there, Cora,' he had said. 'It's got room — lots of room — room fer us. Room fer the kids. Room fer cattle and sheep and wheat. My own belief is that it says right.'

She had made her only remonstrance, that a faint one. 'You're a carpenter, Will, not a farmer.'

'Hell, Cora, farmers need carpenters. All those people — they ain't a-goin' t' live out there long without needin' houses and banks and schools. Then there's this new railroad — the Milwaukee. It'll soon be finished — right across the state. Wherever it touches, towns'll spring up like toadstools. We'll follow it clear across Montana. Maybe clear t' the Pacific Ocean. There'll be more carpenter work than a man ever saw before. And maybe I won't be just a carpenter out there. Maybe I'll hire men t' work for me and be the boss. The country's big. The country's free. No tellin' what'll

happen if you git in on the ground floor. Why God-dammit, Cora, I see it all just as clear as if it was right here in this room. We gotta go.'

When Will swore like that, Cora knew he was in earnest. Besides he was twelve years older than she was, and she always felt presumptuous when she questioned anything he wanted to do. She had had some normal-school education and had taught a country school, and he had gone through country school only; yet she felt no superiority because of her better education. Cora believed that an education was only as good as the man who received it, and never questioned Will's decisions because of the grammar in which they were phrased.

So he had told her farewell and had gone out to Montana to follow a railroad across its great length, and, as he predicted, he had found all the work he could do. He had become a contractor instead of a carpenter, and bid on buildings, and bossed their erection. He had just completed a depot, he wrote her; then he had built a saloon; soon he would be working on a bank. He had teamsters and lathers and bricklayers working under him. But he had no capacity for putting aside money, when the building was booming, for the long winter months when the thermometer was at thirty-five below and no work could be done. He had sent Cora large sums during the summer months, and her heart had bloomed; but long winter months had used up the summer's money. And another summer had had to be worked through before he could save this stake which now brought his family to him. All these things Cora turned over in her mind as she buttoned her two-year-old son into clean rompers, combed her daughter's hair, settled the navy blue sailor on her own light brown hair, and lifted bags down from the hat rack and pulled them out from under the seat. The conductor came and helped Joe move them to the door. The train began to slow down. She saw Will's big, slightly stooped figure on the platform, his hat off, the gray strands in his black hair gleaming in the blistering sun. She pressed her quivering lips and lifted Jeff to her.

'Joe, take Barbie's hand, and don't let her fall going down

the steps. Barbie, you kiss your father even if he isn't an Indian.'

Cora's fatigue didn't leave her as Will gathered her into his arms; it was too deep for that; but the fear went from her, and was replaced by a deep feeling of peace. At last she was here, with Will; and everything would be all right. Jeff started to whimper, and they both realized for the first time that she was still holding him. Will swung Jeff to his own shoulder, but kept one arm about Cora.

'I'd forgotten how little and pretty you are!' he exclaimed with pleasure.

He turned to the man in overalls lounging beside a team and wagon.

'Jim, you take these here suitcases and things up t' my house, will you? Cora, this is Jim Shaw who does all our draying around these parts. Jim, this is Mrs. Gray.'

'I'm mighty pleased t' meet yuh, Mrs. Gray. Bill here's sure had ants in his pants these last few weeks he's bin so scairt he wouldn't git that house ready fer yuh t' move in — ' Shaw broke off in a high cackle, rather red in the face and breathless from performing his social duty.

'How do you do,' Cora said politely. Then she turned to Will with shining eyes. 'Will, you built a house for us!'

Will blushed. 'No, not exactly — No. I bought one and fixed it up a little.'

'You're jest lucky you come when you did, Mrs. Gray,' Shaw said importantly. 'I reckon you'd 'a slep' in a tent or been et up with bedbugs in the Comfort Inn. This house you got was vacated jest in time. Mighty important vacatin' too!'

Will interrupted him, friendly but firm. 'You'll be wantin' t' take up them barrels of dishes and things in the freight shed, too, Jim. I reckon they'd better go up now. You drop by the job, and I'll pay you what I owe you. Much obliged. Well, so long, Jim.'

'So long, Bill. Mighty glad I met yuh, Mrs. Gray.'

'Thank you. I'm glad I met you, too.' Cora smiled shyly at the red-faced man, wanting to make friends with anyone who called her husband 'Bill.'

'My, he's friendly, Will. It's nice he could take our things right up that way.'

'Yeah, he's all right. But he talks too much.'

'What did he mean about the house, Will?'

''Twas the only one in town, Cora, and we're lucky to git it. I never would 'a got time t' build one. You know the old sayin' about the shoemaker's children goin' barefoot. Well, that's me all right, right now.'

'Well, I don't care what kind of a house it is. It'll be home. He said it was a mighty important vacating —'

'I told you he talks too much. I'll tell you all about it later. We'll go home, and you'll see the house for yourself.' He smiled at his wife apologetically. 'It'll be all right.' Still she couldn't help but wonder about it.

'I'm glad you're here — you 'n the kids. By God, I've missed you! Barbie, get out from under that horse's belly! He ain't your grandfather's old mare!'

Barbie came out from under the horse hurriedly. Cora said with feeling, 'I've missed you, too.' Then she added practically, 'And I'm glad you're going to make Barbie mind. She's too much for me sometimes.'

The small procession moved away from the red station up a narrow main street, walking on wooden planks laid down on one side of it. The street seemed almost empty to Cora as they started to walk its short length. She was relieved about this, for in spite of having put on a clean shirtwaist and run a chamois over her freshly washed face, she was conscious that her appearance after three nights on a day coach left much to be desired. But her relief was short-lived, for she soon saw that she was mistaken about the deserted street. Women's faces began to appear at store windows, and men began to call greetings from doorways. The small frame store-buildings lining the street were filled with people.

'The whole town's come down t' see you, Cora,' Will said jocularly.

Cora was shocked, but as she thought quickly of the size of the town and the number of people she saw at doors and windows, she realized that what he said must be the truth. Loud cries of 'Howdy, Bill!' and 'So the Missus finally ar-

rived!' were greeted by Will with equally demonstrative bel-lows of satisfaction. He bowed and waved to everyone, sometimes almost throwing Jeff into the air in the exuberance of his joy. Everyone seemed to know him, and Cora again got the feeling of great friendliness on the part of the people who greeted him from store fronts on both sides of the street. She felt her face redden with a certain pleasure as well as embarrassment. She was glad these people so evidently liked her husband, but she would also have been glad to have felt a little less as if she were being greeted by a brass band.

They came to a new, small red-brick building at the corner of the first of the two blocks which made up the town's main street. It had a plate-glass window in the front of it, like a store. But it also had a green shade pulled down at the window, a swinging door, and gold lettering on the glass which proclaimed that this was 'Mike Finley's Bar.' A worn hitching rail at one side contrasted with the new brick of the building, as the two ponies hitched to the posts contrasted with a new but slightly battered Model-T Ford.

A tall, lean man with a white Stetson pushed back to show graying hair stood in the doorway. After a day spent staring out of day coach windows at the Montana countryside, Cora was prepared somehow for such a man. His weathered face was brown as the land was brown. But his face was saved from the harshness of the land by the eyes, a deeper brown and soft and sad as a retriever's, that looked out from it.

'Howdy, Bill,' the man said. His words made a great impression on Cora, not because they were unusual, but because the sober way in which he said them struck jarringly on the general paean of joy which had greeted them so far.

'Howdy, Mike,' Will said cordially. 'Cora, I want you to meet Mr. Finley. Mike, Mrs. Gray.'

'Pleased to meet you, I'm sure, Mr. Finley,' Cora said nervously. She had never seen a saloon before, much less a saloonkeeper, and she wasn't sure just what the proper greeting should be.

'And I'm pleased to meet you, Mrs. Gray,' said Mr. Finley, coming from the doorway to the middle of the plank walk. He swept off his Stetson with a serious, almost courtly air

and gave her a slow but not unfriendly smile. 'You're getting here just in time to see all these fine buildings your husband's putting up. Mine here — we just moved in a few days ago. And the bank down the street — it'll be the same pattern — the same red brick. Cottonwood's going to have the finest main street in the West, bar none, before we get through with it.'

His tone indicated that this would be a great misfortune for Cottonwood as well as the West.

'That will be nice, I'm sure.' Cora found herself unconsciously speaking in the same tone of hushed sorrow which he had used.

'Oh, Papa, come on!' Barbie had suddenly come back from her confident stalking. She was almost in tears from fatigue and nervousness, and her voice sounded angrier than usual.

'Barbie, be quiet! There's no need to be impatient; we've got all day.' Even as she spoke, Cora realized that she was as tired as her daughter and as impatient to be gone from this sad stranger who talked lugubriously to her from in front of a saloon.

'Don't scold the little ones, Mrs. Gray,' Mr. Finley said, and Cora couldn't be sure that he wasn't laughing at her. 'Sometimes they die when you're least expecting it.' He turned to Barbie. 'What is your name, little girl?' Again he lifted his upper lip in a sad smile.

Barbie drew herself very erect. 'Barbara Dolores Gray. And I'm going on six!'

'Dolores. Dolores — I once knew a girl named Dolores. Hm-m-m. Never mind. Here's a nickel, Dolores — you buy yourself a box of crackerjack to remember Mike Finley by.'

'My name isn't really Dolores, Mr. Finley. That's my middle name. But it was almost Dolores. Mamma named me Barbara for my Aunt Barbie who was dying. After she died I was to be called Dolores. But she didn't die. So now I'm still Barbie.'

'Hush, Barbie. Don't mind her, Mr. Finley. She's tired from too much riding on the train. Will, we'll have to get the children home. Good-bye, Mr. Finley.'

He bowed deeply once more, and sighed. 'I am happy to have made your acquaintance, Mrs. Gray. So long, Bill.'

'So long, Mike.'

Happy to be on the move once more, Barbie smiled at him angelically. To her mother, she said, 'Now may I buy some crackerjack?'

Cora made no reply until she was sure they were well out of earshot. Then she said fiercely, 'You just tie that nickel in your handkerchief and save it for your Sunday School! It'll be one piece of whiskey money that's gone to the right place.'

Will laughed. 'Beer money, Cora, beer money. A nickel wouldn't even get you a smell of a whiskey cork in Mike's place.'

Cora had felt only a surprised acceptance of a strange situation when Will had stopped in front of a saloon and introduced her to a saloonkeeper, but now at his casual laughter she found herself feeling both resentful and fearful. She wondered how much of his time in her absence he had spent sitting around the saloon. Vaguely she characterized sitting around a saloon as 'carrying on,' though, to save her life, she could not have put into more explicit words what she meant by the phrase.

Whatever she might have to say about her fears would have to wait until some other time. Her weariness was beginning to come upon her in recurring waves. Four steps, and a wave would engulf her, weakening her knees, making the small buildings of the street jiggle before her eyes. Another four steps, another wave.

Cora hardly knew how she managed to walk the half-mile which took them to the outskirts of the tiny town. There were no sidewalks, and they trudged down the middle of a straggling road, past small, unpainted houses which she did not see. Sometimes they stumbled over stones or hard clods of dirt. Brief gusts of a high, sweet wind made shifting eddies of dust about them. Fortunately they met no one with whom Will felt it obligatory to exchange more than a 'Howdy,' or a wave of his hand.

'Here's our house, Cora,' she heard Will say, and she opened her smarting lids.

Before them was a small house covered with black tarpaper held in place by strips of lathing. Two little windows,

placed rather high, shone in the sunlight. New, unpainted, wooden steps led directly up to a new, unpainted door. Sagebrush grew around the house, cleared away only from the path leading to a small but necessary building about fifty feet to the rear of the house. A fresh pile of stove wood had been dumped almost at the door. It was a lame duck of a house, if there ever was one, but Cora's heart went out to it as she saw weeks of hard labor ahead of her — scrubbing floors, shining windows, putting up curtains, clearing away sagebrush — labor which she hoped would make the house look less as though it had been dumped from a refuse cart. Her fingers itched to begin.

Barbie gave a horrified snort. 'Gosh, Papa, do we have to live here! This is just an awful old place!'

'Be quiet, Barbie!' her mother said automatically. 'Stop your sniffing and just be thankful we're home.' To her husband she said gently, 'Will, it's just as nice as it can be.'

The room was faint with early morning light. Sleepily Cora looked at the unfamiliar walls covered with dirty, faded, blue building-paper, stained by the rains from many storms. She lay in a brass bed in the corner of the one large room which was to serve as living room, dining room, and bedroom for her and Will. The bed was battered and bent, but it had seemed completely beautiful to Cora the night before. For the first time in her life she had gone to bed before the supper dishes were washed. Now she became more awake as she realized that she would have to wash them before any breakfast could be served to a hungry husband and ravenous children. She stretched and yawned, and noticed with surprise that the fatigue of yesterday was gone. She felt, without being conscious of it, the exciting tang of the air. It was good to be alive, and she didn't need anyone to tell her so; she felt it in her very bones. Tentatively she rubbed a toe against Will's solid leg. He had always been ticklish, and she smiled as he flinched and pulled his leg away. He rolled over, and opened a heavy eye.

'That's a fine way t' wake up a husband after a year's absence,' he grumbled happily, throwing an arm about her shoulder.

'Will, you'll just have to shingle that roof, even if the bank doesn't get finished. See where the rain has stained the ceiling.'

He laughed softly. 'Up to your old tricks! Wake a man up by tickling him so's you can tell him all the things that need to be done. You wouldn't like that sagebrush all pulled up by noon today, would you?'

Cora giggled. 'Yes, I would, but I don't suppose I need think about that for a while yet. I'll put Joe to doing that after school.'

'Chains around their necks 'fore they're outa short pants.' Will's tone carried both amusement and chagrin. 'Your Pennsylvania Dutch blood always shows up early in the morning.'

Cora rubbed her hand along his arm with unwonted demonstrativeness, and kissed him hesitantly.

'I was too tired yesterday to tell you how glad I am that we got here.'

'I knowed you was, Cora. And you knowed I was. That's the way it oughta be. This is an awful dump t' bring you to, but it was all I could git.'

Will sounded so much more apologetic to Cora than the situation seemed to warrant that she found her curiosity of the day before revived.

'You said you'd tell me about the house, Will. How'd you happen to get it? Who lived here, anyway? They didn't take very good care of it.'

'Well, Cora, I'll tell you — ' Will cleared his throat. 'I was gonna tell you yesterday. Now don't git up on your high horse — just remember it's the only house in town.' Will paused again. 'Well, Cora, this used t' be a bad house, and some women who weren't — well, some whores had it till two weeks ago. Then some of the wives around here thought it didn't look so good for Cottonwood t' have a bad house right inside the town, seein' that ever'body's tryin' t' build the town up to be something. So they made their men tell these women they'd have t' clear out. I heard they was a-movin', and come over an' bought the place. That's all there is to it.'

Cora lay still, too horrified to make a sound. Here she

lay in a house in which, just a short time before, other women had lain for quite a different purpose. She felt suddenly angry at Will, angrier than she had ever been before. Her thoughts were jumbled, and at first she felt chiefly outraged that Will had put her in such an unfair position before their new neighbors. What would people think of her anyway to come into a place like this one? What would her mother think when she wrote to Iowa? Quickly she decided that she wouldn't write her mother this particular fact about their new home. She looked about the room furtively. In spite of herself, she found that it had assumed a new interest. Her glance traveled up and down the ugly, stained walls wonderingly. She had never thought about it much, but she had somehow pictured sin in more seductive surroundings. This homely room with its board floors and creaking windows seemed a test for only those strengthened by the most hardy virtue. She tried to put her thoughts into words.

'It seems funny women like that would live in a place like this.'

Will looked at her in amazement. 'Well, I'll be damned! I thought you'd have a fit.'

She made a wry face at him. 'I feel a little like having a fit,' she admitted. 'But I don't see what can be done about it. The children can't sleep out of doors with winter coming on, and we can't afford to go to a hotel.'

He gave a relieved laugh. 'I pictured everything, Cora, but I never pictured you'd see it so clear. Cottonwood's so different from every place you ever knowed before that I didn't know how to tell you about it in letters. Everything's different. Mike Finley now. You thought it was funny I'd stop in front of a saloon with you, and talk to him. But he's a respected citizen here. He paid me good money for building that place of his, and he's always been fine to me, and I knowed everybody'd think it pretty funny if I didn't introduce you right away.'

'He acted so sad at my being here I thought he was afraid he'd lose some trade.'

Will laughed again. 'Well, you kin just put that thought outa yer head. A glass of beer and a game a pinochle's about

all he gets outa me. He always acts sad. It's just his way. But he's a nice fella, Cora. Only different from anybody you knowed back home.'

'Has he got a wife?' Some of Cora's fear that she might have to be friends with a saloonkeeper's wife came through into her voice.

'Not — not a wife —'

Cora looked at him. 'Oh — that.' She half turned away in distaste. 'I don't have to be nice to *her*, do I?'

'Good God, no! Mike'd be the last to expect it. You don't have t' be nice to him, fer that matter, Cora. I don't want you t' feel you gotta bootlick people because it's good business. I just like the guy. It ain't got a damned thing t' do with business.'

Again Cora giggled. 'No, I guess I won't bootlick. I'm not much better than you are at that. You know, it's funny, Will, but I kind of liked him, too. Giving that nickel to Barbie, and all. I know what you mean — How many women lived here, anyway?'

'Five, I guess, but that's hearsay. I didn't visit the house but that one time I come t' buy it, and I just saw two.' He laughed hugely. 'How'd you think I got any work done with all the drinkin' and gamblin' and runnin' after women you act as if I done?'

'No, that's not it. But, my goodness, five women — in these three little rooms! And at least one of them must have been a kitchen. How do you suppose they managed?' She looked guiltily at the door leading into the room where the children were sleeping. She had wondered why a little house so poorly put together as this one should have connecting doors between its rooms.

Will followed her glance. 'I don't know but what it's a good thing them doors is there. Now I can kiss you without having you wiggle away and think the kids are lookin'.'

He put his arms around her, and Cora responded with perhaps more passion than she had shown before in her whole married life. Afterwards she wondered whether it was the talk they had been having, and she wondered, too, why this should be the case.

The sun was considerably higher when the sound of snickering laughter came to them from behind the door of the children's room. Cora got out of bed hastily, and went to the door. Joe and Jeff were on their double bed, watching Barbie, who stumbled back and forth with an affected strut across the tumbled bedding on her cot. Over her shoulder she simpered in an engaging and childish toothless fashion at her chuckling brothers. Around her neck was a long black lace stocking. Held to the flannel front of her nightgown was a huge bunch of paper violets. On her head, tilted at an abrupt angle, was Cora's sailor hat.

'Where did you get those flowers? And that stocking?' Cora was momentarily puzzled; then, as she thought of the information Will had just given her, swiftly alarmed. She hurried to the door of the small closet which she had not had time to inspect the night before. In the general clean-up which the hotel janitor had given the house before their arrival, he had evidently used the closet as a catch-all. Piled neatly therein were things which Cora knew would immediately delight a small girl — a plaid hair-ribbon, a rhinestone-studded comb, a scrap of a broken mirror, a kewpie-doll pincushion. Kicking at the pile angrily with a bare toe, Cora slammed the closet door shut, and whirled around to her children. They were innocently interested in her behavior, but not alarmed.

Joe held out a postcard to her, still laughing at his sister's antics. 'She's trying to look like this, Mom.'

Cora took the card as gingerly as if it had been a dead toad. The buxom curves of the beaming maiden on its glossy front made a well-clothed figure 'S' across the card. Around her plump neck was a feather boa; fastened to her generous bosom was a huge bunch of violets; tilted at a steep angle on her head was a Merry Widow hat with many willow plumes sweeping from its brim. One ankle peeped daringly from beneath a skirt which she lifted coquettishly. The simper Barbie had assumed in imitation of the smile on the face of the pictured hussy was almost too realistic to be borne by her mother.

'The ideal! Take off those things this minute, and come wash your hands! Throw those awful flowers and that rag

of a stocking into the coal bucket! And, Joe, you get up out of bed this minute, and get dressed. I want you to get some lye and some Dutch Cleanser and — and — well, I'll ask your father what else you're to get. We'll scrub this house from top to bottom before another day has passed.'

The first breakfast was over in the new home. Emptying into the teakettle the last of the bucket of water which Will had brought in just before bedtime, she turned to him.

'Now, Will, you show me where the well is, and I'll carry my own water after this.'

'There ain't no well, Cora. Not in the whole town of Cottonwood. Ever'body buys their water at fifty cents a barrel. I borrowed that pailful from Labrees' over there.'

Cora looked at him for a full minute, letting the fact sink in. It was so startling that there was no well any place in the whole town that at first she almost laughed at the oddity of it. But as the words seeped fully into her housekeeping and maternal consciousness, she realized that it was no laughing matter. She thought of the children's clothes that needed to be washed, and the tubfuls which she had planned to use in scrubbing the house. She looked at him hard, hoping he was joking. As she saw he was speaking the truth, dismay deepened in her face. She mustn't let Will see the extent of her consternation. Forcing a dismal smile, she held out the bucket to him.

'Well, borrow another pailful for me, will you? Then we'll get three or four barrels of water to start with. How do we do that?'

'The water man comes around three times a week. He's due to come t' this part of town today. Rose Labree said she'd make him come here. But you're gonna be disappointed, Cora; he only lets each family have one barrel at a time — and you only get three barrels a week — it keeps him workin' overtime as it is t' keep the town in water. He hauls it from the river about three miles away.'

Cora looked at Will unhappily. He patted her shoulder roughly, half-sympathetic, half-amused.

'My poor little scrubber. You just gotta read a book in place a scrubbin' all the time.'

Cora pushed out her chin. 'Don't you worry about me. The rest of these people seem to have lived through it. But how they keep clean, I don't know.'

When Will came back with a bucket of water, he set it down carefully on a rough table beside the stove. 'We gotta remember to return this, Cora. It's about as bad as horse-stealin' not to pay back water in these parts.' He laughed and shrugged. 'Well, I'm off. I'll eat dinner at the beanery this noon — then you can just git the kids a bite, and won't have to bother about me.'

'You'll do no such thing,' Cora said briskly. 'Think I came all the way out here to have you eating downtown? People'd think you had a fine wife! You can bring home some meat for dinner, and Joe and I can go down this afternoon and lay in a store of things. You can put up some shelves in the kitchen for me, and build me a bread box. I'll make biscuits today; then I'll get some yeast and bake tomorrow.'

'Pancakes for breakfast?' Will wanted to know.

'Pancakes for breakfast.'

Although barrels of unpacked household goods still stood in the middle of the floor and the house was in complete disorder, Cora already saw in her mind's eye a clean and spotless home where activities ran on schedule: Monday, washing; Tuesday, ironing; Wednesday, baking; Thursday, mending; Friday, cleaning; Saturday, more baking; Sunday, church and a roast for dinner. White pancakes for fall and spring; buckwheat pancakes for winter. She smiled happily at Will.

Turning briskly to Barbie she said, 'Barbie, you take Jeff out in the yard. The two of you can start carrying the little chunks of wood around to the back — I'll show you where. Joe can take the big chunks and stack it later. Joe, you can chop down sagebrush; and Barbie and Jeff can pile it at the back, and we'll burn it. We've all got to work.'

'The sagebrush'll make a terrible smudge, Cora —' Will began. He broke off abruptly. 'Never mind, honey,' he said. 'When the water man comes, you'll find a new barrel around on the shady side of the house.' He picked up Jeff and carried him down the steps. 'Yes, sir, my boy, we've all got t'

step lively when your mother's around. She'll make great men of us yet.' He smiled at Cora to show that there was no malice in his remark.

In the middle of the morning, Cora heard a team drive up to the door. Barbie shouted from the yard, 'The water man's here! The water man's here!'

Joe came to the door and said politely, 'Here's the water man, Mom. You'd better come talk to him. Barbie's making an awful racket.'

Cora went outside to find a strange contraption resembling a hayrack drawn up to her door by two powerful horses. The vehicle was filled with many barrels covered with wet gunny sacks, held in place by staves. At the front of it, seated on a kitchen chair which was fastened to the frame, was a small man in neat blue overalls, with an oversize straw hat on his head. Through gold-rimmed spectacles, he peered benignly at her.

'Howdy, Mrs. Gray,' he said with great dignity. 'I'm the water man. Rose Labree said you needed water, and I come right over.'

He climbed down from his chair. 'You kin hold the reins,' he said to Joe, as though he were conferring a great honor on him.

Joe took them carefully and stood at rigid attention, with the reins clenched tightly between tense fingers. Seeing Barbie's look of disappointment, the water man said to her, 'I'll need you to hold the gunny sack off'n the bar'l.'

'Our barrel's around here on the shady side of the house.' Cora led him around to it.

He looked it over with the eye of a connoisseur. 'Good. Good. A good tight bar'l that'll last you fer many a day. But it oughta be sunk in the ground, Mrs. Gray. Yes, it really oughta. It'll stay cooler in summer that way, and be handier t' git at any time. I never could git these other folks that lived here to berry their water, but you git Mr. Gray t' sink this bar'l just as soon as it gits empty.'

'But the children might fall in,' Cora objected.

He began deliberately to fill the barrel from one on the

wagon, a bucketful at a time. 'No, you kiver it with a tub. An' the children mustn't never go near the water bar'l. Not never! It's a sin that oughta be punished by death er worse.'

He uttered these words in the most soft and gentle voice imaginable. Barbie dropped the wet gunny sack she was holding and backed slowly away from the barrel, looking at it with horror.

Cora saw he wasn't joking. 'Is there no way I can get more than a barrel at a time, Mr. — ?' she asked.

'My name is of no importance, Mrs. Gray,' he said rather pompously. 'What I bring you is the important thing. I am the water man.'

After giving Cora a moment to absorb this thought, he answered her question firmly. 'The water man don't know of no way you kin git more'n a bar'l at a time, Mrs. Gray. Everybody does without all he wants so's everybody kin have. It seems awful hard at first, but you'll be glad later, becuz it'd soon run up inta more money 'n you c'd afford. There ain't no family in this town oughta be so spendin' with water they have to pay more'n a dollar 'n a half a week fer it. That's whut three bar'ls come to. Now I know about whut Bill Gray makes; an' he cain't afford t' have me sell you more'n three bar'ls a week, not even if you beg fer it on bended knees.'

Cora felt both irritated and apologetic. 'I'm not spend-thrift with water! I simply need some immediately for a lot of washing and scrubbing I have to do.'

He smiled at her soothingly. 'You newcomers gotta learn, Mrs. Gray. Now what you do, Mrs. Gray — you make all the kids wash in the same water. Be fair to them. Let the little boy wash first one day, the big boy the next, the little girl the next. That way nobuddy's cheated, and all's equally clean. An' tell 'em not t' drink so much. An' use about a third as much fer cookin' an' dishwashin' as you're used to. Peel your potatoes without no water. When you wash clothes, jist wash 'em outa one tubful and rench 'em outa one more. Then you save your rench water from one week to use for your wash water the next.'

He delivered all this in a rapid singsong, as though it was

something he had repeated many times. Finished with his task of filling the barrel, he turned back to the wagon.

Cora said, 'Just a minute; I'll get your money.'

'No, Mrs. Gray. Not fer the first bar'l. It comes easier t' pay fer the second. An' life's tough enough these days even when you git the first bar'l a water free.'

He took the reins from Joe and climbed back up on his seat. From this height he smiled down at Cora in a kindly fashion. 'Don't let it knock yer props from under yuh, Mrs. Gray. You'll git along better'n you think fer.'

He paused, then fixed the children with a mild eye, and said slowly and impressively, 'An' don't never, never, never let me hear of you little Grays havin' water fights. When you wanta throw water, you go t' the river. You hear me!'

A cluck to his team, and the makeshift water wagon went lumbering off. Though his seat jiggled furiously beneath him, the little man sat very erect. About a block away he turned around and called out something.

'What?' cried Cora.

'Boil it!' shouted the water man. His voice came back on the wind. 'Boil — it!' The wagon creaked off.

'Well, I never!' Cora said with a helpless laugh to Joe. 'I think we're in a country of crazy people. But he's right about one thing — you children stay away from that water barrel, or I'll give you good spankings.'

'I'll never go near it, Mama — never! He'd kill us all!' Barbie spoke with great intensity, enjoying the quivering fear which sounded in her voice.

'I guess I'd have something to say about that,' Cora said. 'But just the same — and I mean it — you remember not to go near that barrel.'

Cora stood for a moment looking at the barrel. A gust of wind whipped around the corner of the house, and it seemed to her that she could see the film of dust deposited on the water. She got a washtub from the kitchen and put it over the top of the barrel.

Her eyes searched the countryside. A narrow road, with deep ruts, wound across the plain behind their house, disappearing between two small brown hills. No tree was to be

seen, but in places the sagebrush grew almost as high as lilac bushes. The air was fresh and heady, drenched with the fragrance of the sage; but to Cora the country was as ugly as anything she had ever seen, and she turned to go inside without reluctance. Out here she could do little, but inside she could do much. Sagebrush could be pulled up from the yard, only to expose an expanse of brown dirt. She looked at the barrel angrily. There could be no question of flowers or grass or trees with water selling at fifty cents a barrel.

As she entered her house, she felt an excitement which was always hers when she came within her own four walls. Inside these four walls, she could control the wild shiftlessness of the West. Inside these walls she could bathe her children and scrub their ears and see that they were clothed in clean garments. Inside these walls she could bake bread and apple pie and fry chicken as she had been taught to do back home in Iowa. She hung some pans on nails sticking out from the kitchen walls, and vowed that Will should make her shelves before the week was out.

That evening Cora looked about her again, this time with a feeling of great contentment. She had taken the water man's advice, and had used her wash water for scrubbing her floors and woodwork; but even so, she thought ruefully, the barrel of water was already more than half gone. The house now had a steamed, soapy smell about it; and depressions in the uneven floor still showed damp spots from the recent scrubbing. The children's clothes were hung on nails in the tiny closet, or were sorted into neat piles on kitchen chairs which Cora had ranged along one side of the wall. White lace curtains, still creased from their packing, covered the shining windows. White cotton bedspreads covered the beds, even Barbie's cot; and Barbie had been cautioned that there was to be no more jumping up and down on it. A huge pile of sagebrush was stacked at one side of the yard, and at least one tiny patch of ground directly at the front of the house was completely cleared.

The mood of close identification of herself with her family was still upon Cora. When the dishes were done, she

brought some darning into the circle of light cast by the oil lamp. So sharp was her perception of Will and each of the children that it seemed to her they sat within a charmed circle. Joe was hunched over the table reading a book. Barbie, who was curled up on her father's lap, put her finger on his throat now and then in an attempt to feel the rumble of his voice as he talked to her mother.

'It's time for you to go to bed, Barbie,' Cora said, smiling quietly at her daughter.

'Papa used to sing to me before I went to bed,' Barbie objected.

'That's right, I did,' said Will. 'I used to sing to you. And I'm glad t' have the chance t' be singing to you again. What'll it be?'

Barbie wrinkled her forehead in an attempt to remember the songs her father had sung to her before he went to Montana.

Joe said, 'Sing that one about the old man who's going up North to freeze to death, Papa. It used to make Barbie cry, but it's pretty; and she's got to grow up some time and quit crying.'

Will gathered Barbie more closely to him. She watched his mouth and throat intently as he started to sing.

I'm goin' from the cotton fields,
I'm goin' from the cane,
I'm goin' t' leave the old log hut
That stands down in the lane.

When the sun goes down tonight —
Oh, it makes me sigh —
When the sun goes down tonight,
I'm goin' t' say good-bye.

Will's voice, singing the plaintive, sentimental white man's version of the Negro's thoughts, rose full and rich in the quiet autumn air. A patch of moonlight, brighter than the glow from the oil lamp, shone on the floor. The evening was chilly, and no fire was built. Somewhere in the distance Cora heard with great clearness the hoofs of a plodding horse

and the turning wheels of a wagon. She looked about her at these people she loved most of all those on earth, and felt a lonesome peace in accepting as home this strange land in which she found herself. She could almost feel the miles and miles of silent prairie stretching out away from her, and she could hear the wind, rushing through space, with never a treetop to stop its breathless speed. She pulled her rolled-up sleeves down over her cold arms.

Now Dinah she don't want t' go,
She says she's gettin' old,
An' she's afeared she'll freeze t' death,
That country am so cold.

A long, shuddering sob from Barbie interrupted the song. 'Oh, Papa, I can't stand it. Truly I can't. It's too sad.'

'No, Barbie, you gotta hear it all. You can't just say you can't stand things and not listen when a body wants t' sing a song. You let me finish, and then I'll sing a funny one for you.'

Barbie put her hand over her mouth, and cowered down against her father's chest. He stroked her hair gently as he finished the song for Joe, and wiped the tears from his own eyes when he had finished. Then he picked Barbie up in his arms and started waltzing gaily about the floor with her as he began to sing his next song:

Now McManus loaned a dress suit
For the ball the other night.
The coat was much too large for him,
The pants they was too tight —

PHILADELPHIA EXPRESS¹

BY JEROME WEIDMAN

THE waiting room of the midtown bus terminal was lined with benches, on which perhaps a hundred people were sitting. They all looked tired and they all had some sort of luggage — cheap suitcases, parcels wrapped in paper, battered hatboxes — resting on their laps or on the benches beside them or on the floor between their feet. Above the archway leading to the asphalt platform was a large electric clock. The clock showed twenty-five minutes after midnight. Two middle-aged men and two girls hurried in together from the street, glanced around, and stopped short.

‘Well, what the hell you know?’ the short, solid man said. ‘Damn thing’s not even here yet.’

‘That’s buses.’ The tall, sharp man’s voice rasped. ‘Train says it leaves ten-twenty, it leaves ten-twenty. Leaves twelve-thirty, leaves twelve-thirty. These damn buses. Even on a Sunday night, end of a weekend, you can’t depend on them.’

The two girls laughed, exactly the same way, a moment too late, as though they had been reminded to do so by a sharp nudge. Then, both at the same time, they noticed that the two men were not laughing. The men looked annoyed. The girls stopped their laughter, brought it up short, as abruptly as they had started it. They exchanged a worried glance, dropped their eyes guiltily, and raised them at once

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to look with feigned interest past the two men into the waiting room.

It was a large, square room with a high ceiling and a great many lights. All the lights were turned on, yet they did almost nothing to dispel the atmosphere of thick, brownish gloom. The left wall was broken by a line of ticket windows. The wall at the right had two doors, on each of which was a dignified brass sign. One sign said 'Ladies' and the other said 'Gentlemen.' In the wall at the far end of the room was a huge, wide, arched doorway that led out to the asphalt platform, empty now, on which the buses stopped to unload and pick up passengers.

'Gee, Charlie,' said the girl in red. 'What do we do now?'

Her voice sounded like a musical saw, whining and weak and delicately metallic. It brought the head of the short, solid man around in an arc until he was looking at her across his shoulder. He had no hair on the top of his head. His scalp was the same color as his fleshy face, a leathery, sun-tanned brown that looked unhealthy. His lips seemed too large for his mouth. They moved around too much when he talked. The coat of his single-breasted, wrinkled seersucker suit was open, making him look more slovenly than he actually was. The end of his long, washable blue-and-white tie was tucked into the belt of his trousers.

'What do you *think* we do?' he said. 'We wait.'

'I only meant —' the girl in red said. 'I only asked —'

'Sure, Flo,' the tall, sharp man said kindly. 'Charlie only meant we're on time, your bus is late, what the hell, there's nothing else to do. *Naturally* we wait. What else?'

The kindness in his voice petered out gradually with each word until, when he reached the last one, his voice sounded exactly the way Charlie's had. In appearance he was entirely different from Charlie. He was much taller and much thinner and much neater. His head was thatched with thick black hair and the stripes of his seersucker suit were wider. He wasn't sunburned. Yet somehow, at first glance, the men gave the odd impression that they looked exactly alike. A second glance showed why. It was almost as though they were imitating one another — in the expressions on their

faces, the sound of their voices, and their attitude toward the two girls.

'Sure. Herbie's right,' Charlie said. 'That's all I meant.' Some instinct of chivalry, buried deep under layers and years of neglect and misuse, fought through to the surface of his lumpy, perspiring face. He forced a smile that showed his bad teeth. He even patted the girl's arm awkwardly. 'Don't be sore, Flo.'

Flo laughed nervously, again a moment too late. The girl in yellow laughed, too.

'I'm not sore,' Flo said. 'I'm never sore. Am I ever sore, Iris? Am I?'

'Crazy,' Iris said. 'Flo sore?' She laughed harder, without mirth and with unconvincing nonchalance. 'Flo's *never* sore. All the years I know her, I never saw Flo sore. You ever, Herbie?'

The tall, sharp man was setting his wristwatch by the electric clock over the archway. He glanced up and pushed in the watch stem with a faint click. 'What?' he said. 'Oh. Nah. Flo's never sore. Nobody's sore. What's with these damn buses?' He spoke directly to Charlie, as though the girls had suddenly disappeared. 'What do we do?'

'Wait here,' Charlie said. 'You just wait, all of you.' He stepped between the girls, across their two tiny suitcases, and strode toward the ticket windows. His was the only movement in the large, hot, tired room. All the people on the benches, the people who had been idly watching the two middle-aged men and the two girls, turned their heads as their glances followed Charlie. When he came back to the group near the doorway, all the heads turned again.

'That Philadelphia Express, it's plenty late,' he said. 'Guy there says the twelve-thirty, it won't be in before one, maybe a quarter after. Anyhow, I bought the tickets.' He sounded angry, trapped.

'Oh, Christ,' Herbie said. 'These damn buses.'

'Gee whizz,' Flo said in her weak, whining, metallic voice. 'That means Iris and me, we won't get home before maybe four in the morning. Maybe even later.'

The two men scowled at one another. The girls watched

them anxiously. Charlie's oversized lips worked impatiently.

'Well, the hell with it,' he said finally. 'We're stuck. Might as well have a drink.'

The girls brightened at once and dipped down to pick up the suitcases, which were so small they looked like boxes of candy to which handles had been attached.

'No, wait,' Herbie said. 'I'll tell you what.' The bright looks vanished from the faces of the girls. They straightened up, holding the tiny bags in front of them. 'We better see about parking the car first,' Herbie went on. He smiled at the girls with exaggerated enthusiasm. 'So we won't get a ticket, see?'

'That's right,' Charlie said. He grinned. 'We'll just go out and make sure the car is parked O.K. So we don't get a ticket. You girls sit down and wait. We be right back. All right?'

'Better give Flo and Iris the tickets,' Herbie said as he took their arms and started herding the girls toward a vacant bench. 'So's just in case the bus comes while we're parking the car, the girls won't be left flat and —'

'Aah, gee,' Flo said. 'You gonna —'

'No, no, no,' Charlie said hastily. 'Hell, no. Nothing like that. No, I'll hold the tickets.' He scowled at Herbie and shook his head — a short, quick nod of warning. Then, with a smile, to the girls he said, 'Don't you worry. We won't run out on you. We're not that kind of guy. We be right back. In a couple of minutes, soon's we get the car parked right. Then we'll have a drink before the bus comes and slip you girls a piece of change. One last drink. Just a couple minutes.'

The girls sat down on the bench. The two middle-aged men grinned, waved, turned sharply, and strode out of the waiting room into the street. The girls watched them with lips parted slightly, with doubt in their eyes. The moment the men crossed the threshold and disappeared, the girls turned toward each other. The doubt in their eyes was replaced with quick anger. Their thin, pinched, heavily made-up faces creased into scowls.

'Listen,' Flo said. 'You think they —'

'No,' Iris said. 'Don't be crazy.'

'Them bastids,' Flo said bitterly. 'They try that, I'll —'

'Sh-h-h.' Iris made a small motion with her head toward the people on the benches all around them. She spoke out of the corner of her mouth. 'You got to expect that once in a while, kid. There's all kinds.'

Flo bit her lip. Both girls straightened up. They sat very erect, keeping their backs primly from touching the bench. The tiny suitcases rested on their laps. They kept their knees together, their hands folded on the suitcases, and watched the big red second hand sweep smoothly around and around the face of the large clock on the wall. A terrible awkwardness, a frightening discomfort, had suddenly settled down on them. They were absolutely motionless, yet the eyes of all the tired people waiting for buses were turned on them with almost murderous concentration.

The two girls in their red and yellow dresses, sitting stiffly erect, seemed to shrink slightly, as though from an accusation unspoken but clear, familiar yet dreaded. They were all right so long as there was constant motion, so long as there were no gaps like this one, oases of silence and inactivity with nothing to do or say or drink to help drown out the condemnation of respectable eyes. All their brassy gaiety was gone. In these few moments of silence their only buffer against terror had been stripped away.

The door marked 'Ladies' groaned open and a fat woman came out. The small sound caused the girls to jump. The people on the benches turned their heads to watch the fat woman walk self-consciously to a bench. Flo fumbled for her purse. She couldn't get it open.

'Gimme a cigarette,' she said. 'Huh?'

'Sure.' Iris struggled with her purse. 'Here.'

She held the match for Flo and then brought the flame to the end of her own cigarette. The fat woman sat down. All the heads in the room swung back. Iris's hand jumped nervously. The people on the benches stared at them. The two girls sat up straight, their eyes on the clock's circling second hand, their faces set in hard little lines of uncon-

vincing bravado, minute ridges of tiredness and misery. The freshly lighted cigarettes burned disregarded in their hands, which were folded on the tiny suitcases on their laps.

A huge Negro in dirty brown overalls came into the waiting room through the door marked 'Gentlemen.' He was carrying a pail and a large broom. He sprinkled water on the littered, dusty floor and began lazily to sweep up the cigarette stubs and matches and chewing-gum wrappers. All the heads in the room turned to watch him. The two girls hastily stole puffs from their cigarettes. By the time the heads turned back to them, they were again sitting primly erect. Worriedly, they watched the clock. It was now a few minutes after one o'clock. The only sound in the room was the soft scratching of the Negro's broom across the concrete floor.

All at once the silence was shattered by the noise of a bus roaring to a halt on the asphalt platform outside. A low hum of conversation and movement spread across the waiting room. The tired people started to get up, began to gather their bundles and hatboxes and suitcases. Flo and Iris looked at each other with quick, confused dismay. They stood up halfway, sat down again, turned nervously toward the row of ticket windows, swung around to look out through the archway. Across the front of the huge bus was an electric sign that said 'Philadelphia Express.'

'What do we do?' Flo said. 'They got the tickets.'

'Them bastids,' Iris said. 'I guess I better buy us a couple new ones. Otherwise we'll miss this bus and —' She stopped, and then, quickly, she stood up and laughed with relief. 'Here they are!'

Charlie and Herbie strode toward the two girls. Both men looked flushed. The end of Charlie's long, blue-and-white washable tie had pulled loose from the belt of his trousers and was swirling around in front of his large, solid belly. Herbie didn't look quite so sharp and neat any more. Their eyes took in the bus outside, the people walking toward and climbing into it. They saw that the moment of departure had finally arrived, definitely and irrevocably. There would be no more postponements. The men started to grin. They walked faster toward the girls.

'Here we are,' Charlie said boisterously. The smell of brandy was strong on his breath. 'Had a little trouble getting the car started, but we got it parked all right. Got back just in time. See the bus is here. Come on, girls.'

He fumbled in the pocket of his seersucker suit for the tickets and reached for the two tiny suitcases.

'No, wait,' Herbie said grandly. Now that they were finally getting rid of these girls neither one of them could seem to control his exuberance. 'We do this in style.' He snapped his fingers in the air. 'Porter!' he called. 'Porter!'

The people walking out to the bus were attracted by this disturbance. They turned and looked back. The girls blushed. Iris reached up and pulled down Herbie's arm.

'Gee, don't,' she said. 'We don't need no porter. We'll miss the bus.'

'Say, what do you think we are?' Herbie said. 'A couple of pikers? We're sending you girls back in style. Right, Charlie?'

'Sure,' Charlie said. 'No small-time stuff for us.'

'Porter!' Herbie bellowed. 'Porter!' The people on the asphalt platform outside and the people still in the waiting room stared at the two men and the two girls. Nobody answered Herbie's imperious call. 'Wait a second,' he said. 'I'll get a porter.' The girls tried to stop him, but he shook them off and ran over to the ticket windows. 'Say, buddy,' he said pompously to the man behind the grille, 'you got a porter around here to carry some bags?'

The man looked out at Herbie. Then he looked across Herbie's shoulder at Charlie and the two girls. It was the look of a man who had seen situations like this before and had contempt for the actors in it. His glance came back to Herbie, and he nodded toward the large Negro who was sweeping the floor.

'That's him,' he said. 'The only porter around here.'

Herbie turned and hurried across the room. 'Here,' he said as he shoved a coin into the Negro's hand. 'Take these bags out to the bus, will you?'

The Negro stared with astonishment at the money in his hand, at the two tiny suitcases, then back at the money. A

slow, silly grin spread across his face. 'Sure thing, boss,' he said. 'Sure thing.'

He dropped his broom and picked up the two bags. He did it with one hand. The bags were so small and so light that they did not even pull his arm down straight. He strode out through the archway to the bus, grinning widely, as though he had been let in on some tremendous private joke.

Charlie took Flo's arm and Herbie seized Iris's. The two men, smiling, propelled the girls, in the wake of the Negro, across the waiting room and out toward the bus. The people on the asphalt platform smiled. The two girls hung their heads just a trifle and tried to smile, too. They couldn't quite do it. Their lips twitched and their cheeks bunched into little, thin hills, but they were not smiling. They took small, quick, mincing steps, trying to keep up with the bouncing strides of the exuberant men. The girls kept their eyes on the ground. Their faces and necks were flushed. When they reached the bus it was almost full. The Negro went ahead of them.

'Take care of them bags, boy!' Herbie called after him. 'I want you to treat them like they was your own.'

'Yes, suh.' The Negro laughed. Everybody in the bus watched while he put the bags on two empty seats and walked back to the door. He stepped out onto the asphalt, grinning, and touched his hand to his cap. 'All safe, suh.'

Herbie helped the two girls up the step into the bus. Charlie leaned in and handed the tickets to the driver.

'That's a couple of great girls you got there,' he said cheerfully and loudly. 'You take good care of them.'

A few people in the bus laughed. Most of them just stared. The driver took the tickets, but he did not speak. He looked at the two men the way the man behind the grille of the ticket window had looked at them. Iris and Flo blushed a deeper red. Their lips quivered. They ducked their heads to walk down the narrow aisle toward their seats. Charlie stepped up to follow them.

'Just be for a second,' he explained grandly to the driver. 'Want to make sure these two girls are comfortable. A couple of great girls like these, don't want them to be —'

Flo swung around and said 'Oh,' a small, compressed gasp of exasperation, a whimper of anger she couldn't seem to control. Her thin, badly made-up face contracted sharply, as though with a pain that had suddenly become too much to bear. All the little tired creases stood out near the corners of her mouth. Iris turned quickly and put out her hand warningly. She was too late. Flo beat her fists against Charlie's chest.

'Get out!' she gasped. 'Get out, get out, get *out!*' Her voice no longer sounded like a musical saw. All the whine and all the weakness were gone. It was desperate with accumulated suffering, with hatred too long suppressed. 'Get out!' she panted, hammering at Charlie's chest. 'Get out!'

The short, solid man tumbled out of the bus. He fell against Herbie. They grabbed each other and staggered about for a few seconds until they recaptured their balance. Both men stared into the bus with astonishment. Then Charlie let out a bellow of anger and started for the door. The driver closed it in his face. He hit the starter, gunned his motor, and the bus began to roll.

Flo turned to Iris and looked at her guiltily, then caught her breath in a sob. 'I don't care,' she said desperately. 'I don't care. I don't care if we never get another party in New York again.' Her voice rose higher. 'I don't care. I don't care.'

Iris bit her lip and stole a glance at the people around them. 'Sure,' she said as she guided Flo down the aisle of the swaying bus toward their seats. 'Sure, kid. It's all right.'

'I don't care about the money,' Flo cried. 'I don't care. I couldn't stand any more. A whole weekend they — they were — two whole days.' Her voice broke. 'It was too — they —' Then the tears came. 'I don't care about the money,' she wailed brokenly. 'I don't care. I don't care. I don't *care!*'

'Sure,' Iris said. 'I know.'

ASPHODEL¹

BY EUDORA WELTY

IT WAS a cloudless day — a round hill where the warm winds blew. It was noon, and without a shadow the line of columns rose in perfect erectness from the green vines. There was a quiver of bird song. A little company of three women stood fixed on the slope before the ruin, holding wicker baskets between them. They were not young. There were identical looks of fresh mourning on their faces. A wind blew down from the columns, and the white dimity fluttered about their elbows.

‘Look —’

‘Asphodel.’

It was a golden ruin: six Doric columns, with the entablature unbroken over the first two, full-facing the approach. The sky was pure, transparent, and round like a shell over this hill.

The three women drew nearer, in postures that were stiff from ministrations, and that came from a mourning procession.

‘This is Asphodel,’ they repeated, looking modestly upward to the frieze of maidens that was saturated with sunlight and seemed to fill with color, and before which the branch of a leafy tree was trembling.

‘If there’s one place in the solid world where Miss Sabina would never look for us, it’s Asphodel,’ they said. ‘She for-

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bade it,' they said virtuously. 'She would never tolerate us to come, to Mr. Don McInnis's Asphodel, or even to say his name.'

'Her funeral was yesterday, and we've cried our eyes dry,' said one of the three. 'And as for saying Mr. Don's name out loud, of course he is dead too.' And they looked from one to the other — Cora, Phoebe, and Irene, all old maids, in hanging summer cottons, carrying picnic baskets. The way was so narrow they had come in a buggy, then walked.

There was not a shadow. It was high noon. A honey locust bent over their heads, sounding with the bees that kept at its bee-like flowers.

'This is the kind of day I could just *eat!*' cried Cora ardently.

They were another step forward. A little stream spread from rock to rock and over the approach. Then their shoes were off, and their narrow maiden feet hung trembling in the rippling water. The wind had shaken loose their gray and scanty hair. They smiled at each other.

'I used to be scared of little glades,' said Phoebe. 'I used to think something, something wild, would come and carry me off.'

Then they were laughing freely all at once, drying their feet on the other side of the stream. The mocking-birds seemed to imitate flutes in the midday air. The horse they had unhitched champed on the hill, always visible — an old horse that seemed about to run, his mane fluttering in the light and his tail flaunted like a decoration he had only just put on.

Then the baskets were opened, the cloth was spread with the aromatic ham and chicken, spices and jellies, fresh breads and a cake, peaches, bananas, figs, pomegranates, grapes, and a thin dark bottle of blackberry cordial.

'There's one basket left in the buggy,' said Irene, always the last to yield. 'I like to have a little something saved back.'

The women reclined before the food, beside the warm and weighty pedestal. Above them the six columns seemed to be filled with the inhalations of summer and to be suspended in the resting of noon.

They pressed at the pomegranate stains on their mouths. And they began to tell over Miss Sabina's story, their voices serene and alike: how she looked, the legend of her beauty when she was young, the house where she was born and what happened in it, and how she came out when she was old, and her triumphal way, and the pitiful end when she toppled to her death in a dusty place where she was a stranger, that she had despised and deplored.

'Miss Sabina's house stood on the high hill,' Cora said, but the lips of the others moved with hers. It was like an old song they carried in their memory, the story of the two houses separated by a long, winding, difficult, untravelled road — a curve of the old Natchez Trace — but actually situated almost back to back on the ring of hills, while completely hidden from each other, like the reliefs on opposite sides of a vase.

'It commanded the town that came to be at its foot. Her house was a square of marble and stone, the front was as dark as pitch under the magnolia trees. Not one blade of grass grew in the hard green ground, but in some places a root stuck up like a serpent. Inside, the house was all wood, dark wood carved and fluted, long hallways, great staircases of walnut, ebony beds that filled a room, even mahogany roses in the ceilings, where the chandeliers hung down like red glass fruit. There was one completely dark inside room. The house was a labyrinth set with statues — Venus, Hermes, Demeter, and with singing ocean shells on draped pedestals.

'Miss Sabina's father came bringing Mr. Don McInnis home, and proposed the marriage to him. She was no longer young for suitors; she was instructed to submit. On the marriage night the house was ablaze, and lighted the town and the wedding guests climbing the hill. We were there. The presents were vases of gold, gold cups, statues of Diana. — And the bride. — We had not forgotten it yesterday when we drew it from the chest — the stiff white gown she wore! It never made a rustle when she gave him her hand. It was spring, the flowers in the baskets were purple hyacinths and white lilies, that wilted in the heat and showed their blue veins. Ladies fainted from the scent; the men were without

exception drunk, and Mr. Don McInnis with his head turning quickly from side to side, like an animal's, opened his mouth and laughed.'

Irene said: 'A great, profane man like all the McInnis men of Asphodel, Mr. Don McInnis. He was the last of his own, just as she was the last of hers. The hope was in him, and he knew it. He had a sudden way of laughter, like a rage, that pointed his eyebrows that were yellow, and changed his face. That night he stood astride — astride the rooms, the guests, the flowers, the tapers, the bride and her father with his purple face. "What, Miss Sabina?" he would shout, though she had never said a word, not one word — waiting in the stiffened gown that took then its odor of burning wax. We remembered that, that "What, Miss Sabina?" and we whispered it among ourselves later when we embroidered together, as though it were a riddle that young ladies could not answer. He seemed never to have said any other thing to her. He was dangerous that first night, swaying with drink, trampling the scattered flowers, led up to a ceremony there before all our eyes, Miss Sabina so rigid by his side. He was a McInnis, a man that would be like a torch carried into a house.'

The three old maids, who lay like a faded garland at the foot of the columns, paused in peaceful silence. When the story was taken up again, it was in Phoebe's delicate and gentle way, for its narrative was only part of memory now, and its beginning and ending might seem mingled and freed in the blue air of the hill.

'She bore three children, two boys and a girl, and one by one they died as they reached maturity. There was Minerva and she was drowned — before her wedding day. There was Theo, coming out from the university in his gown of the law, and killed in a fall off the wild horse he was bound to ride. And there was Lucian the youngest, shooting himself publicly on the courthouse steps, drunk in the broad daylight.

'Who can tell what will happen in this world!' said Phoebe, and she looked placidly up into the featureless sky overhead.

'It all served to make Miss Sabina prouder than ever,' Irene said. 'She was born grand, with a will to impose, and now she had only Mr. Don left, to impose it upon. But he was a McInnis. He had the wildness we all worshipped that first night, since he was not to be ours to love. He was unfaithful — maybe always — maybe once —'

'We told the news,' said Cora. 'We went in a body up the hill and into the house, weeping and wailing, hardly daring to name the name or the deed.'

'It was in the big hall by the statues of the Seasons, and she stood up to listen to us all the way through,' Irene murmured. 'She didn't move — she didn't blink her eye. We stood there in our little half-circle not daring to come closer. Then she reached out both her arms as though she would embrace us all, and made fists with her hands, with the big rings cutting into her, and called down the curse of heaven on everybody's head — his, and the woman's, and the dead children's, and ours. Then she walked out, and the door of her bedroom closed.'

'We ran away,' said Phoebe languidly. 'We ran down the steps and in and out of the boxwood garden, around the fountain, all clutching one another as though we were pursued, and away through the street, crying. She never shed a tear, whatever happened, but we shed enough for everybody.'

Cora said: 'By that time, her father was dead and there was no one to right the wrong. And Mr. Don — he only flourished. He wore white linen suits summer and winter. She declared the lightning would strike him for the destruction he had brought on her, but it never struck. She never closed her eyes a single night, she was so outraged and so undone. She would not eat a bite for anybody. We carried things up to her — soups, birds, wines, frozen surprises, cold shapes, one after the other. She only pushed them away. It could have been thought that life with the beast was the one thing in the living world to be pined after. But "How can I hate him enough?" she said over and over. "How can I show him the hate I have for him?" She implored us to tell her.'

'We heard he was running away to Asphodel,' said Irene,

'and taking the woman. And when we went and told Miss Sabina, she would not wait any longer for an act of God to punish him, though we took her and held her till she pushed us from her side.'

'She drove Mr. Don out of the house,' said Cora, to whom the cordial was now passed. 'Drove him out with a whip, in the broad daylight. It was a day like this, in summer — I remember the magnolias that made the air so heavy and full of sleep. It was just after dinner time and all the population came out and stood helpless to see, as if in a dream. Like a demon she sprang from the door and rushed down the long iron steps, driving him before her with the buggy whip, that had a purple tassel. He walked straight ahead as if to humor her, with his white hat lifted and held in his hand.'

'We followed at a little distance behind her, in case she should faint,' said Phoebe. 'But we were the ones who were near to fainting, when she set her feet in the gateway after driving him through, and called at the top of her voice for the woman to come forward. She longed to whip her there and then. But no one came forward. She swore that we were hiding and protecting some wretched creature, that we were all in league. Miss Sabina put a great blame on the whole town.'

'When Asphodel burned that night,' said Cora, 'and we all saw the fire raging on the sky, we ran and told her, and she was gratified — but from that moment remote from us and grand. And she laid down the law that the name of Don McInnis and the name of Asphodel were not to cross our lips again.'

The prodigious columns shone down and appeared tremulous with the tender light of summer which enclosed them all around, in equal and shadowless flame. They seemed to flicker with the flight of birds.

'Miss Sabina,' said Irene, 'for the rest of her life was proceeding through the gateway and down the street, and all her will was turned upon the population.'

'She was painted to be beautiful and terrible in the face, all dark around the eyes,' said Phoebe, 'in the way of grand ladies of the South grown old. She wore a fine jet-black wig

of great size, for she had lost her hair by some illness or violence. She went draped in the heavy brocades from her family trunks, which she hung about herself in some bitter disregard. She would do no more than pin them and tie them into place. Through such a weight of material her knees pushed slowly, her progress was hampered but she came on. Her look was the challenging one when looks met, though only Miss Sabina knew why there had to be any clangor of encounter among peaceable people. *We* knew she had been beautiful. Her hands were small, and as hot to the touch as a child's under the sharp diamonds. One hand, the right one, curved round and clenched an ebony stick mounted with the gold head of a lion.'

'She took her stick and went down the street proclaiming and wielding her power,' said Cora. 'Her power reached over the whole population — white and black, men and women, children, idiots, and animals — even strangers. Her law was laid over us, her riches were distributed upon us; we were given a museum and a statue, a waterworks. And we stood in fear of her, old and young. At the May Festival when she passed by, all the maypoles became hopelessly tangled, one by one. Her good wish and her censure could be as clearly told apart as a white horse from a black one. All news was borne to her first, and she interrupted every news-bearer. "You don't have to tell me: I know. The woman is dead. The child is born. The man is proved a thief." There would be a time when she appeared at the door of every house on the street, pounding with her cane. She dominated every ceremony, set the times for weddings and for funerals, even for births, and she named the children. She ordered lives about and moved people from one place to another in the town, brought them together or drove them apart, with the mystical and rigorous devotion of a priestess in a story; and she prophesied all the things beforehand. She foretold disaster, and was ready with hot breads and soups to send by running Negroes to every house the moment it struck. And she expected her imparted recipes to be used forever after, and no other. We are eating Miss Sabina's cake now —'

'But at the end of the street there was one door where Miss Sabina had never entered,' said Phoebe. 'The door of the post office. She acted as if the post office had no existence in the world, or else she called it a dirty little room with the door standing wide open to the flies. All the hate she had left in her when she was old went out to a little four-posted whitewashed building, the post office. It was beyond her domain. For there we might be still apart in a dream, and she did not know what it was.'

'But in the end, she came in,' said Irene.

'We were there,' she said. 'It was mail time, and we each had a letter in our hands. We heard her come to the end of the street, the heavy staggering figure coming to the beat of the cane. We were silent all at once. When Miss Sabina is at the door, there is no other place in the world but where you stand, and no other afternoon but that one, past or future. In the post office we drew near one another, and stood together. We held onto our letters as onto all far-away or ephemeral things at that moment, to our secret hope or joy and our despair too, which she might require of us.'

'When she entered,' said Cora, 'and took her stand in the centre of the floor, a little dog saw who it was and trotted out, and alarm like the vibration from the firebell trembled in the motes of the air, and the crowded room seemed to shake, to totter. We looked at one another in greater fear of her than ever before in our lives, and we would have run away or spoken to her first, except for a premonition that this time was the last, this demand the final one.'

'It was as if the place of the smallest and the longest-permitted indulgence, the little common green, were to be invaded when the time came for the tyrant to die,' said Phoebe.

The three old maids sighed gently. The grapes they held upon their palms were transparent in the light, so that the little black seeds showed within.

'But when Miss Sabina spoke,' said Irene, 'she said, "Give me my letter." And Miss Sabina never got a letter in her life. She never knew a soul beyond the town. We told her there was no letter for her, but she cried out again, "Give me my letter!" We told her there was none, and we went

closer and tried to gather her to us. But she said, "Give me that." And she took our letters out of our hands. "Your lovers!" she said, and tore them in two. We let her do just as she would. But she was not satisfied. "Open up!" she said to the postmistress, and she beat upon the little communicating door. So the postmistress had to open up, and Miss Sabina went in to the inner part. We all drew close. We glanced at one another with our eyes grown bright, like people under a spell, for she was bent upon destruction.'

'A fury and a pleasure seemed to rise inside her, that went out like lightning through her hands,' said Cora. 'She threw down her stick, she advanced with her bare hands. She seized upon everything before her, and tore it to pieces. She dragged the sacks about, and the wastebaskets, and the contents she scattered like snow. Even the ink pad she flung against the wall, and it left a purple mark like a grape stain that will never wear off.'

'She was possessed then, before our eyes, as she could never have been possessed. She raged. She rocked from side to side, she danced. Miss Sabina's arms moved like a harvester's in the field, to destroy all that was in the little room. In her frenzy she tore all the letters to pieces, and even put bits in her mouth and appeared to eat them.'

'Then she stood still in the little room. She had finished. We had not yet moved when she lay toppled on the floor, her wig fallen from her head and her face awry like a mask.'

'"A stroke." That is what we said, because we did not know how to put a name to the end of her life.' . . .

Here in the bright sun where the three old maids sat beside their little feast, Miss Sabina's was an old story, closed and complete. In some intoxication of the time and the place, they recited it and came to the end. Now they lay stretched on their sides on the ground, their summer dresses spread out, little smiles forming on their mouths, their eyes half-closed, Phoebe with a juicy green leaf between her teeth. Above them like a dream rested the bright columns of Asphodel, a dream like the other side of their lamentations.

All at once there was a shudder in the vines growing up

among the columns. Out into the radiant light with one foot forward had stepped a bearded man. He stood motionless as one of the columns, his eyes bearing without a break upon the three women. He was as rude and golden as a lion. He did nothing, and he said nothing while the birds sang on. But he was naked.

The white picnic cloth seemed to have stirred of itself and spilled out the half-eaten fruit and shattered the bottle of wine as the three old maids first knelt, then stood, and with a cry clung with their arms upon one another. As if they heard a sound in the vibrant silence, they were compelled to tarry in the very act of flight. In a soft little chorus of screams they waited, looking back over their shoulders, with their arms stretched before them. Then their shoes were left behind them, and the three made a little line across the brook, and across the field in an aisle that opened among the mounds of wild roses. With the suddenness of birds they had all dropped to earth at the same moment and as if by magic risen on the other side of the fence, beside a 'No Trespassing' sign.

They stood wordless together, brushing and plucking at their clothes, while quite leisurely the old horse trotted towards them across this pasture that was still, for him, unexplored.

The bearded man had not moved once.

Cora spoke. 'That was Mr. Don McInnis.'

'It was not,' said Irene. 'It was a vine in the wind.'

Phoebe was bent over to pull a thorn from her bare foot. 'But we thought he was dead.'

'That was just as much Mr. Don as this is I,' said Cora, 'and I would swear to that in a court of law.'

'He was naked,' said Irene.

'He was buck-naked,' said Cora. 'He was naked as an old goat. He must be as old as the hills.'

'I didn't look,' declared Phoebe. But there at one side she stood bowed and trembling as if from a fateful encounter.

'No need to cry about it, Phoebe,' said Cora. 'If it's Mr. Don, it's Mr. Don.'

They consoled one another, and hitched the horse, and then waited still in their little cluster, looking back.

'What Miss Sabina wouldn't have given to see him!' cried Cora at last. 'What she wouldn't have told him, what she wouldn't have done to him!'

But at that moment, as their gaze was fixed on the ruin, a number of goats appeared between the columns of Asphodel, and with a little leap started down the hill. Their nervous little hoofs filled the air with a shudder and palpitation.

'Into the buggy!'

Tails up, the goats leapt the fence as if there was nothing they would rather do.

Cora, Irene, and Phoebe were inside the open buggy, the whip was raised over the old horse.

'There are more and more coming still,' cried Irene.

There were billy-goats and nanny-goats, old goats and young, a whole thriving herd. Their little beards all blew playfully to the side in the wind of their advancement.

'They are bound to catch up,' cried Irene.

'Throw them something,' said Cora, who held the reins.

At their feet was the basket that had been saved out, with a napkin of biscuits and bacon inside.

'Here, billy-goats!' they cried.

Leaning from the sides of the buggy, their sleeves fluttering, each one of them threw back biscuits with both hands.

'Here, billy-goats!' they cried, but the little goats were prancing so close, their inquisitive noses were almost in the spokes of the wheels.

'It won't stop them,' said Phoebe. 'They're not satisfied in the least, it only makes them curious.'

Cora was standing up in the open buggy, driving it like a chariot. 'Give them the little baked hen, then,' she said, and they threw it behind.

The little goats stopped, with their heads flecked to one side, and then their horns met over the prize.

There was a turn, and Asphodel was out of sight. The road went into a ravine and wound into the shade.

'We escaped,' said Cora.

'I am thankful Miss Sabina did not live to see us then,'

said Irene. 'She would have been ashamed of us — bare-footed and running. She would never have given up the little basket we had saved back.'

'He ought not to be left at liberty,' cried Cora. She spoke soothingly to the old horse whose haunches still trembled, and then said, 'I have a good mind to report him to the law!'

There was the great house where Miss Sabina had lived, high on the coming hill.

But Phoebe laughed aloud as they made the curve. Her voice was soft, and she seemed to be still in a tender dream and an unconscious celebration — as though the picnic were not already set rudely in the past, but were the enduring and intoxicating present, still the phenomenon, the golden day.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTICES

BAUM, VICKI. Born in Vienna in 1896, Miss Baum began a professional life very early as a child-prodigy harpist. She also started her literary career early. After writing short stories for eight years, she had the first one accepted by a magazine when she was fourteen. Before the First World War, she went to Germany, where she married a childhood friend, Richard Lert, and had two sons. From 1926 to 1932 she edited Ullstein publications in Berlin, writing books on the side. Her first international success was 'Grand Hotel,' which brought her to the United States. She became an American citizen in 1938. At present she is finishing a book called 'The Weeping Wood,' the history of rubber.

BECK, WARREN. He is professor of English and tutor in literary composition at Lawrence College, Appleton, Wisconsin. He is author of the short stories collected in the volume 'The Blue Sash.' He also has written a number of critical articles on Faulkner, Virginia Woolf, Spender, and on modern poetry, published in various magazines. Professor Beck says, 'The thing I am proudest of as a writer is that I've appeared annually in *Story* for the last six years. What I am proudest of as a man is my family, my wife and my son.'

BOYLE, KAY. Miss Boyle was born in St. Paul, Minnesota, and lived in Europe twenty years, returning to the United States two years ago. Her thirteenth book, 'Primer for Combat,' was published last year. She is the author of many short stories which have been published on both sides of the Atlantic. Miss Boyle is the mother of five daughters. She recently married Baron Joseph von Franckenstein.

CHEEVER, JOHN. His birthplace was Quincy, Massachusetts, where he was born in 1912. He was educated at Thayer Academy in South Braintree. Since that time he has lived and worked in Boston, Washington, Saratoga Springs, and New York. He entered the army in May, 1942, completed basic infantry training at Camp Croft, South Carolina, and was assigned to the Fourth Division. Mr. Cheever has written many short stories, some of which have recently appeared in book form under the title 'The Way Some People Live.'

D'AGOSTINO, GUIDO. Mr. D'Agostino was born in Greenwich Village, New York City, of Italian parentage. He is the author of two novels, 'Olives on the Apple Tree' and 'Hills Beyond Manhattan.' Short stories by him have been published in *Story*, *Esquire*, and *Coronet*. He lives in Yorktown Heights in a house he built himself and which, with its vegetable acre, orchard, chickens, hunting dogs, cats, and atmosphere of genial living, is more like a home in a pre-war Europe than a residence in Westchester County. There his wife Helene, a Frenchwoman and well-known designer, presides over a Parisian cuisine. Until the war Mr. D'Agostino spent his leisure time in hunting and fishing. Now he devotes six and seven days a week to working in the Office of War Information.

DYER, MURRAY. He was born thirty-five years ago in Japan of English parentage. He was educated at Weymouth College, Dorset, England, and served two years as an instructor at the Imperial Japanese Naval Engineering College, Nakamaizuru, Japan. He taught English for six months at Kwansai University, at Kobe. He came to America in 1928 and became a citizen of the United States in 1937. He is one of the best-known radio script writers in the country, having received many awards for his work. Mr. Dyer is the script editor of the Department of Education of the Columbia Broadcasting System and lecturer in radio writing at New York University.

FAULKNER, WILLIAM. He grew up in Oxford, Mississippi, a descendant of a once wealthy family. His schooling was intermittent and he spent most of his youth loafing around his father's livery stable. He wrote poetry, strongly influenced by Omar Khayyam and Swinburne, but, he says, it was no good except as an aid to love-making. Jolted out of his lazy life by the First World War, he joined the Canadian air force. After the war he turned to earning a living at odd jobs such as house-painting, selling books in a department store, and shoveling coal into a factory furnace. He started writing fiction and suddenly, he explains, 'I discovered that writing was a mighty fine thing. It enables you to make men stand on their hind legs and cast a shadow.' Since then he has written many notable novels and short stories.

FIELD, RACHEL. Her death in March, 1942, deprived the country of one of its most distinguished women writers. Miss Field was born in New York in 1894. She attended school in Massachusetts and later took special courses in literature and playwriting at Radcliffe College. From the year she was fifteen until recently, Miss Field had spent every summer on a small wooded island off the coast of Maine. 'I suppose,' she wrote, 'that it, more than any one thing in my life, has helped me with my writing. For it means roots and background to me.' She was the author of two books of verse, 'The Pointed People' and 'Fear Is the Thorn.' She wrote a number of books for young people, including 'Hitty, Her First Hundred Years,' which won the John Newberry Award in 1930. Novels by her are 'And Now Tomorrow,' 'All This and Heaven Too,' and 'Time Out of Mind.' For the past three years, Miss Field had been living in California with her husband, Arthur S. Pederson, and their small adopted daughter.

FISHER, VARDIS. His birthplace, in 1895, was a one-room cottonwood-log shack in Annis, Idaho, where his Mormon pioneer parents had settled. His mother was his only teacher until he first entered school at the age of fifteen in Rigby, Idaho. In the First World War Mr. Fisher enlisted as a flying cadet and later transferred to the heavy artillery. He studied at the University of Utah and the University of Chicago. He taught nine years in various universities and left teaching in 1931. He was director of the Federal Writers' Project in Idaho. Among his books are 'Toilers of the Hills,' 'In Tragic Life,' 'Passions Spin the Plot,' and 'Forgive Us Our Virtues.' His latest novel is 'Darkness and the Deep.' He lives in Thousand Springs Valley, Idaho, where he describes himself as 'an enthusiastic and wholly incompetent horticulturist; but I stick to those plants which will grow no matter which end you thrust into the earth.'

FLANDRAU, GRACE. A native of St. Paul, Minnesota, at the age of twelve she was sent to a girls' school in France, where she remained for four years. After another year at school in America, she spent several years traveling in the Orient and on her return married Blair Flandrau and went to live on his remote coffee plantation in Mexico. She began writing short stories there, and on her return to the United States contributed stories and critical articles to many magazines. She is the author of two novels, 'Being Respectable' and 'Indeed This Flesh.' She also has written a travel book on Africa, 'Then I Saw the Congo.'

GIBBONS, ROBERT. He was born in 1915 in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, and attended the University of Alabama and the Alabama Polytechnic Institute. He worked as a Bible salesman, farm laborer, and county administrator for A.A.A. and U.S.D.A. and then became a teaching fellow at the University of Alabama, where he is now an instructor in English. He is the holder of the Alfred A. Knopf Fiction Fellowship for 1942 and is completing a novel for which the grant was awarded. Short stories by Mr. Gibbons have appeared in several magazines.

GRAY, PETER. He was born in Fergus Falls, Minnesota, in 1898. He has done newspaper work and ghost-writing. Mr. Gray spent five years in Greece and his

story, 'Threnody for Stelios,' included in this volume, first was published in Greek by an Athenian magazine. He is the author of a novel, 'Pillar of Salt,' and a non-fiction book on Greece, 'People of Poros.' He now lives in New York City.

HALE, NANCY. The daughter of parents who both were painters, she was born in Boston in 1908. She herself was educated to be an artist but turned to writing. She has been a magazine editor in New York and a reporter for the *New York Times*. She now lives in Washington, where her husband is in the Navy. She describes her residence there as 'a boarding-house parlor which serves as a general sitting-room for the boarders during the day' and as her 'bedroom at night.' It was in this room that Miss Hale wrote much of 'The Prodigal Women,' her most recent novel. A collection of her short stories, 'Between the Dark and the Day-light,' is being published this year.

HORGAN, PAUL. Captain Horgan was born in Buffalo in 1903. He studied at the New Mexico Military Institute and then joined the production staff of the Eastman Theatre in Rochester, New York. He was the winner of the Harper Prize Novel Contest in 1933 with his book, 'The Fault of Angels.' Other books by him are 'No Quarter Given,' 'Main Line West,' 'A Lamp on the Plains,' and 'Figures in a Landscape,' a collection of his shorter pieces. His short stories have appeared in many magazines. At present he is on active duty as captain in the United States Army.

KNIGHT, LAURETTE MACDUFFIE. She is a native of Newport, Rhode Island, where she was born in 1906. She lived in the South, for the most part in North Carolina, until she was eighteen, when she went to New York to study at Columbia University. Until 1942 she lived in New York, except for summers spent in various New England states. Since then she has been living in San Antonio, Texas, where her husband, Howard Maier, a writer and a staff sergeant in the Air Corps, edits the *Duncan Field Flying Times*. Her first published story was published in the *Delineator Magazine* in 1936, and since then she has had stories in *Collier's*, *Story*, *Woman's Home Companion*, *Red Book*, and other magazines. She is working on a novel to be published by Doubleday, Doran sometime in 1944.

LAIDLAW, CLARA. She was born in Gladstone, Michigan. She received her A.B. degree from the Northern Michigan College of Education and is now doing post-graduate work at the University of Michigan, where she has won three Avery Hopwood Awards, two in fiction and one in the essay. While studying with Professor R. W. Cowden, Director of the Hopwood Awards, she also is teaching high-school English. 'The Little Black Boys,' which is reprinted in this anthology, received a prize in the Avery Hopwood and Jule Hopwood Awards Contest for 1942. It is Miss Laidlaw's first published story.

LAVIN, MARY. Until she was ten years old, Miss Lavin lived in America, where she was born in New York City. She was then taken by her parents to Ireland and has lived there ever since. She was unknown as a writer until an American woman, visiting Ireland, happened to see some of her manuscripts and was so impressed by them that she brought them back to the United States with her to show an editor. Miss Lavin's first published story was in the *Atlantic Monthly*. A collection of her short stories was published last year under the title, 'Tales from Bective Bridge.'

MORRIS, EDITA. A native of Sweden, she spent her childhood in a remote country place there. She completed her education in Stockholm and at the age of twenty-one left Sweden. She lived for long periods in various countries, including England, France, North Africa, the Near East, and Central America. She is married to an American, I. V. Morris, a writer of distinction. Her first novel, 'My Darling from the Lions,' is being published this year. Previously, a collection of her

short stories, 'Birth of an Old Lady,' was published in England and Sweden. Mrs. Morris recently has made radio broadcasts to Sweden and has been engaged in editorial work for the Swedish edition of the *Reader's Digest*.

SAROYAN, WILLIAM. Ever since he first shot to fame with his book, 'The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze,' Mr. Saroyan, who was born in Fresno, California, has attracted wide attention by both his short stories and his plays. Several collections of his stories have been published, and among his plays are 'The Time of Your Life,' 'My Heart's in the Highlands,' and 'The Beautiful People.' His first novel, 'The Human Comedy,' was published this year. 'I have been a little untrue to my first love,' he writes, 'and have taken up with that bum, the play. I really miss writing stories, want to get back some day to the better writing of better Saroyan stories — simpler, swifter, and more said in each of them.' A private in the Army, he is stationed at the Wright Barracks, near Dayton, with the Signal Corps.

SCHWARTZ, DELMORE. He was born twenty-nine years ago in Brooklyn, New York. He has published three books, 'In Dreams Begin Responsibilities,' 'Shenandoah,' and 'Genesis.' He also is the author of short stories, verse, and critical articles. At present, he is an instructor in English composition at Harvard University.

SHAW, IRWIN. He is a native New Yorker and author of many short stories, published mainly in *The New Yorker*. He also is a playwright, his play 'Bury the Dead' attracting widespread attention a few years ago. His newest play, produced this year, is called 'Sons and Soldiers.' 'As for biographical data,' he states, 'I've been a private in the Army since last July and we seem to be winning.'

SHEDD, MARGARET. Her grandparents and parents were Presbyterian missionaries in Persia, where she was born in 1900. She was educated at schools in Persia and Switzerland and at Stanford University in California. Her first novel, 'Hurricane Cay,' was published last year and she now is at work on a second book. Her short stories have been printed in *Transition*, *Theatre Arts Monthly*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and the *North American Review*. She is married to Oliver Kisich and is the mother of three children.

STEGNER, WALLACE. He was born in Lake Mills, Iowa, in 1909 and has lived in many places, including North Dakota, Saskatchewan, and Utah. In 1937 he was winner of the Little, Brown novelette contest and since then has written three books. A fourth, 'The Rock Candy Mountain,' will be published this year. He is Briggs-Copeland Instructor of English at Harvard University and lives in Cambridge.

STUART, ALISON. She was born in Princeton, New Jersey, in 1918. She attended Sarah Lawrence College, from which she was graduated in 1941. 'Death and My Uncle Felix' was written in her senior year there. At present she is living in Miami, Florida, where her husband, an ensign in the Navy, is stationed at the Submarine Chaser Training Center.

STUART, JESSE. A Kentuckian, he has written innumerable stories laid in his native state. His first book was a volume of poetry, 'The Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow,' and he has three books slated for publication during 1943 and 1944. Mr. Stuart is superintendent of three schools in Kentucky and lives in Riverton with his wife and baby daughter. In addition to writing both stories and books, and running three schools, he also finds time to farm.

SULLIVAN, RICHARD. His birthplace is Kenosha, Wisconsin, where he was born in 1908. He graduated from Notre Dame University in 1930. He is married and has two children. His work has been published in *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Scribner's*, *Mademoiselle*, *The New Yorker*, *The New Republic*, and other magazines.

His first novel, 'Summer After Summer,' was published last year and he is now completing another novel. Since 1936 he has been on the faculty of English at Notre Dame.

THURBER, JAMES. He was born in Columbus, Ohio, in 1894. He attended public schools and Ohio State University, from which he was not graduated because of failure in botany and military drill. He served two years as a code clerk in the diplomatic service and afterward was a newspaperman for seven years. His cartoons in *The New Yorker* have aroused nation-wide mirth. His short stories and sketches have been published in book form. He has settled permanently in Cornwall, Connecticut, 'The seventh Connecticut town Mrs. Thurber and I have lived in since 1935 and the one we like best of them all. Because of my impaired vision, "The Catbird Seat" was written in longhand on yellow paper. The scrawls were read back to me, and I re-scrawled the parts of the story I wasn't satisfied with. About four hundred sheets of paper were used in the process. It's hard work — for the person who has to read the scrawls. . . . I'm trying to write a play in this manner. Nobody knows how that will come out.'

TREICHLER, JESSIE. She is an Iowan and was graduated from the State University of Montana. She has been secretary to three college presidents and is assistant to the President of Antioch College. Mrs. Treichler read manuscripts for H. G. Merriam, editor of *The Frontier*, and is an associate of *The Writer's Forum*. She is the wife of Paul Treichler, playwright and director of dramatics at Antioch, and has a daughter, born this spring.

WEIDMAN, JEROME. He was born on New York's East Side in 1913. He attended public schools and evening sessions at both the College of the City of New York and New York University, where he studied accountancy and law. Before turning to writing, Mr. Weidman, in his own words, 'was a newsboy, a soda jerker, a mail clerk, a delivery boy for a firm that rented tuxedos made — I'll take my oath — of pure lead, a printer, a stenographer, a window cleaner, a switchboard operator, and an operator in a necktie factory.' He has published six books, among them 'I Can Get It for You Wholesale,' 'I'll Never Go There Any More,' and 'The Horse That Could Whistle "Dixie,"' a collection of short stories. His latest novel, published this spring, is 'Lights Around the Shore.' He now is in England on a government mission.

WELTY, EUDORA. She was born in Jackson, Mississippi, which has always been her home. After attending school in her native state, she went to the University of Wisconsin and Columbia University. Miss Welty worked briefly on newspapers and at publicity, and now devotes all her time to the writing of fiction. She is the author of 'The Robber Bridegroom' and 'Curtain of Green.'

THE YEARBOOK OF THE AMERICAN
SHORT STORY
JANUARY 1 TO DECEMBER 31, 1942

ROLL OF HONOR

1942

ALGREN, NELSON.
The Captain Is a Card.

BAUM, VICKI.
This Healthy Life.

BECK, WARREN.
Boundary Line.

BEMELMANS, LUDWIG.
Watch the Birdie.

BLOCK, LIBBIE.
What Son Tells Everything?

BOYLE, KAY.
Frenchman's Ship.
Hilaire and the Maréchal Pétard.

BREUER, BESSIE.
Pigeons en Casserole.

BRIDGE, ANN.
Hindemith at Harvard.

BROOKHOUSER, FRANK.
They Were Very Young.

CHEEVER, JOHN.
The Pleasures of Solitude.
The Shape of a Night.

D'AGOSTINO, GUIDO.
The Dream of Angelo Zara.

DYER, MURRAY.
Samuel Blane.

FAULKNER, WILLIAM.
The Bear.

FIELD, RACHEL.
Delta Autumn.

FINEMAN, MORTON.
Beginning of Wisdom.

FINEMAN, MORTON.
Garibaldi Still Walks in the Streets.

FISHER, VARDIS.
A Partnership with Death.

FLANDRAU, GRACE.
What Do You See, Dear Enid?

GHISELIN, BREWSTER.
Escape.

GIBBONS, ROBERT.
Time's End.

GRAY, PETER.
Threnody for Stelios.

HALE, NANCY.
Who Lived and Died Believing.

HORGAN, PAUL.
The Peach Stone.
A Try for the Island.

JAYNES, CLARE.
The Coming of Age.

KNIGHT, LAURETTE MACDUFFIE.
The Enchanted.

LAIDLAW, CLARA.
The Little Black Boys.

LAVIN, MARY.
Love Is For Lovers

McLAUGHLIN, ROBERT.
Everything Runs Backward in
Chicago.

MOON, BUCKLIN.
Ceremonial into Freedom.

MORRIS, EDITA.
Young Man in an Astrakhan Cap.

NOLAND, FELIX.
All the Days of Your Life.

O'HARA, MARY.
He was So — Gorgeous.

SAROYAN, WILLIAM.
Knife-Like, Flower-Like, Like Noth-
ing at All in the World.

SCHWARTZ, DELMORE.
An Argument in 1934.

SHAW, IRWIN.
Preach on the Dusty Roads.
Welcome to the City.

SHEDD, MARGARET.
My Public.

STEGNER, WALLACE.
Chip Off the Old Block.
Two Rivers.

STUART, ALISON.
Death and My Uncle Felix.
The Yodeler.

STUART, JESSE.
Dawn of Remembered Spring.

SULLIVAN, RICHARD.
The Women.

SUYIN, HAN.
Dawn in China.

THOMAS, DOROTHY.
Sin.

THURBER, JAMES.
The Catbird Scat.

TREICHLER, JESSIE.
Homecoming.

WEIDMAN, JEROME.
Philadelphia Express.

WELTY, EUDORA.
Asphodel.

The Wide Net.

WINSLOW, THYRA SAMTER.
A Lot in Common.

WRIGHT, RICHARD.
The Man Who Lived Underground.

ZUGSMITH, LEANE.
Ohaiyo, Kentucky.

DISTINCTIVE VOLUMES OF SHORT STORIES

PUBLISHED IN THE UNITED STATES

1942

- BAUER, W., and BOWDER, W., *editors*. Short Story in Parallel. Heath.
- BEMELMANS, LUDWIG. I Love You, I Love You, I Love You. Viking Press.
- BRICKELL, HERSCHEL, and FULLER, MURIEL, *editors*. O. Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories of 1942. Doubleday, Doran.
- CHEYNEY, P. Best Stories of the Underworld. Ryerson Press.
- FLORES, ANGEL, and POORE, DUDLEY, *editors*. Fiesta in November. Houghton Mifflin.
- FOLEY, MARTHA, *editor*. Best American Short Stories, 1942. Houghton Mifflin.
- LAVIN, MARY. Tales from Bective Bridge. Little Brown.
- MARIELLA, SISTER. Great Modern Catholic Short Stories. Sheed and Ward.
- POST STORIES OF 1942. Little Brown.
- SPEARE, M. E. World's Great Short Stories. World Pub. Co.
- THURBER, JAMES. My World — and Welcome to It. Harcourt, Brace.
- WELTY, EUDORA. Curtain of Green. Doubleday, Doran.
- WEST, RAY B., *editor*. Rocky Mountain Stories. Swallow and Critchlow.

DISTINCTIVE SHORT STORIES IN AMERICAN MAGAZINES

1942

ABBETT, HALLIE SOUTHGATE

The Dark Forest. American, Oct.

ALGREN, NELSON

The Captain Is a Card. Esquire, June

ALPERT, HOLLIS

The Grandmother. American Prefaces,
Spring

BAUM, VICKI

This Healthy Life. Story, Sept.-Oct.

BECK, WARREN

Boundary Line. Rocky Mountain Re-
view, Winter

The Four-Faced God. Story, May-
June

BELNAP, CONSTANCE

The Dinky House. New Yorker, Feb.
28

BEMELMANS, LUDWIG

Watch the Birdie. New Yorker, June 6

BENEDICT, LIBBY

The Stamp Collector. Menorah Jour-
nal, Autumn

BENSON, SALLY

Going Home. New Yorker, July 4
5135 Kensington — Jan., 1904. New
Yorker, Jan. 31

5135 Kensington — Feb., 1904. New
Yorker, Feb. 28

BINDAMIN, M. R.

Choice Word. Writer's Forum, Feb.

BLOCK, LIBBIE

What Son Tells Everything? Good
Housekeeping, May

BONELLI, CONSTANCE

Caterpillars. Mademoiselle, August

BOYLE, KAY

The Eternal Train. Harper's Bazaar,
June

Frenchman's Ship. Saturday Evening
Post, Nov. 21

Hilaire and the Maréchal Pétard.
Harper's, August

The Statue's Face. Mademoiselle, July
Their Name Is Macaroni. New Yorker,
Jan. 3

This They Carried with Them.
Harper's Bazaar, Oct.

Wanderer. Accent, Winter

BREUER, BESSIE

Pigeons en Casserole. New Yorker,
June 20

BREYFOGLE, WILLIAM ARTHUR

The Runt. Saturday Evening Post,
June 13

BRIDGE, ANN

Hindemith at Harvard. Mademoiselle,
April

BROOKHOUSER, FRANK

Girl at the Station. Red Book, April

The Girls. Rocky Mountain Review,
Winter

They Were Very Young. Red Book,
August

BUCK, ASHLEY

In This Dull Haven. Writer's Forum,
June

BUCK, PEARL S.

The Enemy. Harper's, Nov.

CHASE, MARY ELLEN

A Candle at Night. Collier's, May 9

CHEAVENS, MARTHA

Sleep Not, My Country. Good House-
keeping, June

CHEEVER, JOHN

The Man Who Was Very Homesick
for New York. New Yorker, Nov. 21

The Peril in the Streets. New Yorker,
March 21

The Pleasures of Solitude. New York-
er, Jan. 24

The Shape of a Night. New Yorker,
April 18

CHIDESTER, ANN

When War Came. Mademoiselle, Sept.

CLARK, WALTER VAN TILBURG

The Pretender. Atlantic Monthly,
April

COATES, ROBERT M.

The Darkness of the Night. New
Yorker, Sept. 5

COVERT, ALICE LENT

First Love. Saturday Evening Post,
Sept. 26

CROWLEY, JOSEPH

Hosannas to Peace. Rocky Mountain
Review, Winter

D'AGOSTINO, GUIDO

The Dream of Angelo Zara. Story,
Sept.-Oct.

DAVIS, ROBERT GORHAM

An Interval Like This. New Yorker,
April 25

DE JONG, DAVID CORNEL

Snow-on-the-Mountain. Harper's Ba-
zaar, May

DOLE, VIRGINIA MORRELL

Innocente's Miracle. Household, Sept.

DONATHI, STANLEY F.

Honorable Discharge. Collier's, Nov.
21

One Hundred Frenchmen. Saturday
Evening Post, Oct. 10

DOUGALL, ELSE TORGE

The Bear, The Red Ox, Cupid and Mr. Zorn. Story, Sept.-Oct.

DYER, MURRAY

Samuel Blane. Harper's, Sept.

FANTE, JOHN

Mary Osaka, I Love You. Good House-keeping, Oct.

FAULKNER, WILLIAM

The Bear. Saturday Evening Post, May 9

Delta Autumn. Story, May-June

Two Soldiers. Saturday Evening Post, March 28

FELD, ROSE

Sophie Halenczik Makes a Speech, New Yorker, Oct. 3

Sophie Halenczik's Greenhorns. New Yorker, Jan. 31

FERNALD, JOHN

Destroyer from America. Saturday Evening Post, June 20

FERRO, MATHILD

Weedy's Mrs. Worthington, Harper's Bazaar, Sept.

FIELD, RACHEL

Beginning of Wisdom. American, March

FINEMAN, MORTON

Garibaldi Still Walks in the Streets. Writer's Forum, July

The Last Frenchman. University Review, Spring

FISHER, LEWIS

Military Secret. Accent, Autumn

FISHER, VARDIS

A Partnership with Death. Rocky Mountain Review, Spring-Summer

FLANDRAU, GRACE

A Nice Man. Harper's, Jan.

What Do You See, Dear Enid? New Yorker, Sept. 26

FOLEY, TERESA

Lucy. Story, July-August

FOSTER, MICHAEL

Weep No More. Collier's, Sept. 5

FREEMAN, I. H.

One-Punch Peddie. Prairie Schooner, Spring

FUCHS, DANIEL

A Clean, Quiet House. New Yorker, May 30

GHISELIN, BREWSTER

Escape. University Review, Autumn

GIBBONS, ROBERT

Time's End. Atlantic Monthly, Jan.

GIZYCKA, FELICIA

The Clown and the Angel. Harper's Bazaar, Dec.

GOLD, ZACHARY

You Can't Miss Him. Saturday Evening Post, Nov. 14

GORDON, RUTH

Our New Telephone. Atlantic Monthly, Sept.

GRAY, PETER

Threnody for Stelios. Virginia Quarterly Review, Winter

GREBANIER, JERRY

The Sparrow Hath Found a House. Mademoiselle, June

HALE, NANCY

Days Become Dear. Harper's Bazaar, March 1

Georgetown Heights. New Yorker, Sept. 19

The Japanese Garden. New Yorker, Nov. 28

Who Lived and Died Believing. Harper's Bazaar, Sept.

HARDY, W. G.

The Longest Way Round. Collier's, Dec. 19

HAVILL, EDWARD

Memorial to Birth. Red Book, Nov.

HENRY, GENE

The Watch. Woman's Home Companion, Dec.

HIGGINS, JAMES

A Decision. Fantasy

HORGAN, PAUL

The Peach Stone. Yale Review, Summer

A Try for the Island. Harper's, June

JAYNES, CLARE

The Coming of Age. Story, Jan.-Feb.

KALISCHER, PETER

American in Paris. Collier's, July 4

KNIGHT, LAURETTE MACDUFFIE

The Enchanted. Story, March-April

KOMROFF, MANUEL

The Joy of Waiting. Esquire, October

LAIDLAW, CLARA

The Little Black Boys. Atlantic Monthly, Dec.

LANDI, ELISSA

St. Veronica and Joe. Mademoiselle, Nov.

LAVIN, MARY

Love Is for Lovers. Harper's Bazaar, Jan.

LITSEY, SARAH

Turkey Feather. Prairie Schooner, Fall

LULL, RODERICK

The Gun. Elks Magazine, March

MACKAY, MARGARET MACKPRANG

A Day on the Beach. New Yorker, Nov. 7

MASON, M. M.

Passage to the Stars. Writer's Forum, July

MCCULLERS, CARSON

A Tree, a Rock, a Cloud. Harper's Bazaar, Nov.

McLAUGHLIN, ROBERT

Everything Ruins Backward in Chicago. New Yorker, Nov. 28

- McNULTY, JOHN
A Man like Grady, You Got to Know Him First. New Yorker, Sept. 26
- MERRIAM, EVE
Wien, Wien. American Prefaces, Autumn
- MERRICK, REBECCA
The Sun Shines in August. Story, Jan.-Feb.
- MILLER, MARGARET
Diamond Rings and Roses. Mademoiselle, June
- MILLER, WARREN
Tenants of the House. Harper's Bazaar, August
- MLAKAR, FRANK
My Uncle Poldé. Esquire, August
- MOLL, ELICK
By the Dawn's Early Light. Story, Sept.-Oct.
You'll Never Get Rich. Saturday Evening Post, Nov. 21
- MOON, BUCKLIN
Ceremonial into Freedom. Decade of Short Stories, Autumn
- MORI, TOSHIO
Say It with Flowers. Writer's Forum, March
- MORRIS, EDITA
Young Man in an Astrakhan Cap. Harper's Bazaar, Dec.
- MORRIS, E. G.
Long, Lonesome Road. Esquire, August
- MORRIS, I. V.
Departure Deferred. Story, July-Aug.
- NEWHOUSE, EDWARD
The Day Before. New Yorker, Sept. 5
The Indecent Haste of Horace Gardner. New Yorker, March 14
Vacancy in Westchester. New Yorker, August 8
- NOLAND, FELIX
All the Days of Your Life. McCall's, March
- O'BRIEN, EDWARD W.
The Peddler Came A-driving. Saturday Evening Post, Dec. 26
- O'HARA, MARY
He Was So — Gorgous. Red Book, July
- PANETTA, GEORGE
About a Picnic. Story, July-Aug.
- PARKER, ELSIE BELL
Almost Everything. Mademoiselle, March
- PAUKER, JOHN
Last Time in Vienna. Threshold, April
- PEATTIE, MARGARET RHODES
Even the Dead Shall Rise. Story, Sept.-Oct.
- PIERCE, OVID WILLIAMS
One of the Darkies. Southwest Review, Winter
- ROBINSON, LEONARD W.
Prelude in 4-F. New Yorker, Nov. 7
- ROHRICH, RUBY
Citizen in the South. Opportunity, Dec.
- ROSE, ROMA
The Way It Was Before. American, Nov.
- RUMSEY, ADELINE
The Collection. New Yorker, Oct. 10
- RYDELL, HELEN BULLARD
Harvest Bums. Writer's Forum, June
- SAROYAN, WILLIAM
Knife-Like, Flower-Like, Like Nothing at All in the World. Harper's Bazaar, July
- SAVELA, MARTIN
Man in Uniform. Direction, Summer
- SCHAAL, ERIC
The Gardenia. Story, May-June
- SCHWARTZ, DELMORE
An Argument in 1934. Kenyon Review, Winter
- SCHWARTZ, RUTH A.
The First Good Day. New York University Fiction Workshop Manuscripts
- SCOTT, DOLORES TAYLOR
The Letter. Mademoiselle, April
- SEIDE, MICHAEL
The Sore Loser. American Prefaces, Spring
- SELMAN, JEROME AND ABE
Where the Sun Died. Story, March-April
- SHAPLEN, ROBERT
Somewhere Safe to Sea. Coronet, Nov.
- SHAW, IRWIN
Preach on the Dusty Roads. New Yorker, Aug. 22
Welcome to the City. New Yorker, Jan. 17
- SHEDD, MARGARET
My Public. Harper's Bazaar, Sept.
- SHEEAN, VINCENT
They Dance in Lisbon. Red Book, March
- SHERMAN, RICHARD
Some Day I'll Get You. American, Jan.
- SILVERMAN, MIRIAM
Love Was the Theme. Mademoiselle, Aug.
- SOUTHARD, W. P.
Give me Time. Kenyon Review, Spring
- STEGNER, WALLACE
Chip Off the Old Block. Virginia Quarterly Review, Autumn
Two Rivers. Atlantic Monthly, June

- STERN, PHILIP VAN DOREN
Lincoln's Last Christmas. Collier's,
Dec. 26
- STOWE, PERRY
Superstition Farm. Story, March-
April
- STRONG, AUSTIN
'She Shall Have Music.' Atlantic
Monthly, Oct.
- STUART, ALISON
Death and My Uncle Felix. Mademoi-
selle, Oct.
The Yoodeler. Harper's Bazaar, June
- STUART, JESSE
Another April. Harper's, August
Biting Doodle Bug. University Re-
view, Spring
Dawn of Remembered Spring. Harper's
Bazaar, June
Death Has Two Good Eyes. Esquire,
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Grandpa. Prairie Schooner, Spring
Plowshare in Heaven. Fantasy
Whose Land is This? Esquire, Sept.
- SULLIVAN, RICHARD
In a Glass Darkly. Yale Review,
Spring
The Sharers. American Mercury, June
The Women. Accent, Autumn
- SUYIN, HAN
Dawn in China. Woman's Home Com-
panion, Aug.
- TAYLOR, PETER
The Schoolgirl. American Prefaces,
Spring
- THOMAS, DOROTHY
Sin. Saturday Evening Post, July 4
- THURBER, JAMES
The Catbird Seat. New Yorker, Nov.
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Some Will Dream. American Prefaces,
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Stone. Common Ground, Spring
- TREAT, IDA
Escape from Djibouti. Saturday Eve-
ning Post, May 9
- TREICHLER, JESSIE
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mer
- TURNER, ETHEL
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- TYLER, DOROTHY
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- VAN BUSKIRK, SUZAN
The Stairway. Husk, Oct.
- VOLLMER, LULA
Ghost Shoes. Saturday Evening Post,
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- WARREN, VIRGINIA LEE
Not Much Time. Story, Sept.-Oct.
- WEAVER, JOHN D.
While Lions Roar. Saturday Evening
Post, July 25
- WEIDMAN, JEROME
Fire Escape. Yale Review, Autumn
Philadelphia Express, New Yorker,
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- WELLER, GEORGE
Icarus Over Key West. Story, March-
April
- WELTY, EUDORA
Asphodel. Yale Review, Autumn
Livvie is Back. Atlantic Monthly, Nov.
The Wide Net. Harper's, May
The Winds. Harper's Bazaar, Aug.
- WEST, RAY B., JR.
Scorekeeper. New Mexico Quarterly
Review, Aug.
- WHITE, WILLIAM C.
Pecos Bill and the Willful Coyote.
Story, July-Aug.
- WINSLOW, THYRA SAMTER
A Lot in Common. New Yorker, Aug.
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- WOLFF, MARITTA
This Was the Day. Harper's Bazaar,
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- WRIGHT, RICHARD
The Man Who Lived Underground.
Accent, Spring
- ZARA, LOUIS
Peter Cartwright's Windies. Esquire,
March
- ZUGSMITH, LEANE
Ohaiyo, Kentucky. Story, July-Aug.

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 Opportunity, 1133 Broadway, New York City
 Partisan Review, 22 East 17th Street, New York City
 Prairie Schooner, 12th and R Streets, Lincoln, Nebraska

Queen's Quarterly, Queen's University, Kingston, Ont., Canada
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