FIRST-PRIZE STORIES

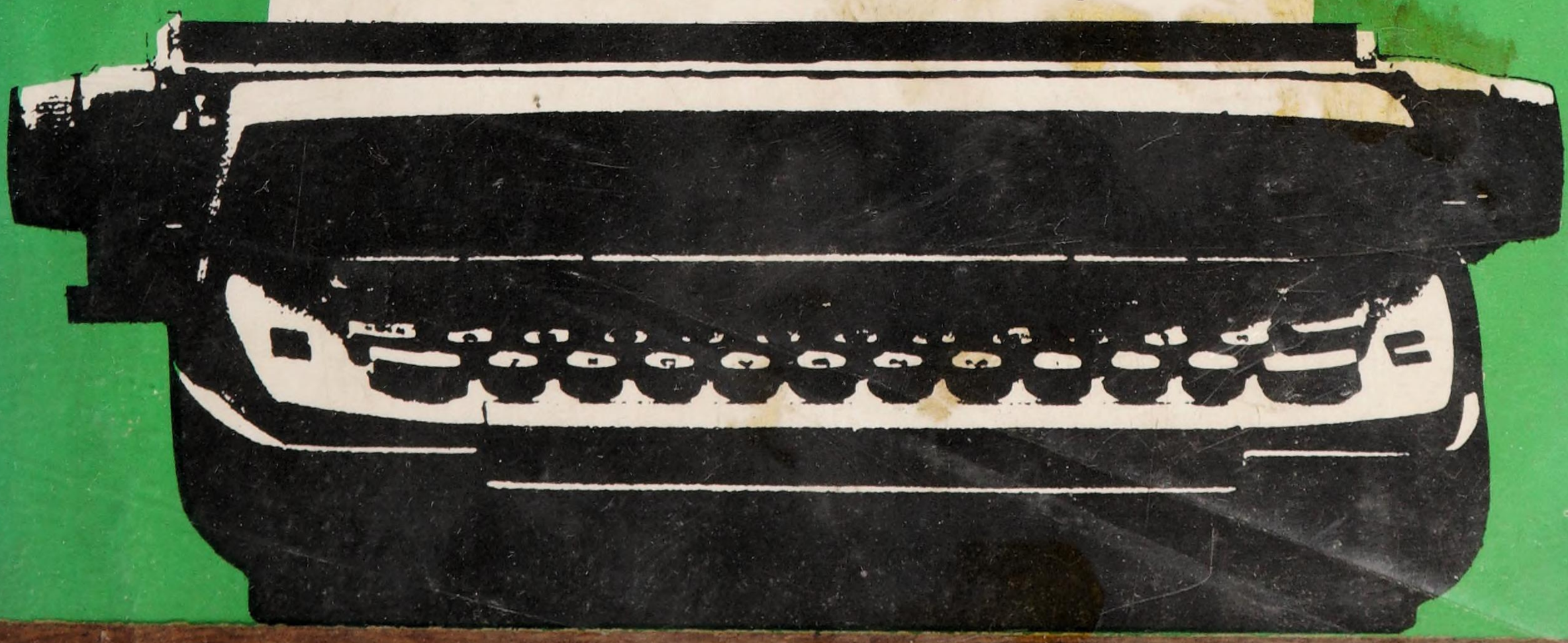
FROM THE O. HENRY MEMORIAL AWARDS

1919-1966



Forty-six great American stories—an outstanding anthology of first-prize winners from this country's most famous series of annual prize short story collections.

Introduction by Harry Hansen



F.P.S.
$5.95

FIRST-PRIZE STORIES

FROM THE O. HENRY MEMORIAL AWARDS

1919-1966

The forty-six stories in this book share a common distinction: all of them have been first-prize winners of the annual O. Henry Memorial Awards.

Established in 1919 as a tribute to the memory of William Sydney Porter — America's beloved O. Henry — the awards have developed into the most important annual short-story series in America. The editors and judges, all of them distinguished men and women of letters, have chosen from the work of American writers appearing in American publications. In their search for stories of exceptional merit they read *all* the magazines that publish fiction. Inclusion in one of the annual collections means not only that a story has been chosen from hundreds of entries but also that it has passed through many readings. And to be chosen Number One is an honor indeed.

Among the writers who have won the first prize in past years are four Pulitzer Prize winners: Stephen Vincent Benét, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, Roark

(continued on back flap)

(continued from front flap)

Bradford, and James Gould Cozzens. Another, William Faulkner, has received the Nobel prize. Other notables represented in the collection are Flannery O'Connor, Irvin S. Cobb, Walter Duranty, Wilbur Daniel Steele, Wallace Stegner, Kay Boyle, Eudora Welty, Truman Capote, Irwin Shaw, and Katherine Anne Porter.

Besides serving as a springboard for new and talented writers, the series has been a mirror of our times. The annual editions have reflected the days of two world wars, women's suffrage, the violence of the Roaring Twenties, Prohibition, the Depression, and even the vogue of Freudian psychology. Here, in a single volume, is a picture of American life over a period of forty-six years. Even the change in the tone of the short story itself as a literary form—its shift from what people do to what they think—is apparent when one reads the stories in their chronological order.

And so FIRST-PRIZE STORIES offers not only reading enjoyment of an almost unequaled quality but an intriguing look at ourselves through the eyes of the most gifted writers of nearly five decades. The late John Marquand called these stories "documents of our time... reflecting the doubts, the suspense and the heartbreak of each year."

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Printed in the U.S.A.

FIRST-PRIZE STORIES

1919–1966

from the O. Henry Memorial Awards

FIRST-PRIZE STORIES 1919–1966

from the O. Henry Memorial Awards

Introduction by Harry Hansen

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INTRODUCTION

by Harry Hansen

A good story is always a good story, but sometimes so many people read it that its pages fall apart and it goes out of circulation. If it has won a prize for excellence, then there is added reason for keeping it available, for it has been singled out for distinction by persons who are supposed to have judgment in such matters. The prize stories in this book have been pleasing readers and experts in the course of thirty-five years, but they have appeared in annual printings—the Prize Stories of the O. Henry Memorial Award—and it may be that some of the younger readers who admire William Faulkner and Eudora Welty are less familiar with the tales by Irvin S. Cobb and Wilbur Daniel Steele that their parents brag about. To bring the best of these stories together in one volume is therefore doing a service not only to literature but to the pursuit of happiness.

We have here not only a unique collection of stories that have proved enjoyable and profitable reading but that likewise give you a chance to see how fashions in storytelling have changed. For though the essential conflicts in stories are quite similar, if not identical, to such conflicts in life, and remain unchanged, there are as different ways of telling a tale as there are of clothing the human body. It will be possible, therefore, to discern that storytellers absorb something of the spirit of the times in which they live. It also will be obvious that although these stories were awarded prizes in honor of a great popular story writer, William Sydney Porter (1862–1910), who wrote under the name of O. Henry, none of their authors resembled him in any way.

Storytelling is a human attribute, as old as man. It is logical to assume that it began as the report of an actual experience and that it gained weight as it moved from the intensely personal to the typical and universal. We are all storytellers, for the moment we begin to tell what happened to us we choose details and arrange them to impress our listeners. The temptation to give importance to personal adventure—even if it was only a talk across a garden wall—makes us emphasize, dramatize, and eventually embroider, and some of us gain startling facility in distorting the facts, without ever recognizing such an intention. Thus the imagined world, far from being the possession

of a few, lives in all of us, and if we reflect we will discover that fiction comes natural to many of us. In the same way a great deal of personal satisfaction enters into our appreciation of stories other people tell.

A story is never complete on the printed page; it gets new life every time it is absorbed by the reader. For every story provides a mental stimulus that acts differently in every one of us. The author provides the framework, and you and I, as recipients of the author's confidence, begin building an imaginary world as soon as we scan the pages. We all can agree on the substance of the story we have read, but I'll wager no two readers of one story carry in their minds identical pictures of characters and settings. Reading a story is a solitary diversion, one of the great satisfactions we are able to possess individually. Even when we hear stories read aloud in a group, we each construct our own inner gallery of pictures. As proof of this, observe how far the illustrations that adorn any famous story differ from what you imagined when you were reading it.

The writer is always fighting for free expression of what he wants to say. He continually challenges the barriers of custom, taste, tradition, and habit—especially the last, for readers have a deadly way of asking for "more of the same." The tendency to conformity is always present, and every writer worth his salt challenges it. In times when society is fairly stable, fiction conforms more nearly to an accepted pattern and the experimenter is looked upon as an intruder. In times of social unrest literature, like life, becomes partial to unfamiliar and often erratic changes. Yet in no medium but writing is individual revolt more effective and more likely to gain followers.

All this is to be seen in the following pages, in which stories written during three decades of the twentieth century reflect the changing attitudes, the exasperations and aspirations of their time. Here are stories that make use of the discoveries in psychology and psychoanalysis that became available to authors in the 1920s. Here are stories that reflect the preoccupation with social conditions in the 1930s. Still other stories were influenced by the unrest of the period between the two world wars. The many changes in technique that broke conventional patterns that were deep-rooted in 1919 left their mark on the methods by which many tales reached print.

The O. Henry Memorial Award grew out of the circumstance that in 1918 the Society of Arts and Sciences of New York had money that it wished to apply to a literary ideal. This society with the high-sounding name was actually an aggregation of people who loved books—authors, editors, teachers, and plain, solvent book buyers, who enjoyed meeting for dinner and listening to talks about writing. Some of them had known O. Henry, and all were still under the spell of his stories. He had touched prosaic moments with a romantic glow, expressed a good-natured and sometimes regretful acceptance of the hazards of existence, and sprinkled his philosophizing with the pepper of

humor. A proposal to honor O. Henry by a tangible memorial was first advanced by John F. Tucker. The members thought of placing a plaque on an O. Henry house, but fortunately for us they decided against that, probably recalling the many dull and unreadable bronze tablets in forgotten places. In 1919 their effort took the form of offering two prizes for the best short stories of the year. Blanche Colton Williams, critic, author, and educator, and at that time associated with the Department of English at Hunter College in the City of New York, became chairman of the Committee of Award. The committee attached no strings to the prizes; it did not ask authors to imitate O. Henry.

It is worth noting that the first committee found thirty-two stories worthy of special mention and that among the authors were some who are still luminaries in today's skies, notably James Branch Cabell, Mary Hastings Bradley, Edna Ferber, Ben Hecht, Fannie Hurst, Edison Marshall, and Wilbur Daniel Steele. There also were stories by such beginners as Joseph Hergesheimer, Ben Ames Williams, and Anne Sedgwick, who were to make their marks and are no longer living. There were several tales destined to become memorable, notably "Humoresque." From the start the members of the committee acted as all committees have done. They knew what they wanted in a short story, but they disagreed on how well the examples met their expectations. They wanted, above all else, a story—a conflict that was resolved, a narrative that carried the reader to a satisfying destination. Style, mood, reverie, sketchy suggestion were all secondary. As Dr. Williams pointed out, "The story's the thing." The judges sought originality, excellence in characterization, skill in organization of plot, power in moving emotions, and, although honoring O. Henry, made demands he would have been unable to meet. What persisted in their lively memories of the Caliph of Bagdad-on-the-Subway was the pleasure he had given them, and they hoped newer writers would not overlook the high usefulness of entertainment.

Dr. Williams soon became the mainspring of the O. Henry Memorial Award, and the award itself became the actual reason for the society's continuing existence. Soon she enlisted members of the faculty and students of Hunter College in sifting the huge crop of short stories that appeared in the nation's magazines. During this first decade experiments in expression broke the conventional patterns of storytelling, and the story with a carefully contrived plot fell into critical disrepute. Edward J. O'Brien, who edited an influential anthology of short stories, was so eager to get away from the "tailor-made story" that he chose his examples almost entirely from the so-called little magazines. In one instance he published as one of the best stories of the year a progression of one-sentence paragraphs, each preceded by a number. The editors of the O. Henry Prize Stories admitted the validity of new ways, but they were never as radical as O'Brien. They still believed that a story

should "go somewhere"—that is, wind up a conflict that had been placed before the reader at the beginning. While they often found good writing in the smaller, consciously literary magazines, they did not ignore the more popular weeklies and monthlies. Editors of the latter published stories by Stephen Vincent Benét, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Thomas Wolfe, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, and others of like stature.

Dr. Williams guided the O. Henry Memorial Award through fourteen annual issues of the Prize Stories. She was succeeded as editor by Harry Hansen, who was a bookman but determinedly unacademic. The eight volumes that he edited carried the names of many new writers and demonstrated the unending vitality of the American short story. The books bore the dates 1933–40. He was succeeded by Herschel Brickell, a book critic of Southern antecedents and fine critical discernment, who expressed deep interest in writers who were publishing their first stories, and instituted a special prize in their favor. He edited eleven volumes, from 1941 through 1951.

Brickell's sudden death in 1952 left that year's manuscript incomplete and also resulted in the omission of a volume in 1953. During that year Paul Engle and Hanford Martin, members of the faculty of the Department of English at the State University of Iowa, took over the responsibilities of the O. Henry Memorial Award, and in 1954 published their first volume of the Prize Stories, the thirty-fourth in a succession that began when the original admirers of O. Henry decided that encouraging the new storytellers of America was better than putting a bronze plaque on an old house.

Mr. Engle and Mr. Martin continued as co-editors of the series through 1956. For the 1957 awards Mr. Engle was assisted by Constance Urdang, and in 1958 Curt Harnack helped out. The following year, however, Paul Engle alone undertook the huge task of choosing the stories for the 1959 volume. Mary Stegner edited the 1960 collection. Richard Poirier edited the 1961, 1962, 1963, and 1964 collections. For the 1965 and 1966 collections, Mr. Poirier joined forces with William Abrahams.

FIRST-PRIZE STORIES

1919–1966

from the O. Henry Memorial Awards

1919: *from Atlantic Monthly*

ENGLAND TO AMERICA

by Margaret Prescott Montague, who had the honor of being the first first-prize winner in this most famous American short story series. This award takes on greater significance when one considers Miss Montague's competition—Wilbur Daniel Steele, Ben Ames Williams, Albert Payson Terhune, Edison Marshall, Edna Ferber, James Branch Cabell. Her name has been well known to an appreciative public since her first book came from the presses in 1905. It was not until some years after the Atlantic Monthly *published "Twenty Minutes of Reality" that she disclosed her authorship of that stirring work. In the years that have elapsed since her first published work appeared, Miss Montague has written many stories of distinction. Some of her books are as follows:* Closed Doors: Studies of Deaf and Blind Children, Deep Channel, Man from God's Country, *and* Lucky Lady.

1: "Lord, but English people are funny!"

This was the perplexed mental ejaculation that young Lieutenant Skipworth Cary, of Virginia, found his thoughts constantly reiterating during his stay in Devonshire. Had he been, he wondered, a confiding fool, to accept so trustingly Chev Sherwood's suggestion that he spend a part of his leave, at least, at Bishopsthorpe, where Chev's people lived? But why should he have anticipated any difficulty here, in this very corner of England which had bred his own ancestors, when he had always hit it off so splendidly with his English comrades at the Front? Here, however, though they were all awfully kind,—at least, he was sure they meant to be kind,—something was always bringing him up short: something that he could not lay hold of, but which made him feel like a blind man groping in a strange place, or worse, like a bull in a china-shop. He was prepared enough to find differences in the American and English points of view. But this thing that baffled him did not seem to have to do with that; it was something deeper, something very defi-

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nite, he was sure—and yet, what was it? The worst of it was that he had a curious feeling as if they were all—that is, Lady Sherwood and Gerald; not Sir Charles so much—protecting him from himself—keeping him from making breaks, as he phrased it. That hurt and annoyed him, and piqued his vanity. Was he a social blunderer, and weren't a Virginia gentleman's manners to be trusted in England without leading-strings?

He had been at the Front for several months with the Royal Flying Corps, and when his leave came, his Flight Commander, Captain Cheviot Sherwood, discovering that he meant to spend it in England, where he hardly knew a soul, had said his people down in Devonshire would be jolly glad to have him stop with them; and Skipworth Cary, knowing that, if the circumstances had been reversed, his people down in Virginia would indeed have been jolly glad to entertain Captain Sherwood, had accepted unhesitatingly. The invitation had been seconded by a letter from Lady Sherwood,—Chev's mother,—and after a few days sight-seeing in London, he had come down to Bishopsthorpe, very eager to know his friend's family, feeling as he did about Chev himself. "He's the finest man that ever went up in the air," he had written home; and to his own family's disgust, his letters had been far more full of Chev Sherwood than they had been of Skipworth Cary.

And now here he was, and he almost wished himself away—wished almost that he was back again at the Front, carrying on under Chev. There, at least, you knew what you were up against. The job might be hard enough, but it wasn't baffling and queer, with hidden undercurrents that you couldn't chart. It seemed to him that this baffling feeling of constraint had rushed to meet him on the very threshold of the drawing-room, when he made his first appearance.

As he entered, he had a sudden sensation that they had been awaiting him in a strained expectancy, and that, as he appeared, they adjusted unseen masks and began to play-act at something. "But English people don't play-act very well," he commented to himself, reviewing the scene afterward.

Lady Sherwood had come forward and greeted him in a manner which would have been pleasant enough, if he had not, with quick sensitiveness, felt it to be forced. But perhaps that was English stiffness.

Then she had turned to her husband, who was standing staring into the fireplace, although, as it was June, there was no fire there to stare at.

"Charles," she said, "here is Lieutenant Cary"; and her voice had a certain note in it which at home Cary and his sister Nancy were in the habit of designating "mother-making-dad-mind-his-manners."

At her words the old man—and Cary was startled to see how old and broken he was—turned round and held out his hand. "How d'you do?" he said jerkily, "how d'you do?" and then turned abruptly back again to the fireplace.

"Hello! What's up! The old boy doesn't like me!" was Cary's quick, startled comment to himself.

He was so surprised by the look the other bent upon him that he involuntarily glanced across to a long mirror to see if there was anything wrong with his uniform. But no, that appeared to be all right. It was himself, then—or his country; perhaps the old sport didn't fall for Americans.

"And here is Gerald," Lady Sherwood went on in her low remote voice, which somehow made the Virginian feel very far away.

It was with genuine pleasure, though with some surprise, that he turned to greet Gerald Sherwood, Chev's younger brother, who had been, tradition in the corps said, as gallant and daring a flyer as Chev himself, until he got his in the face five months ago.

"I'm mighty glad to meet you," he said eagerly, in his pleasant, muffled Southern voice, grasping the hand the other stretched out, and looking with deep respect at the scarred face and sightless eyes.

Gerald laughed a little, but it was a pleasant laugh, and his hand-clasp was friendly.

"That's real American, isn't it?" he said. "I ought to have remembered and said it first. Sorry."

Skipworth laughed too. "Well," he conceded, "we generally are glad to meet people in my country, and we don't care who says it first. But," he added, "I didn't think I'd have the luck to find you here."

He remembered that Chev had regretted that he probably wouldn't see Gerald, as the latter was at St. Dunstan's, where they were re-educating the blinded soldiers.

The other hesitated a moment, and then said rather awkwardly, "Oh, I'm just home for a little while; I only got here this morning, in fact."

Skipworth noted the hesitation. Did the old people get panicky at the thought of entertaining a wild man from Virginia, and send an SOS for Gerald, he wondered.

"We are so glad you could come to us," Lady Sherwood said rather hastily just then. And again he could not fail to note that she was prompting her husband.

The latter reluctantly turned round, and said, "Yes, yes, quite so. Welcome to Bishopsthorpe, my boy," as if his wife had pulled a string, and he responded mechanically, without quite knowing what he said. Then, as his eyes rested a moment on his guest, he looked as if he would like to bolt out of the room. He controlled himself, however, and, jerking round again to the fireplace, went on murmuring, "Yes, yes, yes," vaguely—just like the dormouse at the Mad Tea-Party, who went to sleep, saying, "Twinkle, twinkle, twinkle," Cary could not help thinking to himself.

But after all, it wasn't really funny, it was pathetic. Gosh, how doddering

the poor old boy was! Skipworth wondered, with a sudden twist at his heart, if the war was playing the deuce with his home people, too. Was his own father going to pieces like this, and had his mother's gay vivacity fallen into that still remoteness of Lady Sherwood's? But of course not! The Carys hadn't suffered as the poor Sherwoods had, with their youngest son, Curtin, killed early in the war, and now Gerald knocked out so tragically. Lord, he thought, how they must all bank on Chev! And of course they would want to hear at once about him. "I left Chev as fit as anything, and he sent all sorts of messages," he reported, thinking it more discreet to deliver Chev's messages thus vaguely than to repeat his actual carefree remark, which had been, "Oh, tell 'em I'm jolly as a tick."

But evidently there was something wrong with the words as they were, for instantly he was aware of that curious sense of withdrawal on their part. Hastily reviewing them, he decided that they had sounded too familiar from a stranger and a younger man like himself. He supposed he ought not to have spoken of Chev by his first name. Gee, what sticklers they were! Wouldn't his family—dad and mother and Nancy—have fairly lapped up any messages from him, even if they had been delivered a bit awkwardly? However, he added, as a concession to their point of view, "But of course, you'll have had later news of Captain Sherwood."

To which, after a pause, Lady Sherwood responded, "Oh, yes," in that remote and colourless voice which might have meant anything or nothing.

At this point dinner was announced.

Lady Sherwood drew her husband away from the empty fireplace, and Gerald slipped his arm through the Virginian's, saying pleasantly, "I'm learning to carry on fairly well at St. Dunstan's, but I confess I still like to have a pilot."

To look at the tall young fellow beside him, whose scarred face was so reminiscent of Chev's untouched good looks, who had known all the immense freedom of the air, but who was now learning to carry on in the dark, moved Skipworth Cary to generous homage.

"You know my saying I'm glad to meet you isn't just American," he said half shyly, but warmly. "It's plain English, and the straight truth. I've wanted to meet you awfully. The oldsters are always holding up your glorious exploits to us newcomers. Withers never gets tired telling about that fight of yours with the four enemy planes. And besides," he rushed on eagerly, "I'm glad to have a chance to tell Chev's brother—Captain Sherwood's brother, I mean—what I think of him. Only as a matter of fact, I can't," he broke off with a laugh. "I can't put it exactly into words, but I tell you I'd follow that man straight into hell and out the other side—or go there alone if he told me to. He is the finest chap that ever flew."

And then he felt as if a cold douche had been flung in his face, for after

a moment's pause, the other returned, "That's awfully good of you," in a voice so distant and formal that the Virginian could have kicked himself. What an ass he was to be so darned enthusiastic with an Englishman! He supposed it was bad form to show any pleasure over praise of a member of your family. Lord, if Chev got the V.C., he reckoned it would be awful to speak of it. Still, you would have thought Gerald might have stood for a little praise of him. But then, glancing sideways at his companion, he surprised on his face a look so strange and suffering that it came to him almost violently what it must be never to fly again; to be on the threshold of life, with endless days of blackness ahead. Good God! How cruel he had been to flaunt Chev in his face! In remorseful and hasty reparation he stumbled on, "But the old fellows are always having great discussions as to which was the best—you or your brother. Withers always maintains you were."

"Withers lies, then!" the other retorted. "I never touched Chev—never came within a mile of him, and never could have."

They reached the dinner-table with that, and young Cary found himself bewildered and uncomfortable. If Gerald hadn't liked praise of Chev, he had liked praise of himself even less, it seemed.

Dinner was not a success. The Virginian found that, if there was to be conversation, the burden of carrying it on was upon him, and gosh! they don't mind silences in this man's island, do they? he commented desperately to himself, thinking how different it was from America. Why, there they acted as if silence was an egg that had just been laid, and everyone had to cackle at once to cover it up. But here the talk constantly fell to the ground, and nobody but himself seemed concerned to pick it up. His attempt to praise Chev had not been successful, and he could understand their not wanting to hear about flying and the war before Gerald.

So at last, in desperation, he wandered off into descriptions of America, finding to his relief, that he had struck the right note at last. They were glad to hear about the States, and Lady Sherwood inquired politely if the Indians still gave them much trouble; and when he assured her that in Virginia, except for the Pocahontas tribe, they were all pretty well subdued, she accepted his statement with complete innocency. And he was so delighted to find at last a subject to which they were evidently cordial, that he was quite carried away, and wound up by inviting them all to visit his family in Richmond, as soon as the war was over.

Gerald accepted at once, with enthusiasm; Lady Sherwood made polite murmurs, smiling at him in quite a warm and almost, indeed, maternal manner. Even Sir Charles, who had been staring at the food on his plate as if he did not quite know what to make of it, came to the surface long enough to mumble, "Yes, yes, very good idea. Countries must carry on together—— What?"

But that was the only hit of the whole evening, and when the Virginian retired to his room, as he made an excuse to do early, he was so confused and depressed that he fell into an acute attack of homesickness.

Heavens, he thought, as he tumbled into bed, just suppose, now, this was little old Richmond, Virginia, U.S.A., instead of being Bishopsthorpe, Avery Cross near Wick, and all the rest of it! And at that, he grinned to himself. England wasn't such an all-fired big country that you'd think they'd have to ticket themselves with addresses a yard long, for fear they'd get lost—now, would you? Well, anyway, suppose it was Richmond, and his train just pulling into the Byrd Street Station. He stretched out luxuriously, and let his mind picture the whole familiar scene. The wind was blowing right, so there was the mellow homely smell of tobacco in the streets, and plenty of people all along the way to hail him with outstretched hands and shouts of "Hey, Skip Cary, when did you get back?" "Welcome home, my boy!" "Well, will you *look* what the cat dragged in!" And so he came to his own front door-step, and, walking straight in, surprised the whole family at breakfast; and yes—doggone it! if it wasn't Sunday, and they having waffles! And after that his obliging fancy bore him up Franklin Street, through Monroe Park, and so to Miss Sally Berkeley's door. He was sound asleep before he reached it, but in his dreams, light as a little bird, she came flying down the broad stair-way to meet him, and—

But when he waked next morning, he did not find himself in Virginia, but in Devonshire, where, to his unbounded embarrassment, a white housemaid was putting up his curtains and whispering something about his bath. And though he pretended profound slumber, he was well aware that people do not turn brick-red in their sleep. And the problem of what was the matter with the Sherwood family was still before him.

2: "They're playing a game," he told himself after a few days. "That is, Lady Sherwood and Gerald are—poor old Sir Charles can't make much of a stab at it. The game is to make me think they are awfully glad to have me, when in reality there's something about me, or something I do, that gets them on the raw."

He almost decided to make some excuse and get away; but after all, that was not easy. In English novels, he remembered, they always had a wire call-ing them to London; but, darn it all! the Sherwoods knew mighty well there wasn't any one in London who cared a hoot about him.

The thing that got his goat most, he told himself, was that they apparently didn't like his friendship with Chev. Anyway they didn't seem to want him to talk about him; and whenever he tried to express his warm appreciation for all that the older man had done for him, he was instantly aware of a wall of reserve on their part, a holding of themselves aloof from him. That puz-

zled and hurt him, and put him on his dignity. He concluded that they thought it was cheeky of a youngster like him to think that a man like Chev could be his friend; and if that was the way they felt, he reckoned he'd jolly well better shut up about it.

But whatever it was that they didn't like about him, they most certainly did want him to have a good time. He and his pleasure appeared to be for the time being their chief consideration. And after the first day or so he began indeed to enjoy himself extremely. For one thing, he came to love the atmosphere of the old place and of the surrounding country, which he and Gerald explored together. He liked to think that ancestors of his own had been inheritors of these green lanes, and pleasant mellow stretches. Then, too, after the first few days, he could not help seeing that they really began to like him, which of course was reassuring, and tapped his own warm friendliness, which was always ready enough to be released. And besides, he got by accident what he took to be a hint as to the trouble. He was passing the half-open door of Lady Sherwood's morning-room, when he heard Sir Charles's voice break out, "Good God, Elizabeth, I don't see how you stand it! When I see him so straight and fine-looking, and so untouched, beside our poor lad, and think—and think——"

Skipworth hurried out of earshot, but now he understood that look of aversion in the old man's eyes which had so startled him at first. Of course, the poor old boy might easily hate the sight of him beside Gerald. With Gerald himself he really got along famously. He was a most delightful companion, full of anecdotes and history of the countryside, every foot of which he had apparently explored in the old days with Chev and the younger brother, Curtin. Yet even with Gerald, Cary sometimes felt that aloofness and reserve, and that older protective air that they all showed him. Take, for instance, that afternoon when they were lolling together on the grass in the park. The Virginian, running on in his usual eager manner, had plunged without thinking into an account of a particularly daring bit of flying on Chev's part, when suddenly he realized that Gerald had rolled over on the grass and buried his face in his arms, and interrupted himself awkwardly. "But, of course," he said, "he must have written home about it himself."

"No, or if he did, I didn't hear of it. Go on," Gerald said in a muffled voice.

A great rush of compassion and remorse overwhelmed the Virginian, and he burst out penitently, "What a brute I am! I'm always forgetting and running on about flying, when I know it must hurt like the very devil!"

The other drew a difficult breath. "Yes," he admitted, "what you say does hurt in a way—in a way you can't understand. But all the same I like to hear you. Go on about Chev."

So Skipworth went on and finished his account, winding up, "I don't be-

lieve there's another man in the service who could have pulled it off—but I tell you your brother's one in a million."

"Good God, don't I know it!" the other burst out. "We were all three the jolliest pals together," he got out presently in a choked voice, "Chev and the young un and I; and now——"

He did not finish, but Cary guessed his meaning. Now the young un, Curtin, was dead, and Gerald himself knocked out. But, heavens! the Virginian thought, did Gerald think Chev would go back on him now on account of his blindness? Well, you could everlastingly bet he wouldn't!

"Chev thinks the world and all of you!" he cried in eager defense of his friend's loyalty. "Lots of times when we're all awfully jolly together, he makes some excuse and goes off by himself; and Withers told me it was because he was so frightfully cut up about you. Withers said he told him once that he'd a lot rather have got it himself—so you can everlastingly bank on him!"

Gerald gave a terrible little gasp. "I—I knew he'd feel like that," he got out. "We've always cared such a lot for each other." And then he pressed his face harder than ever into the grass, and his long body quivered all over. But not for long. In a moment he took fierce hold on himself, muttering, "Well, one must carry on, whatever happens," and apologized disjointedly. "What a fearful fool you must think me! And—and this isn't very pippy for you, old chap." Presently, after that, he sat up, and said, brushing it all aside, "We're facing the old moat, aren't we? There's an interesting bit of tradition about it that I must tell you."

And there you were, Cary thought: no matter how much Gerald might be suffering from his misfortune, he must carry on just the same, and see that his visitor had a pleasant time. It made the Virginian feel like an outsider and very young, as if he were not old enough for them to show him their real feelings.

Another thing that he noticed was that they did not seem to want him to meet people. They never took him anywhere to call, and if visitors came to the house, they showed an almost panicky desire to get him out of the way. That again hurt his pride. What in heaven's name was the matter with him anyway!

3: However, on the last afternoon of his stay at Bishopsthorpe, he told himself with a rather rueful grin, that his manners must have improved a little, for they took him to tea at the rectory.

He was particularly glad to go there because, from certain jokes of Withers's, who had known the Sherwoods since boyhood, he gathered that Chev and the rector's daughter were engaged. And just as he would have liked Chev to meet Sally Berkeley, so he wanted to meet Miss Sybil Gaylord.

He had little hope of having a tête-à-tête with her, but as it fell out he did. They were all in the rectory garden together, Gerald and the rector a little behind Miss Gaylord and himself, as they strolled down a long walk with high hedges bordering it. On the other side of the hedge Lady Sherwood and her hostess still sat at the tea-table, and then it was that Cary heard Mrs. Gaylord say distinctly, "I'm afraid the strain has been too much for you—you should have let us have him."

To which Lady Sherwood returned quickly, "Oh, no, that would have been impossible with——"

"Come—come this way—I must show you the view from the arbor," Miss Gaylord broke in breathlessly; and laying a hand on his arm, she turned him abruptly into a side path.

Glancing down at her, the Southerner could not but note the panic and distress in her fair face. It was so obvious that the overheard words referred to him, and he was so bewildered by the whole situation, that he burst out impulsively, "I say, what *is* the matter with me? Why do they find me so hard to put up with? Is it something I do—or don't they like Americans? Honestly, I wish you'd tell me."

She stood still at that, looking at him, her blue eyes full of distress and concern.

"Oh, I am so sorry," she cried. "They would be so sorry to have you think anything like that."

"But what is it?" he persisted. "Don't they like Americans?"

"Oh, no, it isn't that—Oh, quite the contrary!" she returned eagerly.

"Then it's something about me they don't like?"

"Oh, no, no! Least of all, that—*don't* think that!" she begged.

"But what am I to think then?"

"Don't think anything just yet," she pleaded. "Wait a little, and you will understand."

She was so evidently distressed that he could not press her further; and fearing she might think him unappreciative, he said, "Well, whatever it is, it hasn't prevented me from having a ripping good time. They've seen to that, and just done everything for my pleasure."

She looked up quickly, and to his relief he saw that for once he had said the right thing.

"You have enjoyed it, then?" she questioned eagerly.

"Most awfully," he assured her warmly. "I shall always remember what a happy leave they gave me."

She gave a little sigh of satisfaction. "I am so glad," she said. "They wanted you to have a good time—that was what we all wanted."

He looked at her gratefully, thinking how sweet she was in her fair English beauty, and how good to care that he should have enjoyed his leave. How

different she was too from Sally Berkeley—why she would have made two of his little girl! And how quiet! Sallie Berkeley, with her quick glancing vivacity, would have been all around her and off again like a humming-bird before she could have uttered two words. And yet he was sure that they would have been friends, just as he and Chev were. Perhaps they all would be, after the war. And then he began to talk about Chev, being sure that, had the circumstances been reversed, Sally Berkeley would have wanted news of him. Instantly he was aware of a tense listening stillness on her part. That pleased him. Well, she did care for the old fellow all right, he thought; and though she made no response, averting her face, and plucking nervously at the leaves of the hedge as they passed slowly along, he went on pouring out his eager admiration for his friend.

At last they came to a seat in an arbour, from which one looked out upon a green beneficent landscape. It was an intimate secluded little spot—and oh, if Sallie Berkeley were only there to sit beside him! And as he thought of this, it came to him whimsically that in all probability she must be longing for Chev, just as he was for Sally.

Dropping down on the bench beside her, he leaned over, and said with a friendly, almost brotherly, grin of understanding, "I reckon you're wishing Captain Sherwood was sitting here, instead of Lieutenant Cary."

The minute the impulsive words were out of his mouth, he knew he had blundered, been awkward, and inexcusably intimate. She gave a little choked gasp, and her blue eyes stared up at him, wide and startled. Good heavens, what a break he had made! No wonder the Sherwoods couldn't trust him in company! There seemed no apology that he could offer in words, but at least, he thought, he would show her that he would not have intruded on her secret without being willing to share his with her. With awkward haste he put his hand into his breast-pocket, and dragged forth the picture of Sally Berkeley he always carried there.

"This is the little girl I'm thinking about," he said, turning very red, yet boyishly determined to make amends, and also proudly confident of Sally Berkeley's charms. "I'd like mighty well for you two to know one another."

She took the picture in silence, and for a long moment stared down at the soft little face, so fearless, so confident and gay, that smiled appealingly back at her. Then she did something astonishing,—something which seemed to him wholly un-English,—and yet he thought it the sweetest thing he had ever seen. Cupping her strong hands about the picture with a quick protectiveness, she suddenly raised it to her lips, and kissed it lightly. "O little girl!" she cried, "I hope you will be very happy!"

The little involuntary act, so tender, so sisterly and spontaneous, touched the Virginian extremely.

"Thanks, awfully," he said unsteadily. "She'll think a lot of that, just as I do—and I know she'd wish you the same."

She made no reply to that, and as she handed the picture back to him, he saw that her hands were trembling, and he had a sudden conviction that, if she had been Sally Berkeley, her eyes would have been full of tears. As she was Sybil Gaylord, however, there were no tears there, only a look that he never forgot. The look of one much older, protective, maternal almost, and as if she were gazing back at Sally Berkeley and himself from a long way ahead on the road of life. He supposed it was the way most English people felt nowadays. He had surprised it so often on all their faces, that he could not help speaking of it.

"You all think we Americans are awfully young and raw, don't you?" he questioned.

"Oh, no, not that," she deprecated. "Young perhaps for these days, yes—but it is more that you—that your country is so—so unsuffered. And we don't want you to suffer!" she added quickly.

Yes, that was it! He understood now, and, heavens, how fine it was! Old England was wounded deep—deep. What she suffered herself she was too proud to show; but out of it she wrought a great maternal care for the newcomer. Yes, it *was* fine—he hoped his country would understand.

Miss Gaylord rose. "There are Gerald and father looking for you," she said, "and I must go now." She held out her hand. "Thank you for letting me see her picture, and for everything you said about Captain Sherwood—for *everything*, remember—I want you to remember."

With a light pressure of her fingers she was gone, slipping away through the shrubbery, and he did not see her again.

4: So he came to his last morning at Bishopsthorpe; and as he dressed, he wished it could have been different; that he were not still conscious of that baffling wall of reserve between himself and Chev's people, for whom, despite all, he had come to have a real affection.

In the breakfast-room he found them all assembled, and his last meal there seemed to him as constrained and difficult as any that had preceded it. It was over finally, however, and in a few minutes he would be leaving.

"I can never thank you enough for the splendid time I've had here," he said as he rose. "I'll be seeing Chev to-morrow, and I'll tell him all about everything."

Then he stopped dead. With a smothered exclamation, old Sir Charles had stumbled to his feet, knocking over his chair, and hurried blindly out of the room; and Gerald said, "*Mother!*" in a choked appeal.

As if it were a signal between them, Lady Sherwood pushed her chair back a little from the table, her long delicate fingers dropped together loosely in

her lap; she gave a faint sigh as if a restraining mantle slipped from her shoulders, and, looking up at the youth before her, her fine pale face lighted with a kind of glory, she said, "No, dear lad, no. You can never tell Chev, for he is gone."

"*Gone!*" he cried.

"Yes," she nodded back at him, just above a whisper; and now her face quivered, and the tears began to rush down her cheeks.

"Not *dead!*" he cried. "Not Chev—not that! O my God, Gerald, not *that!*"

"Yes," Gerald said. "They got him two days after you left."

It was so overwhelming, so unexpected and shocking, above all so terrible, that the friend he had so greatly loved and admired was gone out of his life forever, that young Cary stumbled back into his seat, and, crumpling over, buried his face in his hands, making great uncouth gasps as he strove to choke back his grief.

Gerald groped hastily around the table, and flung an arm about his shoulders.

"Steady on, dear fellow, steady," he said, though his own voice broke.

"When did you hear?" Cary got out at last.

"We got the official notice just the day before you came—and Withers has written us particulars since."

"And you *let* me come in spite of it! And stay on, when every word I said about him must have—have fairly *crucified* each one of you! Oh, forgive me! forgive me!" he cried distractedly. He saw it all now; he understood at last. It was not on Gerald's account that they could not talk of flying and of Chev, it was because—because their hearts were broken over Chev himself. "Oh, forgive me!" he gasped again.

"Dear lad, there is nothing to forgive," Lady Sherwood returned. "How could we help loving your generous praise of our poor darling? We loved it, and you for it; we wanted to hear it, but we were afraid. We were afraid we might break down, and that you would find out."

The tears were still running down her cheeks. She did not brush them away now; she seemed glad to have them there at last.

Sinking down on his knees, he caught her hands. "Why did you *let* me do such a horrible thing?" he cried. "Couldn't you have trusted me to understand? Couldn't you *see* I loved him just as you did—— No, no!" he broke down humbly. "Of course I couldn't love him as his own people did. But you must have seen how I felt about him—how I admired him, and would have followed him anywhere—and *of course* if I had known, I should have gone away at once."

"Ah, but that was just what we were afraid of," she said quickly. "We were afraid you would go away and have a lonely leave somewhere. And in

these days a boy's leave is so precious a thing that nothing must spoil it—*nothing*," she reiterated; and her tears fell upon his hands like a benediction. "But we didn't do it very well, I'm afraid," she went on presently, with gentle contrition. "You were too quick and understanding; you guessed there was something wrong. We were sorry not to manage better," she apologized.

"Oh, you wonderful, wonderful people!" he gasped. "Doing everything for my happiness, when all the time—all the time——"

His voice went out sharply, as his mind flashed back to scene after scene: to Gerald's long body lying quivering on the grass; to Sybil Gaylord wishing Sallie Berkeley happiness out of her own tragedy; and to the high look on Lady Sherwood's face. They seemed to him themselves, and yet more than themselves—shining bits in the mosaic of a great nation. Disjointedly there passed through his mind familiar words—"these are they who have washed their garments—having come out of great tribulation." No wonder they seemed older.

"We—we couldn't have done it in America," he said humbly.

He had a desperate desire to get away to himself; to hide his face in his arms, and give vent to the tears that were stifling him; to weep for his lost friend, and for this great heartbreaking heroism of theirs.

"But why did you do it?" he persisted. "Was it because I was his friend?"

"Oh, it was much more than that," Gerald said quickly. "It was a matter of the two countries. Of course, we jolly well knew you didn't belong to us, and didn't want to, but for the life of us we couldn't help a sort of feeling that you did. And when America was in at last, and you fellows began to come, you seemed like our very own come back after many years, and," he added, a throb in his voice, "we were most awfully glad to see you—we wanted a chance to show you how England felt."

Skipworth Cary rose to his feet. The tears for his friend were still wet upon his lashes. Stooping, he took Lady Sherwood's hands in his and raised them to his lips. "As long as I live, I shall never forget," he said. "And others of us have seen it too in other ways—be sure America will never forget, either."

She looked up at his untouched youth out of her beautiful sad eyes, the exalted light still shining through her tears. "Yes," she said, "you see it was—I don't know exactly how to put it—but it was England to America."

1920: *from Scribner's Magazine*

EACH IN HIS GENERATION

by Maxwell Struthers Burt. Author and ranchman, he learned to write as a reporter for the old Philadelphia Times. *During an extremely productive lifetime he published books of high merit in the field of fiction, poetry, critical essays, and Western lore. These include* The Diary of a Dude Wrangler; Festival; Entertaining the Islanders; Along These Streets; Philadelphia, Holy Experiment; *and* Powder River: Let 'er Buck, *a volume of the Rivers of America series. He is also represented in the 1939 volume of the O. Henry Memorial Award series with "The Fawn," from the* Atlantic Monthly. *Mr. Burt died in 1954.*

Every afternoon at four o'clock, except when the weather was very bad—autumn, winter, and spring—old Mr. Henry McCain drove up to the small, discreet, polished front door, in the small, discreet, fashionable street in which lived fairly old Mrs. Thomas Denby; got out, went up the white marble steps, rang the bell, and was admitted into the narrow but charming hall—dim turquoise-blue velvet panelled into the walls, an etching or two: Whistler, Brangwyn—by a trim parlour-maid. Ten generations, at least, of trim parlour-maids had opened the door for Mr. McCain. They had seen the sparkling victoria change, not too quickly, to a plum-coloured limousine; they had seen Mr. McCain become perhaps a trifle thinner, the colour in his cheeks become a trifle more confined and fixed, his white hair grow somewhat sparser, but beyond that they had seen very little indeed, although, when they had left Mr. McCain in the drawing-room with the announcement that Mrs. Denby would be down immediately, and were once again seeking the back of the house, no doubt their eyebrows, blonde, brunette, or red, apexed to a questioning angle.

In the manner of youth the parlour-maids had come, worked, fallen in love and departed, but Mr. McCain, in the manner of increasing age, had if any-

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thing grown more faithful and exact to the moment. If he were late the fraction of five minutes, one suspected that he regretted it, that it came near to spoiling his entire afternoon. He was not articulate, but occasionally he expressed an idea and the most common was that he "liked his things as he liked them"; his eggs, in other words, boiled just so long, no more—after sixty years of inner debate on the subject he had apparently arrived at the conclusion that boiled eggs were the only kind of eggs permissible—his life punctual and serene. The smallest manifestation of unexpectedness disturbed him. Obviously that was one reason why, after a youth not altogether constant, he had become so utterly constant where Mrs. Denby was concerned. She had a quality of perenniality, charming and assuring, even to each strand of her delicate brown hair. Grayness should have been creeping upon her, but it was not. It was doubtful if Mr. McCain permitted himself, even secretly, to wonder why. Effects, fastidious and constant, were all he demanded from life.

This had been going on for twenty years—this afternoon call; this slow drive afterward in the park; this return by dusk to the shining small house in the shining small street; the good-by, reticently ardent, as if it were not fully Mr. McCain's intention to return again in the evening. Mr. McCain would kiss Mrs. Denby's hand—slim, lovely, with a single gorgeous sapphire upon the third finger. "Good-by, my dear," he would say, "you have given me the most delightful afternoon of my life." For a moment Mrs. Denby's hand would linger on the bowed head; then Mr. McCain would straighten up, smile, square his shoulders in their smart, young-looking coat, and depart to his club, or the large, softly lit house where he dwelt alone. At dinner he would drink two glasses of champagne. Before he drained the last sip of the second pouring he would hold the glass up to the fire, so that the bronze coruscations at the heart of the wine glowed like fireflies in a gold dusk. One imagined him saying to himself: "A perfect woman! A perfect woman—— God bless her!" Saying "God bless" any one, mind you, with a distinct warming of the heart, but a thoroughly late-Victorian disbelief in any god to bless. . . . At least, you thought as much.

And, of course, one had not the slightest notion whether he—old Mr. Henry McCain—was aware that this twenty years of devotion on his part to Mrs. Denby was the point upon which had come to focus the not inconsiderable contempt and hatred for him of his nephew Adrian.

It was an obvious convergence, this devotion of all the traits which composed, so Adrian imagined, the despicable soul that lay beneath his uncle's unangled exterior: undeviating self-indulgence; secrecy; utter selfishness—he was selfish even to the woman he was supposed to love; that is, if he was capable of loving any one but himself—a bland hypocrisy; an unthinking conformation to the dictates of an unthinking world. The list could be multi-

plied. But to sum it up, here was epitomized, beautifully, concretely, the main and minor vices of a generation for which Adrian found little pity in his heart; a generation brittle as ice; a generation of secret diplomacy; a generation that in its youth had covered a lack of bathing by a vast amount of perfume. That was it——! That expressed it perfectly! The just summation! Camellias, and double intentions in speech, and unnecessary reticences, and refusals to meet the truth, and a deliberate hiding of uglinesses!

Most of the time Adrian was too busy to think about his uncle at all—he was a very busy man with his writing: journalistic writing; essays, political reviews, propaganda—and because he was busy he was usually well-content, and not uncharitable, except professionally; but once a month it was his duty to dine with his uncle, and then, for the rest of the night, he was disturbed, and awoke the next morning with the dusty feeling in his head of a man who has been slightly drunk. Old wounds were recalled, old scars inflamed; a childhood in which his uncle's figure had represented to him the terrors of sarcasm and repression; a youth in which, as his guardian, his uncle had deprecated all first fine hot-bloodednesses and enthusiasms; a young manhood in which he had been told cynically that the ways of society were good ways, and that the object of life was material advancement; advice which had been followed by the stimulus of an utter refusal to assist financially except where absolutely necessary. There had been willingness, you understand, to provide a gentleman's education, but no willingness to provide beyond that any of a gentleman's perquisites. That much of his early success had been due to this heroic upbringing, Adrian was too honest not to admit, but then—by God, it had been hard! All the colour of youth! No time to dream—except sorely! Some warping, some perversion! A gasping, heart-breaking knowledge that you could not possibly keep up with the people with whom, paradoxically enough, you were supposed to spend your leisure hours. Here was the making of a radical. And yet, despite all this, Adrian dined with his uncle once a month.

The mere fact that this was so, that it could be so, enraged him. It seemed a renunciation of all he affirmed; an implicit falsehood. He would have liked very much to have got to his feet, standing firmly on his two long, well-made legs, and have once and for all delivered himself of a final philippic. The philippic would have ended something like this:

"And this, sir, is the last time I sacrifice any of my good hours to you. Not because you are old, and therefore think you are wise, when you are not; not because you are blind and besotted and damned—a trunk of a tree filled with dry rot that presently a clean wind will blow away; not because your opinions, and the opinions of all like you, have long ago been proven the lies and idiocies that they are; not even because you haven't one single real right left to live—I haven't come to tell you these things, although they are true; for

you are past hope and there is no use wasting words upon you; I have come to tell you that you bore me inexpressibly. (That would be the most dreadful revenge of all. He could see his uncle's face!) That you have a genius for taking the wrong side of every question, and I can no longer endure it. I dissipate my time. Good-night!"

He wouldn't have said it in quite so stately a way, possibly; the sentences would not have been quite so rounded, but the context would have been the same.

Glorious; but it wasn't said. Instead, once a month, he got into his dinner-jacket, brushed his hair very sleekly, walked six blocks, said good-evening to his uncle's butler, and went on back to the library, where, in a room rich with costly bindings, and smelling pleasantly of leather, and warmly yellow with the light of two shaded lamps, he would find his uncle reading before a crackling wood fire. What followed was almost a formula, an exquisite presentation of stately manners, an exquisite avoidance of any topic which might cause a real discussion. The dinner was invariably gentle, persuasive, a thoughtful gastronomic achievement. Heaven might become confused about its weather, and about wars, and things like that, but Mr. McCain never became confused about his menus. He had a habit of commending wine. "Try this claret, my dear fellow, I want your opinion. . . . A drop of this Napoleonic brandy won't hurt you a bit." He even sniffed the bouquet before each sip; passed, that is, the glass under his nose and then drank. But Adrian, with a preconceived image of the personality back of this, and the memory of too many offences busy in his mind, saw nothing quaint or amusing. His gorge rose. Damn his uncle's wines, and his mushrooms, and his soft-footed servants, and his house of nuances and evasions, and his white grapes, large and outwardly perfect, and inwardly sentimental as the generation whose especial fruit they were. As for himself, he had a recollection of ten years of poverty after leaving college; a recollection of sweat and indignities; he had also a recollection of some poor people whom he had known.

Afterward, when the dinner was over, Adrian would go home and awake his wife, Cecil, who, with the brutal honesty of an honest woman, also some of the ungenerosity, had early in her married life flatly refused any share in the ceremonies described. Cecil would lie in her small white bed, the white of her boudoir-cap losing itself in the white of the pillow, a little sleepy and a little angrily perplexed at the perpetual jesuitical philosophy of the male. "If you feel that way," she would ask, "why do you go there, then? Why don't you banish your uncle utterly?" She asked this not without malice, her long, violet, Slavic eyes widely open, and her red mouth, a trifle too large, perhaps, a trifle cruel, fascinatingly interrogative over her white teeth. She loved Adrian and had at times, therefore, the right and desire to torture him. She knew perfectly well why he went. He was his uncle's heir, and until such time

as money and other anachronisms of the present social system were done away with, there was no use throwing a fortune into the gutter, even if by your own efforts you were making an income just sufficiently large to keep up with the increased cost of living.

Sooner or later Adrian's mind reverted to Mrs. Denby. This was usually after he had been in bed and had been thinking for a while in the darkness. He could not understand Mrs. Denby. She affronted his modern habit of thought.

"The whole thing is so silly and adventitious!"

"What thing?"

Adrian was aware that his wife knew exactly of what he was talking, but he had come to expect the question. "Mrs. Denby and my uncle." He would grow rather gently cross. "It has always reminded me of those present-day sword-and-cloak romances fat businessmen used to write about ten years ago and sell so enormously—there's an atmosphere of unnecessary intrigue. What's it all about? Here's the point! Why, if she felt this way about things, didn't she divorce that gentle drunkard of a husband of hers years ago and marry my uncle outright and honestly? Or why, if she couldn't get a divorce —which she could—didn't she leave her husband and go with my uncle? Anything in the open! Make a break—have some courage of her opinions! Smash things; build them up again! Thank God nowadays, at least, we have come to believe in the cleanness of surgery rather than the concealing palliatives of medicine. We're no longer—we modern people—afraid of the world; and the world can never hurt for any length of time any one who will stand up to it and tell it courageously to go to hell. No! It comes back and licks hands.

"I'll tell you why. My uncle and Mrs. Denby are the typical moral cowards of their generation. There's selfishness, too. What a travesty of love! Of course there's scandal, a perpetual scandal; but it's a hidden, sniggering scandal they don't have to meet face to face; and that's all they ask of life, they, and people like them—never to have to meet anything face to face. So long as they can bury their heads like ostriches! . . . Faugh!" There would be a moment's silence; then Adrian would complete his thought. "In my uncle's case," he would grumble in the darkness, "one phase of the selfishness is obvious. He couldn't even get himself originally, I suppose, to face the inevitable matter-of-fact moments of marriage. It began when he was middle-aged, a bachelor—I suppose he wants the sort of Don Juan, eighteen-eighty, perpetual sort of romance that doesn't exist outside the brains of himself and his like. . . . Camellias!"

Usually he tried to stir up argument with his wife, who in these matters agreed with him utterly; even more than agreed with him, since she was the escaped daughter of rich and stodgy people, and had insisted upon earning

her own living by portrait-painting. Theoretically, therefore, she was, of course, an anarchist. But at moments like the present her silent assent and the aura of slight weariness over an ancient subject which emanated from her in the dusk, affronted Adrian as much as positive opposition.

"Why don't you try to understand me?"

"I do, dearest!"—a pathetic attempt at eager agreement.

"Well, then, if you do, why is the tone of your voice like that? You know by now what I think. I'm not talking convention; I believe there are no laws higher than the love of a man for a woman. It should seek expression as a seed seeks sunlight. I'm talking about honesty; bravery; a willingness to accept the consequences of one's acts and come through; about the intention to sacrifice for love just what has to be sacrificed. What's the use of it otherwise? That's one real advance the modern mind has made, anyhow, despite all the rest of the welter and uncertainty."

"Of course, dearest."

He would go on. After a while Cecil would awake guiltily and inject a fresh, almost gay interest into her sleepy voice. She was not so unfettered as not to dread the wounded esteem of the unlistened-to male. She would lean over and kiss Adrian.

"Do go to sleep, darling! What's the sense? Pretty soon your uncle will be dead—wretched old man! Then you'll never have to think of him again." Being a childless woman, her red, a trifle cruel mouth would twist itself in the darkness into a small, secretive, maternal smile.

But old Mr. Henry McCain didn't die; instead he seemed to be caught up in the condition of static good health which frequently companions entire selfishness and a careful interest in oneself. His butler died, which was very annoying. Mr. McCain seemed to consider it the breaking of a promise made fifteen or so years before. It was endlessly a trouble instructing a new man, and then, of course, there was Adlington's family to be looked after, and taxes had gone up, and Mrs. Adlington was a stout woman who, despite the fact that Adlington, while alive, had frequently interrupted Mr. McCain's breakfast newspaper reading by asserting that she was a person of no character, now insisted upon weeping noisily every time Mr. McCain granted her an interview. Also, and this was equally unexpected, since one rather thought he would go on living forever, like one of the damper sort of fungi, Mr. Denby came home from the club one rainy spring night with a slight cold and died, three days later, with extraordinary gentleness.

"My uncle," said Adrian, "is one by one losing his accessories. After a while it will be his teeth."

Cecil was perplexed. "I don't know exactly what to do," she complained. "I don't know whether to treat Mrs. Denby as a bereaved aunt, a non-existent family skeleton, or a released menace. I dare say now, pretty soon, she and

your uncle will be married. Meanwhile, I suppose it is rather silly of me not to call and see if I can help her in any way. After all, we do know her intimately, whether we want to or not, don't we? We meet her about all the time, even if she wasn't motoring over to your uncle's place in the summer when we stop there."

So she went, being fundamentally kindly and fundamentally curious. She spoke of the expedition as "a descent upon Fair Rosamund's tower."

The small, yellow-panelled drawing-room, where she awaited Mrs. Denby's coming, was lit by a single silver vase-lamp under an orange shade and by a fire of thin logs, for the April evening was damp with a hesitant rain. On the table, near the lamp, was a silver vase with three yellow tulips in it, and Cecil, wandering about, came upon a double photograph frame, back of the vase, that made her gasp. She picked it up and stared at it. Between the alligator edgings, facing each other obliquely, but with the greatest amity, were Mr. Thomas Denby in the fashion of ten years before, very handsome, very well-groomed, with the startled expression which any definite withdrawal from his potational pursuits was likely to produce upon his countenance, and her uncle-in-law, Mr. Henry McCain, also in the fashion of ten years back. She was holding the photographs up to the light, her lips still apart, when she heard a sound behind her, and, putting the frame back guiltily, turned about. Mrs. Denby was advancing toward her. She seemed entirely unaware of Cecil's malfeasance; she was smiling faintly; her hand was cordial, grateful.

"You are very good," she murmured. "Sit here by the fire. We will have some tea directly."

Cecil could not but admit that she was very lovely; particularly lovely in the black of her mourning, with her slim neck, rising up from its string of pearls, to a head small and like a delicate white-and-gold flower. An extraordinarily well-bred woman, a sort of misty Du Maurier woman, of a type that had become almost non-existent, if ever it had existed in its perfection at all. And, curiously enough, a woman whose beauty seemed to have been sharpened by many fine-drawn renunciations. Now she looked at her hands as if expecting Cecil to say something.

"I think such calls as this are always very useless, but then——"

"Exactly—but then! They mean more than anything else in the world, don't they? When one reaches fifty-five one is not always used to kindness. . . . You are very kind. . . ." She raised her eyes.

Cecil experienced a sudden impulsive warmth. After all, what did she or any one else know about other peoples' lives? Poor souls! What a base thing life often was!

"I want you to understand that we are always so glad, both Adrian and myself. . . . Any time we can help in any way, you know——"

"Yes, I think you would. You—I have watched you both. You don't mind, do you? I think you're both rather great people—at least, my idea of greatness."

Cecil's eyes shone just a little; then she sat back and drew together her eager, rather childish mouth. This wouldn't do! She had not come here to encourage sentimentalization. With a determined effort she lifted her mind outside the circle of commiseration which threatened to surround it. She deliberately reset the conversation to impersonal limits. She was sure that Mrs. Denby was aware of her intention, adroitly concealed as it was. This made her uncomfortable, ashamed. And yet she was irritated with herself. Why should she particularly care what this woman thought in ways as subtle as this? Obvious kindness was her intention, not mental charity pursued into tortuous by-paths. And, besides, her frank, boyish cynicism, its wariness, revolted, even while she felt herself flattered at the prospect of the confidences that seemed to tremble on Mrs. Denby's lips. It wouldn't do to "let herself in for anything"; to "give herself away." No! She adopted a manner of cool, entirely reflective kindliness. But all along she was not sure that she was thoroughly successful. There was a lingering impression that Mrs. Denby was penetrating the surface to the unwilling interest beneath. Cecil suspected that this woman was trained in discriminations and half-lights to which she and her generation had joyfully made themselves blind. She felt uncomfortably young; a little bit smiled at in the most kindly of hidden ways. Just as she was leaving, the subversive softness came close to her again, like a wave of too much perfume as you open a church-door; as if some one were trying to embrace her against her will.

"You will understand," said Mrs. Denby, "that you have done the very nicest thing in the world. I am horribly lonely. I have few women friends. Perhaps it is too much to ask—but if you could call again sometime. Yes . . . I would appreciate it so greatly."

She let go of Cecil's hand and walked to the door, and stood with one long arm raised against the curtain, her face turned toward the hall.

"There is no use," she said, "in attempting to hide my husband's life, for every one knows what it was, but then—yes, I think you will understand. I am a childless woman, you see; he was infinitely pathetic."

Cecil felt that she must run away, instantly. "I do——" she said brusquely. "I understand more than other women. Perfectly! Good-by!"

She found herself brushing past the latest trim parlour-maid, and out once more in the keen, sweet, young dampness. She strode briskly down the deserted street. Her fine bronze eyebrows were drawn down to where they met. "Good Lord! Damn!"—Cecil swore very prettily and modernly—"What rotten taste! Not frankness, whatever it might seem outwardly; not frankness, but devious excuses! Some more of Adrian's hated past-generation stuff!

And yet—no! The woman was sincere—perfectly! She had meant it—that about her husband. And she *was* lovely—and she was fine, too! It was impossible to deny it. But—a childless woman! About that drunken tailor's model of a husband! And then—Uncle Henry! . . ." Cecil threw back her head; her eyes gleamed in the wet radiance of a corner lamp; she laughed without making a sound, and entirely without amusement.

But it is not true that good health is static, no matter how carefully looked after. And, despite the present revolt against the Greek spirit, Time persists in being bigotedly Greek. The tragedy—provided one lives long enough—is always played out to its logical conclusion. For every hour you have spent, no matter how quietly or beautifully or wisely, Nemesis takes toll in the end. You peter out; the engine dulls; the shining coin wears thin. If it's only that it is all right; you are fortunate if you don't become greasy, too, or blurred, or scarred. And Mr. McCain had not spent all his hours wisely or beautifully, or even quietly, underneath the surface. He suddenly developed what he called "acute indigestion." "Odd!" he complained, "and exceedingly tiresome! I've been able to eat like an ostrich all my life." Adrian smiled covertly at the simile, but his uncle was unaware that it was because in Adrian's mind the simile applied to his uncle's conscience, not his stomach.

It *was* an odd disease, that "acute indigestion." It manifested itself by an abrupt tragic stare in Mr. McCain's eyes, a whiteness of cheek, a clutching at the left side of the breast; it resulted also in his beginning to walk very slowly indeed. One day Adrian met Carron, his uncle's physician, as he was leaving a club after luncheon. Carron stopped him. "Look here, Adrian," he said, "is that new man of your uncle's—that valet, or whatever he is—a good man?"

Adrian smiled. "I didn't hire him," he answered, "and I couldn't discharge him if I wanted—in fact, any suggestion of that kind on my part, would lead to his employment for life. Why?"

"Because," said Carron, "he impresses me as being rather young and flighty, and some day your uncle is going to die suddenly. He may last five years; he may snuff out to-morrow. It's his heart." His lips twisted pityingly. "He prefers to call it by some other name," he added, "and he would never send for me again if he knew I had told you, but you ought to know. He's a game old cock, isn't he?"

"Oh, very!" agreed Adrian. "Yes, game! Very, indeed!"

He walked slowly down the sunlit courtway on which the back door of the club opened, swinging his stick and meditating. Spring was approaching its zenith. In the warm May afternoon pigeons tumbled about near-by church spires which cut brown inlays into the soft blue sky. There was a feeling of open windows; a sense of unseen tulips and hyacinths; of people playing pianos. . . . Too bad, an old man dying that way, his hand furtively seeking

his heart, when all this spring was about! Terror in possession of him, too! People like that hated to die; they couldn't see anything ahead. Well, Adrian reflected, the real tragedy of it hadn't been his fault. He had always been ready at the slightest signal to forget almost everything—yes, almost everything. Even that time when, as a sweating newspaper reporter, he had, one dusk, watched in the park his uncle and Mrs. Denby drive past in the cool seclusion of a shining victoria. Curious! In itself the incident was small, but it had stuck in his memory more than others far more serious, as concrete instances are likely to do. . . . No, he wasn't sorry; not a bit! He was glad, despite the hesitation he experienced in saying to himself the final word. He had done his best, and this would mean his own release and Cecil's. It would mean at last the blessed feeling that he could actually afford a holiday, and a little unthinking laughter, and, at thirty-nine, the dreams for which, at twenty-five, he had never had full time. He walked on down the courtway more briskly.

That Saturday night was the night he dined with his uncle. It had turned very warm; unusually warm for the time of year. When he had dressed and had sought out Cecil to say good-by to her he found her by the big studio window on the top floor of the apartment where they lived. She was sitting in the window-seat, her chin cupped in her hand, looking out over the city, in the dark pool of which lights were beginning to open like yellow water-lilies. Her white arm gleamed in the gathering dusk, and she was dressed in some diaphanous blue stuff that enhanced the bronze of her hair. Adrian took his place silently beside her and leaned out. The air was very soft and hot and embracing, and up here it was very quiet, as if one floated above the lower clouds of perpetual sound.

Cecil spoke at last. "It's lovely, isn't it?" she said. "I should have come to find you, but I couldn't. These first warm nights! You really understand why people live, after all, don't you? It's like a pulse coming back to a hand you love." She was silent a moment. "Kiss me," she said, finally. "I—I'm so glad I love you, and we're young."

He stooped down and put his arms about her. He could feel her tremble. How fragrant she was, and queer, and mysterious, even if he had lived with her now for almost fifteen years! He was infinitely glad at the moment for his entire life. He kissed her again, kissed her eyes, and she went down the stairs with him to the hall-door. She was to stop for him at his uncle's after a dinner to which she was going.

Adrian lit a cigarette and walked instead of taking the elevator. It was appropriate to his mood that on the second floor some one with a golden Italian voice should be singing "Louise." He paused for a moment. He was reminded of a night long ago in Verona, when there had been an open window and moonlight in the street. Then he looked at his watch. He was late;

he would have to hurry. It amused him that at his age he should still fear the silent rebuke with which his uncle punished unpunctuality.

He arrived at his destination as a near-by church clock struck the half-hour. The new butler admitted him and led him back to where his uncle was sitting by an open window; the curtains stirred in the languid breeze, the suave room was a little penetrated by the night, as if some sly, disorderly spirit was investigating uninvited. It was far too hot for the wood fire—that part of the formula had been omitted, but otherwise each detail was the same. "The two hundredth time!" Adrian thought to himself. "The two hundredth time, at least! It will go on forever!" And then the formula was altered again, for his uncle got to his feet, laying aside the evening paper with his usual precise care. "My dear fellow," he began, "so good of you! On the minute, too! I——" and then he stumbled and put out his hand. "My glasses!" he said.

Adrian caught him and held him upright. He swayed a little. "I—— Lately I have had to use them sometimes, even when not reading," he murmured. "Thank you! Thank you!"

Adrian went back to the chair where his uncle had been sitting. He found the glasses—gold pince-nez—but they were broken neatly in the middle, lying on the floor, as if they had dropped from someone's hand. He looked at them for a moment, puzzled, before he gave them back to his uncle.

"Here they are, sir," he said. "But—it's very curious. They're broken in such an odd way."

His uncle peered down at them. He hesitated and cleared his throat. "Yes," he began; then he stood up straight, with an unexpected twist of his shoulders. "I was turning them between my fingers," he said, "just before you came in. I had no idea—no, no idea! Shall we go in? I think dinner has been announced."

There was the sherry in the little, deeply cut glasses, and the clear soup, with a dash of lemon in it, and the fish, and afterward the roast chicken, with vegetables discreetly limited and designed not to detract from the main dish; and there was a pint of champagne for Adrian and a mild white wine for his uncle. The latter twisted his mouth in a dry smile. "One finds it difficult to get old," he said. "I have always been very fond of champagne. More aesthetically I think than the actual taste. It seems to sum up so well the evening mood—dinner and laughter and forgetting the day. But now——" he flicked contemptuously the stem of his glass—"I am only allowed this uninspired stuff." He stopped suddenly and his face twisted into the slight grimace which Adrian in the last few weeks had been permitted occasionally to see. His hand began to wander vaguely over the white expanse of his shirt.

Adrian pushed back his chair. "Let me——!" he began, but his uncle waved a deprecating hand. "Sit down!" he managed to say. "Please!" Adrian

sank back again. The colour returned to his uncle's cheeks and the staring question left his eyes. He took a sip of wine.

"I cannot tell you," he observed with elaborate indifference, "how humiliating this thing is becoming to me. I have always had a theory that invalids and people when they begin to get old and infirm, should be put away some place where they can undergo the unpleasant struggle alone. It's purely selfish—there's something about the sanctity of the individual. Dogs have it right—you know the way they creep off? But I suppose I won't. Pride fails when the body weakens, doesn't it, no matter what the will may be?" He lifted his wine-glass. "I am afraid I am giving you a very dull evening, my dear fellow," he apologized. "Forgive me! We will talk of more pleasant things. I drink wine with you! How is Cecil? Doing well with her painting?"

Adrian attempted to relax his own inner grimness. He responded to his uncle's toast. But he wished this old man, so very near the mysterious crisis of his affairs, would begin to forego to some extent the habit of a lifetime, become a little more human. This ridiculous "façade"! The dinner progressed.

Through an open window the night, full of soft, distant sound, made itself felt once more. The candles, under their red shades, flickered at intervals. The noiseless butler came and went. How old his uncle was getting to look, Adrian reflected. There was a grayness about his cheeks; fine, wire-like lines about his mouth. And he was falling into that sure sign of age, a vacant absent-mindedness. Half the time he was not listening to what he, Adrian, was saying; instead, his eyes sought constantly the shadows over the carved sideboard across the table from him. What did he see there? What question was he asking? Adrian wondered. Only once was his uncle very much interested, and that was when Adrian had spoken of the war and the psychology left in its train. Adrian himself had not long before been released from a weary round of training-camps, where, in Texas dust, or the unpleasant resinous summer of the South, he had gone through a repetition that in the end had threatened to render him an imbecile. He was not illusioned. As separate personalities, men had lost much of their glamour for him; there had been too much sweat, too much crowding, too much invasion of dignity, of everything for which the world claimed it had been struggling and praying. But alongside of this revolt on his part had grown up an immense pity and belief in humanity as a mass—struggling, worm-like, aspiring, idiotic, heroic. The thought of it made him uncomfortable and at the same time elate.

His uncle shook a dissenting head. On this subject he permitted himself mild discussion, but his voice was still that of an old, wearied man, annoyed and bewildered. "Oh, no!" he said. "That's the very feature of it that seems to me most dreadful; the vermicular aspect; the massed uprising; the massed death. About professional armies there was something decent—about pro-

fessional killing. It was cold-blooded and keen, anyway. But this modern war, and this modern craze for self-revelation! Naked! Why, these books—the young men kept their fingers on the pulses of their reactions. It isn't clean; it makes the individual cheap. War is a dreadful thing; it should be as hidden as murder." He sat back, smiled. "We seem to have a persistent tendency to become serious to-night," he remarked.

Serious! Adrian saw a vision of the drill-grounds, and smiled sardonically; then he raised his head in surprise, for the new butler had broken all the rules of the household and was summoning his uncle to the telephone in the midst of dessert. He awaited the expected rebuke, but it did not come. Instead, his uncle paused in the middle of a sentence, stared, and looked up. "Ah, yes!" he said, and arose from his chair. "Forgive me, Adrian, I will be back shortly." He walked with a new, just noticeable, infirmness toward the door. Once there he seemed to think an apology necessary, for he turned and spoke with absent-minded courtesy.

"You may not have heard," he said, "but Mrs. Denby is seriously ill. Her nurse gives me constant bulletins over the telephone."

Adrian started to his feet, then sat down again. "But—" he stuttered—"but—is it as bad as all that?"

"I am afraid," said his uncle gently, "it could not be worse." The curtain fell behind him.

Adrian picked up his fork and began to stir gently the melting ice on the plate before him, but his eyes were fixed on the wall opposite, where, across the shining table, from a mellow gold frame, a portrait of his grandfather smiled with a benignity, utterly belying his traditional character, into the shadows above the candles. But Adrian was not thinking of his grandfather just then, he was thinking of his uncle—and Mrs. Denby. What in the world——! Dangerously ill, and yet here had been his uncle able to go through with—not entirely calmly, to be sure; Adrian remembered the lack of attention, the broken eye-glasses; and yet, still able to go through with, not obviously shaken, this monthly farce; this dinner that in reality mocked all the real meaning of blood-relationship. Good Lord! To Adrian's modern mind, impatient and courageous, the situation was preposterous, grotesque. He himself would have broken through to the woman he loved, were she seriously ill, if all the city was cordoned to keep him back. What could it mean? Entire selfishness on his uncle's part? Surely not that! That was too inhuman! Adrian was willing to grant his uncle exceptional expertness in the art of self-protection, but there was a limit even to self-protection. There must be some other reason. Discretion? More likely, and yet how absurd! Had Mr. Denby been alive, a meticulous, a fantastic delicacy might have intervened, but Mr. Denby was dead. Who were there to wound, or who left for the telling of tales? A doctor and the servants. This was not alto-

gether reasonable, despite what he knew of his uncle. Here was some oddity of psychology he could not follow. He heard the curtains stir as his uncle reëntered. He looked up, attentive and curious, but his uncle's face was the mask to which he was accustomed.

"How is Mrs. Denby?" he asked.

Mr. McCain hesitated for the fraction of a second. "I am afraid, very ill," he said. "Very ill, indeed! It is pneumonia. I—the doctor thinks it is only a question of a little time, but—well, I shall continue to hope for the best." There was a metallic harshness to his concluding words. "Shall we go into the library?" he continued. "I think the coffee will be pleasanter there."

They talked again of the war; of revolution; of the dark forces at large in the world.

Through that hour or two Adrian had a nakedness of perception unusual even to his sensitive mind. It seemed to him three spirits were abroad in the quiet, softly-lit, book-lined room; three intentions that crept up to him like the waves of the sea, receded, crept back again; or were they currents of air? or hesitant, unheard feet that advanced and withdrew? In at the open windows poured at times the warm, enveloping scent of the spring; pervading, easily overlooked, lawless, persistent, inevitable. Adrian found himself thinking it was like the presence of a woman. And then, overlapping this, would come the careful, dry, sardonic tones of his uncle's voice, as if insisting that the world was an ordinary world, and that nothing, not even love or death, could lay disrespectful fingers upon or hurry for a moment the trained haughtiness of the will. Yet even this compelling arrogance was at times overtaken, submerged, by a third presence, stronger even than the other two; a presence that entered upon the heels of the night; the ceaseless murmur of the streets; the purring of rubber tires upon asphalt; a girl's laugh, high, careless, reckless. Life went on. Never for a moment did it stop.

"I am not sorry that I am getting old," said Mr. McCain. "I think nowadays is an excellent time to die. Perhaps for the very young, the strong—but for me, things are too busy, too hurried. I have always liked my life like potpourri. I liked to keep it in a china jar and occasionally take off the lid. Otherwise one's sense of perfume becomes satiated. Take your young girls; they remain faithful to a love that is not worth being faithful to—all noise, and flushed laughter, and open doors." Quite unexpectedly he began to talk in a way he had never talked before. He held his cigar in his hand until the ash turned cold; his fingers trembled just a little.

"You have been very good to me," he said. Adrian raised startled eyes. "Very good. I am quite aware that you dislike me"—he hesitated and the ghost of a smile hovered about his lips—"and I have always disliked you. Please!" He raised a silencing hand. "You don't mind my saying so? No. Very well, then, there is something I want to tell you. Afterward I will never

mention it again. I dare say our mutual dislike is due to the inevitable misunderstanding that exists between the generations. But it is not important. The point is that we have always been well-bred toward each other. Yes, that is the point. You have always been a gentleman, very considerate, very courteous, I cannot but admire you. And I think you will find I have done the best I could. I am not a rich man, as such things go nowadays, but I will hand you on the money that will be yours quite unimpaired, possibly added to. I feel very strongly on that subject. I am old-fashioned enough to consider the family the most important thing in life. After all, we are the only two McCains left." He hesitated again, and twisted for a moment his bloodless hands in his lap, then he raised his eyes and spoke with a curious hurried embarrassment. "I have sacrificed a great deal for that," he said. "Yes, a great deal."

The soft-footed butler stood at his elbow, like an actor in comedy suddenly cast for the rôle of a portentous messenger.

"Miss Niles is calling you again, sir," he said.

"Oh, yes!—ah—Adrian, I am very sorry, my dear fellow. I will finish the conversation when I come back."

This time the telephone was within earshot; in the hall outside. Adrian heard his uncle's slow steps end in the creaking of a chair as he sat down; then the picking up of the receiver. The message was a long one, for his uncle did not speak for fully a minute; finally his voice drifted in through the curtained doorway.

"You think . . . only a few minutes?"

". . . Ah, yes! Conscious? Yes. Well, will you tell her, Miss Niles?—yes, please listen very carefully—tell her this. That I am not there because I dared not come. Yes; on her account. She will understand. My heart—it's my heart. She will understand. I did not dare. For her sake, not mine. Tell her that. She will understand. Please be very careful in repeating the message, Miss Niles. Tell her I dared not come because of my heart. . . . Yes; thank you. That's it. . . . What? Yes, I will wait, Miss Niles."

Adrian, sitting in the library, suddenly got to his feet and crossed to the empty fireplace and stood with his back to it, enlightenment and a puzzled frown struggling for possession of his face. His uncle's heart! Ah, he understood, then! It was discretion, after all, but not the kind he thought—a much more forgiveable discretion. And, yet, what possible difference could it make should his uncle die suddenly in Mrs. Denby's house? Fall dead across her bed, or die kneeling beside it? Poor, twisted old fool, afraid even at the end that death might catch him out; afraid of a final undignified gesture.

A motor blew its horn for the street crossing. Another girl laughed; a young, thin, excited girl, to judge by her laughter. The curtains stirred and again there was that underlying scent of tulips and hyacinths; and then, from

the hall outside, came the muffled thud of a receiver falling to the floor. Adrian waited. The receiver was not picked up. He strode to the door. Crumpled up over the telephone was old Mr. McCain.

Cecil came later. She was very quick and helpful, and jealously solicitous on Adrian's account, but in the taxicab going home she said the one thing Adrian had hoped she wouldn't say, and yet was sure she would. She belonged to a sex which, if it is honest at all, is never reticently so. She believed that between the man she loved and herself there were no possible mental withdrawals. "It is very tragic," she said, "but much better—you know it is better. He belonged to the cumberers of the earth. Yes, so much better; and this way, too!"

In the darkness her hand sought his. Adrian took it, but in his heart was the same choked feeling, the same knowledge that something was gone that could not be found again, that, as a little boy, he had had when they sold, at his father's death, the country place where he had spent his summers. Often he had lain awake at night, restless with the memory of heliotrope, and phlox, and mignonette, and afternoons quiet except for the sound of bees.

1921: *from Everybody's*

THE HEART OF LITTLE SHIKARA

by Edison Marshall, who was born in Indiana, but soon afterward moved with his family to Oregon. It was there in the Oregon woods that the boy got the taste for adventure which was to take him on exploring and hunting trips in Alaska, Africa, and many parts of Asia. Mr. Marshall is the author of many novels of romantic adventure, among them Gypsy Sixpence, Yankee Pasha, The Viking, *and* Caravan to Xanadu. *He now makes his home in Augusta, Georgia.*

1: If it hadn't been for a purple moon that came peering up above the dark jungle just at nightfall, it would have been impossible to tell that Little Shikara was at his watch. He was really just the colour of the shadows—a rather pleasant brown—he was very little indeed, and besides, he was stand-

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ing very, very still. If he was trembling at all, from anticipation and excitement, it was no more than Nahar the tiger trembles as he crouches in ambush. But the moon did show him—peering down through the leaf-clusters of the heavy vines—and shone very softly in his wide-open dark eyes.

And it was a purple moon—no other colour that man could name. It looked almost unreal, like a paper moon painted very badly by a clumsy stage-hand. The jungle-moon quite often has that peculiar purplish tint, most travellers know, but few of them indeed ever try to tell what causes it. This particular moon probed down here and there between the tall bamboos, transformed the jungle—just now waking—into a mystery and a fairyland, glinted on a hard-packed elephant trail that wound away into the thickets, and always came back to shine on the coal-black Oriental eyes of the little boy beside the village gate. It showed him standing very straight and just as tall as his small stature would permit, and looked oddly silvery and strange on his long, dark hair. Little Shikara, son of Khoda Dunnoo, was waiting for the return of a certain idol and demigod who was even now riding home in his *howdah* from the tiger hunt.

Other of the villagers would be down to meet Warwick Sahib as soon as they heard the shouts of his beaters—but Little Shikara had been waiting almost an hour. Likely, if they had known about it, they would have commented on his badness, because he was notoriously bad, if indeed—as the villagers told each other—he was not actually cursed with evil spirits.

In the first place, he was almost valueless as a herder of buffalo. Three times, when he had been sent with the other boys to watch the herds in their wallows, he had left his post and crept away into the fringe of jungle on what was unquestionably some mission of witchcraft. For small naked brown boys, as a rule, do not go alone and unarmed into the thick bamboos. Too many things can happen to prevent them ever coming out again; too many brown silent ribbons crawl in the grass, or too many yellow, striped creatures, no less lithe, lurk in the thickets. But the strangest thing of all—and the surest sign of witchcraft—was that he had always come safely out again, yet with never any satisfactory explanations as to why he had gone. He had always looked some way very joyful and tremulous—and perhaps even pale if from the nature of things a brown boy ever can look pale. But it was the kind of paleness that one has after a particularly exquisite experience. It was not the dumb, teeth-chattering paleness of fear.

"I saw the sergeant of the jungle," Little Shikara said after one of these excursions. And this made no sense at all.

"There are none of the King's soldiers here," the brown village folk replied to him. "Either thou liest to us, or thine eyes lied to thee. And didst thou also see the chevron that told his rank?"

"That was the way I knew him. It was the black bear, and he wore the pale chevron low on his throat."

This was Little Shikara all over. Of course he referred to the black Himalayan bear which all men know wears a yellowish patch, of chevron shape, just in front of his forelegs; but why he should call him a jungle-sergeant was quite beyond the wit of the village folk to say. Their imagination did not run in that direction. It never even occurred to them that Little Shikara might be a born jungle creature, expatriated by the accident of birth—one of that free, strange breed that can never find peace in the villages of men.

"But remember the name we gave him," his mother would say. "Perhaps he is only living up to his name."

For there are certain native hunters in India that are known, far and wide, as the Shikaris; and possibly she meant in her tolerance that her little son was merely a born huntsman. But in reality Little Shikara was not named for these men at all. Rather it was for a certain fleet-winged little hawk, a hunter of sparrows, that is one of the most free spirits in all the jungle.

And it was almost like taking part in some great hunt himself—to be waiting at the gate for the return of Warwick Sahib. Even now, the elephant came striding out of the shadows; and Little Shikara could see the trophy. The hunt had indeed been successful, and the boy's glowing eyes beheld—even in the shadows—the largest, most beautiful tiger-skin he had ever seen. It was the great Nahar, the royal tiger, who had killed one hundred cattle from near-by fields.

Warwick Sahib rode in his *howdah*, and he did not seem to see the village people that came out to meet him. In truth, he seemed half asleep, his muscles limp, his gray eyes full of thoughts. He made no answer to the triumphant shouts of the village folk. Little Shikara glanced once at the lean, bronzed face, the limp, white, thin hands, and something like a shiver of ecstasy went clear to his ten toes. For like many other small boys, all over the broad world, he was a hero-worshipper to the last hair of his head; and this quiet man on the elephant was to him beyond all measure the most wonderful living creature on the earth.

He didn't cry out, as the others did. He simply stood in mute worship, his little body tingling with glory. Warwick Sahib had looked up now, and his slow eyes were sweeping the line of brown faces. But still he did not seem to see them. And then—wonder of wonders—his eyes rested full on the eyes of his little worshipper beside the gate.

But it was quite the way of Warwick Sahib to sweep his gray, tired-out eyes over a scene and seemingly perceive nothing; yet in reality absorbing every detail with the accuracy of a photographic plate. And his seeming indifference was not a pose with him, either. He was just a great sportsman who was also an English gentleman, and he had learned certain lessons of

impassiveness from the wild. Only one of the brown faces he beheld was worth a lingering glance. And when he met that one his eyes halted in their sweeping survey—and Warwick Sahib smiled.

That face was the brown, eager visage of Little Shikara. And the blood of the boy flowed to the skin, and he glowed red all over through the brown.

It was only the faintest of quiet, tolerant smiles; but it meant more to him than almost any kind of an honour could have meant to the prematurely gray man in the *howdah*. The latter passed on to his estate, and some of the villagers went back to their women and their thatch huts. But still Little Shikara stood motionless—and it wasn't until the thought suddenly came to him that possibly the beaters had already gathered and were telling the story of the kill that with startling suddenness he raced back through the gates to the village.

Yes, the beaters had assembled in a circle under a tree, and most of the villagers had gathered to hear the story. He slipped in among them, and listened with both outstanding little ears. Warwick Sahib had dismounted from his elephant as usual, the beaters said, and with but one attendant had advanced up the bed of a dry creek. This was quite like Warwick Sahib, and Little Shikara felt himself tingling again. Other hunters, particularly many of the rich sahibs from across the sea, shot their tigers from the security of the *howdah;* but this wasn't Warwick's way of doing. The male tiger had risen snarling from his lair, and had been felled at the first shot.

Most of the villagers had supposed that the story would end at this point. Warwick Sahib's tiger hunts were usually just such simple and expeditious affairs. The gun would lift to his shoulder, the quiet eyes would glance along the barrel—and the tiger, whether charging or standing still—would speedily die. But to-day there had been a curious epilogue. Just as the beaters had started toward the fallen animal, and the white Heaven-born's cigarette-case was open in his hand, Nahara, Nahar's great, tawny mate, had suddenly sprung forth from the bamboo thickets.

She drove straight to the nearest of the beaters. There was no time whatever for Warwick to take aim. His rifle leaped, like a live thing, in his arms, but not one of the horrified beaters had seen his eyes lower to the sights. Yet the bullet went home—they could tell by the way the tiger flashed to her breast in the grass.

Yet she was only wounded. One of the beaters, starting, had permitted a bough of a tree to whip Warwick in the face, and the blow had disturbed what little aim he had. It was almost a miracle that he had hit the great cat at all. At once the thickets had closed around her, and the beaters had been unable to drive her forth again.

The circle was silent thereafter. They seemed to be waiting for Khusru, one of the head men of the village, to give his opinion. He knew more about the

wild animals than any mature native in the assembly, and his comments on the hunting stories were usually worth hearing.

"We will not be in the honoured service of the Protector of the Poor at this time a year from now," he said.

They all waited tensely. Shikara shivered. "Speak, Khusru," they urged him.

"Warwick Sahib will go again to the jungles—and Nahara will be waiting. She owes two debts. One is the killing of her mate—and ye know that these two tigers have been long and faithful mates. Do ye think she will let that debt go unpaid? She will also avenge her own wound."

"Perhaps she will die of bleeding," one of the others suggested.

"Nay, or ye would have found her this afternoon. Ye know that it is the wounded tiger that is most to be feared. One day, and he will go forth in pursuit of her again; and then ye will not see him riding back so grandly on his elephant. Perhaps she will come here, to carry away *our* children."

Again Shikara tingled—hoping that Nahara would at least come close enough to cause excitement. And that night, too happy to keep silent, he told his mother of Warwick Sahib's smile. "And some time I—I, thine own son," he said as sleepiness came upon him, "will be a killer of tigers, even as Warwick Sahib."

"Little sparrow-hawk," his mother laughed at him. "Little one of mighty words, only the great sahibs that come from afar, and Warwick Sahib himself, may hunt the tiger. So how canst thou, little worthless?"

"I will soon be grown," he persisted, "and I—I, too—will some time return with such a tiger-skin as the great Heaven-born brought this afternoon." Little Shikara was very sleepy, and he was telling his dreams much more frankly than was his wont. "And the village folk will come out to meet me with shoutings, and I will tell them of the shot—in the circle under the tree."

"And where, little hawk, wilt thou procure thine elephants, and such rupees as are needed?"

"Warwick Sahib shoots from the ground—and so will I. And sometimes he goes forth with only one attendant—and I will not need even one. And who can say—perhaps he will find me even a bolder man than Gunga Singhai; and he will take me in his place on the hunts in the jungles."

For Gunga Singhai was Warwick Sahib's own personal attendant and gun-carrier—the native that the Protector of the Poor could trust in the tightest places. So it was only to be expected that Little Shikara's mother should laugh at him. The idea of her son being an attendant of Warwick Sahib, not to mention a hunter of tigers, was only a tale to tell her husband when the boy's bright eyes were closed in sleep.

"Nay, little man," she told him. "Would I want thee torn to pieces in

Nahara's claws? Would I want thee smelling of the jungle again, as thou didst after chasing the waterbuck through the bamboos? Nay—thou wilt be a herdsman, like thy father—and perhaps gather many rupees."

But Little Shikara did not want to think of rupees. Even now, as sleep came to him, his childish spirit had left the circle of thatch roofs, and had gone on tremulous expeditions into the jungle. Far away, the trumpet-call of a wild tusker trembled through the moist, hot night; and great bell-shaped flowers made the air pungent and heavy with perfume. A tigress skulked somewhere in a thicket licking an injured leg with her rough tongue, pausing to listen to every sound the night gave forth. Little Shikara whispered in his sleep.

A half mile distant, in his richly furnished bungalow, Warwick Sahib dozed over his after-dinner cigar. He was in evening clothes, and crystal and silver glittered on his board. But his gray eyes were half closed; and the gleam from his plate could not pass the long, dark lashes. For his spirit was far distant, too—on the jungle trails with that of Little Shikara.

2: One sunlit morning, perhaps a month after the skin of Nahar was brought in from the jungle, Warwick Sahib's mail was late. It was an unheard-of thing. Always before, just as the clock struck eight, he would hear the cheerful tinkle of the postman's bells. At first he considered complaining; but as morning drew to early afternoon he began to believe that investigation would be the wiser course.

The postman's route carried him along an old elephant trail through a patch of thick jungle beside one of the tributaries of the Manipur. When natives went out to look, he was neither on the path nor drowned in the creek, nor yet in his thatched hut at the other end of his route. The truth was that this particular postman's bells would never be heard by human ears again. And there was enough evidence in the wet mould of the trail to know what had occurred.

That night the circle under the tree was silent and shivering. "Who is next?" they asked of one another. The jungle night came down, breathless and mysterious, and now and then a twig was cracked by a heavy foot at the edge of the thickets. In Warwick's house, the great Protector of the Poor took his rifles from their cases and fitted them together.

"To-morrow," he told Gunga Singhai, "we will settle for that postman's death." Singhai breathed deeply, but said nothing. Perhaps his dark eyes brightened. The tiger-hunts were nearly as great a delight to him as they were to Warwick himself.

But while Nahara, lame from Warwick's bullet, could no longer overtake cattle, she did with great skilfulness avoid the onrush of the beaters. Again Little Shikara waited at the village gate for his hero to return; but the beaters

walked silently to-night. Nor were there any tales to be told under the tree.

Nahara, a fairly respectable cattle-killer before, had become in a single night one of the worst terrors of India. Of course she was still a coward, but she had learned, by virtue of a chance meeting with a postman on a trail after a week of heart-devouring starvation, two or three extremely portentous lessons. One of them was that not even the little deer, drinking beside the Manipur, died half so easily as these tall, forked forms of which she had previously been so afraid. She found out also that they could neither run swiftly nor walk silently, and they could be approached easily even by a tiger that cracked a twig with every step. It simplified the problem of living immensely; and just as any other feline would have done, she took the line of least resistance. If there had been plenty of carrion in the jungle, Nahara might never have hunted men. But the kites and the jackals looked after the carrion; and they were much swifter and keener-eyed than a lame tiger.

She knew enough not to confine herself to one village; and it is rather hard to explain how any lower creature, that obviously cannot reason, could have possessed this knowledge. Perhaps it was because she had learned that a determined hunt, with many beaters and men on elephants, invariably followed her killings. It was always well to travel just as far as possible from the scene. She found out also that, just as a doe is easier felled than a horned buck, certain of this new kind of game were more easily taken than the others. Sometimes children played at the door of their huts, and sometimes old men were afflicted with such maladies that they could not flee at all. All these things Nahara learned; and in learning them she caused a certain civil office of the British Empire to put an exceedingly large price on her head.

Gradually the fact dawned on her that unlike the deer and the buffalo, this new game was more easily hunted in the daylight—particularly in that tired-out, careless twilight hour when the herders and the plantation hands came in from their work. At night the village folk kept in their huts, and such wood-cutters and gipsies as slept without wakened every hour to tend their fires. Nahara was deathly afraid of fire. Night after night she would creep round and round a gipsy camp, her eyes like two pale blue moons in the darkness, and would never dare attack.

And because she was taking her living in a manner forbidden by the laws of the jungle, the glory and beauty of her youth quickly departed from her. There are no prisons for those that break the jungle laws, no courts and no appointed officers; but because these are laws that go down to the roots of life, punishment is always swift and inevitable. "Thou shalt not kill men," is the first law of the wild creatures; and everyone knows that any animal or breed of animals that breaks this law has sooner or later been hunted down and slain—just like any other murderer. The mange came upon her, and she lost flesh, and certain of her teeth began to come out. She was no longer the

beautiful female of her species, to be sung to by the weaver-birds as she passed beneath. She was a hag and a vampire, hatred of whom lay deep in every human heart in her hunting range.

Often the hunting was poor, and sometimes she went many days in a stretch without making a single kill. And in all beasts, high and low, this is the last step to the worst degeneracy of all. It instils a curious, terrible kind of blood-lust—to kill, not once, but as many times as possible in the same hunt; to be content not with one death, but to slay and slay until the whole herd is destroyed. It is the instinct that makes a little weasel kill all the chickens in a coop, when one was all it could possibly carry away, and that will cause a wolf to leap from sheep to sheep in a fold until every one is dead. Nahara didn't get a chance to kill every day; so when the opportunity did come, like a certain pitiable kind of human hunter who comes from afar to hunt small game, she killed as many times as she could in quick succession. And the British Empire raised the price on her head.

One afternoon found her within a half mile of Warwick's bungalow, and for five days she had gone without food. One would not have thought of her as a royal tigress, the queen of the felines and one of the most beautiful of all living things. And since she was still tawny and graceful, it would be hard to understand why she no longer gave the impression of beauty. It was simply gone, as a flame goes, and her queenliness was wholly departed, too. In some vague way she had become a poisonous, a ghastly thing, to be named with such outcasts as the jackals or hyenas.

Excessive hunger, in most of the flesh-eating animals, is really a first cousin to madness. It brings bad dreams and visions, and, worst of all, it induces an insubordination to all the forest laws of man and beast. A well-fed wolf-pack will run in stark panic from a human being; but even the wisest of mountaineers do not care to meet the same gray band in the starving times of winter. Starvation brings recklessness, a desperate frenzied courage that is likely to upset all of one's preconceived notions as to the behavior of animals. It also brings, so that all men may be aware of its presence, a peculiar lurid glow to the balls of the eyes.

In fact, the two pale circles of fire were the most noticeable characteristics of the long, tawny cat that crept through the bamboos. Except for them, she would hardly have been discernible at all. The yellow grass made a perfect background, her black stripes looked like the streaks of shadow between the stalks of bamboo, and for one that is lame she crept with an astounding silence. One couldn't have believed that such a great creature could lie so close to the earth and be so utterly invisible in the low thickets.

A little peninsula of dwarf bamboos and tall jungle grass extended out into the pasture before the village and Nahara crept out clear to its point. She didn't seem to be moving. One couldn't catch the stir and draw of muscles.

And yet she slowly glided to the end; then began her wait. Her head sunk low, her body grew tense, her tail whipped softly back and forth, with as easy a motion as the swaying of a serpent. The light flamed and died and flamed and died again in her pale eyes.

Soon a villager who had been working in Warwick's fields came trotting in Oriental fashion across the meadow. His eyes were only human, and he did not see the tawny shape in the tall grass. If any one had told him that a full-grown tigress could have crept to such a place and still remained invisible, he would have laughed. He was going to his thatched hut, to brown wife and babies, and it was no wonder that he trotted swiftly. The muscles of the great cat bunched, and now the whipping tail began to have a little vertical motion that is the final warning of a spring.

The man was already in leaping range; but the tiger had learned, in many experiences, always to make sure. Still she crouched—a single instant in which the trotting native came two paces nearer. Then the man drew up with a gasp of fright.

For just as the clear outlines of an object that has long been concealed in a maze of light and shadow will often leap, with sudden vividness, to the eyes, the native suddenly perceived the tiger.

He caught the whole dread picture—the crouching form, the terrible blue lights of the eyes, the whipping tail. The gasp he uttered from his closing throat seemed to act like the fall of a firing-pin against a shell on the bunched muscles of the animal; and she left her covert in a streak of tawny light.

But Nahara's leaps had never been quite accurate since she had been wounded by Warwick's bullet, months before. They were usually straight enough for the general purposes of hunting, but they missed by a long way the "theoretical centre of impact" of which artillery officers speak. Her lame paw always seemed to disturb her balance. By remembering it, she could usually partly overcome the disadvantage; but to-day, in the madness of her hunger, she had been unable to remember anything except the terrible rapture of killing. This circumstance alone, however, would not have saved the native's life. Even though her fangs missed his throat, the power of the blow and her rending talons would have certainly snatched away his life as a storm snatches a leaf. But there was one other determining factor. The Burman had seen the tiger just before she leaped; and although there had been no time for conscious thought, his guardian reflexes had flung him to one side in a single frenzied effort to miss the full force of the spring.

The result of both these things was that he received only an awkward, sprawling blow from the animal's shoulder. Of course he was hurled to the ground; for no human body in the world is built to withstand the ton or so of shocking power of a three-hundred-pound cat leaping through the air. The tigress sprawled down also, and because she lighted on her wounded paw, she

squealed with pain. It was possibly three seconds before she had forgotten the stabbing pain in her paw and had gathered herself to spring on the unconscious form of the native. And that three seconds gave Warwick Sahib, sitting at the window of his study, an opportunity to seize his rifle and fire.

Warwick knew tigers, and he had kept the rifle always ready for just such a need as this. The distance was nearly five hundred yards, and the bullet went wide of its mark. Nevertheless, it saved the native's life. The great cat remembered this same far-off explosion from another day, in a dry creek-bed of months before, and the sing of the bullet was a remembered thing, too. Although it would speedily return to her, her courage fled and she turned and faced into the bamboos.

In an instant, Warwick was on his great veranda, calling his beaters. Gunga Singhai, his faithful gun-carrier, slipped shells into the magazine of his master's high-calibered close-range tiger-rifle. "The elephant, Sahib?" he asked swiftly.

"Nay, this will be on foot. Make the beaters circle about the fringe of bamboos. Thou and I will cross the eastern fields and shoot at her as she breaks through."

But there was really no time to plan a complete campaign. Even now, the first gray of twilight was blurring the sharp outlines of the jungle, and the soft jungle night was hovering, ready to descend. Warwick's plan was to cut through to a certain little creek that flowed into the river and with Singhai to continue on to the edge of the bamboos that overlooked a wide field. The beaters would prevent the tigress from turning back beyond the village, and it was at least possible that he would get a shot at her as she burst from the jungle and crossed the field to the heavier thickets beyond.

"Warwick Sahib walks into the teeth of his enemy," Khusru, the hunter, told a little group that watched from the village gate. "Nahara will collect her debts."

A little brown boy shivered at his words and wondered if the beaters would turn and kick him, as they had always done before, if he should attempt to follow them. It was the tiger-hunt, in view of his own village, and he sat down, tremulous with rapture, in the grass to watch. It was almost as if his dream—that he himself should be a hunter of tigers—was coming true. He wondered why the beaters seemed to move so slowly and with so little heart.

He would have known if he could have looked into their eyes. Each black pupil was framed with white. Human hearts grow shaken and bloodless from such sights as this they had just seen, and only the heart of a jungle creature —the heart of the eagle that the jungle gods, by some unheard-of fortune, had put in the breast of Little Shikara—could prevail against them. Besides,

the superstitious Burmans thought that Warwick was walking straight to death—that the time had come for Nahara to collect her debts.

3: Warwick Sahib and Singhai disappeared at once into the fringe of jungle, and silence immediately fell upon them. The cries of the beaters at once seemed curiously dim. It was as if no sound could live in the great silences under the arching trees. Soon it was as if they were alone.

They walked side by side, Warwick with his rifle held ready. He had no false ideas in regard to this tiger-hunt. He knew that his prey was desperate with hunger, that she had many old debts to pay, and that she would charge on sight.

The self-rage that is felt on missing some particularly fortunate chance is not confined to human beings alone. There is an old saying in the forest that a feline that has missed his stroke is like a jackal in dog-days—and that means that it is not safe to be anywhere in the region with him. He simply goes rabid and is quite likely to leap at the first living thing that stirs. Warwick knew that Nahara had just been cheated out of her kill and someone in the jungle would pay for it.

The gaudy birds that looked down from the tree-branches could scarcely recognize this prematurely gray man as a hunter. He walked rather quietly, yet with no conscious effort toward stealth. The rifle rested easily in his arms, his gray eyes were quiet and thoughtful as always. Singularly, his splendid features were quite in repose. The Burman, however, had more of the outer signs of alertness; and yet there was none of the blind terror upon him that marked the beaters.

"Where are the men?" Warwick asked quietly. "It is strange that we do not hear them shouting."

"They are afraid, Sahib," Singhai replied. "The forest pigs have left us to do our own hunting."

Warwick corrected him with a smile. "Forest pigs are brave enough," he answered. "They are sheep—just sheep—sheep of the plains."

The broad trail divided, like a three-tined candlestick, into narrow trails. Warwick halted beside the centre of the three that led to the creek they were obliged to cross. Just for an instant he stood watching, gazing into the deep-blue dusk of the deeper jungle. Twilight was falling softly. The trails soon vanished into shadow—patches of deep gloom, relieved here and there by a bright leaf that reflected the last twilight rays. A living creature coughed and rustled away in the thickets beside him.

"There is little use of going on," he said. "It is growing too dark. But there will be killings before the dawn if we don't get her first."

The servant stood still, waiting. It was not his place to advise his master.

"If we leave her, she'll come again before the dawn. Many of the herders

haven't returned—she'll get one of them sure. At least we may cross the creek and get a view of the great fields. She is certain to cross them if she has heard the beaters."

In utter silence they went on. One hundred yards farther they came to the creek, and both strode in together to ford.

The water was only knee-deep, but Warwick's boots sank three inches in the mud of the bottom. And at that instant the gods of the jungle, always waiting with drawn scimitar for the unsuspecting, turned against them.

Singhai suddenly splashed down into the water, on his hands and knees. He did not cry out. If he made any sound at all, it was just a shivering gasp that the splash of water wholly obscured. But the thing that brought home the truth to Warwick was the pain that flashed, vivid as lightning, across his dark face; and the horror of death that left its shadow. Something churned and writhed in the mud; and then Warwick fired.

Both of them had forgotten Mugger, the crocodile, that so loves to wait in the mud of a ford. He had seized Singhai's foot, and had already snatched him down into the water when Warwick fired. No living flesh can withstand the terrible, rending shock of a high-powered sporting rifle at close range. Mugger had plates of armour, but even these could not have availed against it if he had been exposed to the fire. As it was, several inches of water stood between, a more effective armour than a two-inch steel plate on a battleship. Of course the shock carried through, a smashing blow that caused the reptile to release his hold on Singhai's leg; but before the native could get to his feet he had struck again. The next instant both men were fighting for their lives.

They fought with their hands, and Warwick fought with his rifle, and the native slashed again and again with the long knife that he carried at his belt. To a casual glance, a crocodile is wholly incapable of quick action. These two found him a slashing, darting, wolf-like thing, lunging with astounding speed through the muddied water, knocking them from their feet and striking at them as they fell.

The reptile was only half grown, but in the water they had none of the usual advantages that man has over the beasts with which he does battle. Warwick could not find a target for his rifle. But even human bodies, usually so weak, find themselves possessed of an amazing reserve strength and agility in the moment of need. These men realized perfectly that their lives were the stakes for which they fought, and they gave every ounce of strength and energy they had. Their aim was to hold the mugger off until they could reach the shore.

At last, by a lucky stroke, Singhai's knife blinded one of the lurid reptile eyes. He was prone in the water when he administered it, and it went home just as the savage teeth were snapping at his throat. For an instant the great reptile flopped in an impotent half-circle, partly reared out of the water. It

gave Warwick a chance to shoot, a single instant in which the rifle seemed to whirl about in his arms, drive to his shoulder, and blaze in the deepening twilight. And the shot went true. It pierced the mugger from beneath, tearing upward through the brain. And then the agitated waters of the ford slowly grew quiet.

The last echo of the report was dying when Singhai stretched his bleeding arms about Warwick's body, caught up the rifle and dragged them forty feet up on the shore. It was an effort that cost the last of his strength. And as the stars popped out of the sky, one by one, through the gray of dusk, the two men lay silent, side by side, on the grassy bank.

Warwick was the first to regain consciousness. At first he didn't understand the lashing pain in his wrists, the strange numbness in one of his legs, the darkness with the great white Indian stars shining through. Then he remembered. And he tried to stretch his arm to the prone form beside him.

The attempt was an absolute failure. The cool brain dispatched the message, it flew along the telegraph-wires of the nerves, but the muscles refused to react. He remembered that the teeth of the mugger had met in one of the muscles of his upper arm, but before unconsciousness had come upon him he had been able to lift the gun to shoot. Possibly infection from the bite had in some manner temporarily paralyzed the arm. He turned, wracked with pain, on his side and lifted his left arm. In doing so his hand crossed before his eyes—and then he smiled wanly in the darkness.

It was quite like Warwick, sportsman and English gentleman, to smile at a time like this. Even in the gray darkness of the jungle night he could see the hand quite plainly. It no longer looked slim and white. And he remembered that the mugger had caught his fingers in one of its last rushes.

He paused only for one glance at the mutilated member. He knew that his first work was to see how Singhai had fared. In that glance he was boundlessly relieved to see that the hand could unquestionably be saved. The fingers were torn, yet their bones did not seem to be severed. Temporarily at least, however, the hand was utterly useless. The fingers felt strange and detached.

He reached out to the still form beside him, touching the dark skin first with his fingers, and then, because they had ceased to function, with the flesh of his wrist. He expected to find it cold. Singhai was alive, however, and his warm blood beat close to the dark skin.

But he was deeply unconscious, and it was possible that one foot was hopelessly mutilated.

For a moment Warwick lay quite still, looking his situation squarely in the face. He did not believe that either he or his attendant was mortally or even very seriously hurt. True, one of his arms had suffered paralysis, but there was no reason for thinking it had been permanently injured. His hand

would be badly scarred, but soon as good as ever. The real question that faced them was that of getting back to the bungalow.

Walking was out of the question. His whole body was bruised and lacerated, and he was already dangerously weak from loss of blood. It would take all his energy, these first few hours, to keep his consciousness. Besides, it was perfectly obvious that Singhai could not walk. And English gentlemen do not desert their servants at a time like this. The real mystery lay in the fact that the beaters had not already found and rescued them.

He wore a watch with luminous dial on his left wrist, and he managed to get it before his eyes. And then understanding came to him. A full hour had passed since he and his servant had fought the mugger in the ford. And the utter silence of early night had come down over the jungle.

There was only one thing to believe. The beaters had evidently heard him shoot, sought in vain for him in the thickets, possibly passed within a few hundred feet of him, and because he had been unconscious he had not heard them or called to them, and now they had given him up for lost. He remembered with bitterness how all of them had been sure that an encounter with Nahara would cost him his life, and would thus be all the more quick to believe he had died in her talons. Nahara had her mate and her own lameness to avenge, they had said, attributing in their superstition human emotions to the brute natures of animals. It would have been quite useless for Warwick to attempt to tell them that the male tiger, in the mind of his wicked mate, was no longer even a memory, and that premeditated vengeance is an emotion almost unknown in the animal world. Without leaders or encouragement, and terribly frightened by the scene they had beheld before the village, they had quickly given up any attempt to find his body. There had been none among them coolheaded enough to reason out which trail he had likely taken, and thus look for him by the ford. Likely they were already huddled in their thatched huts, waiting till daylight.

Then he called in the darkness. A heavy body brushed through the creepers, and stepping falsely, broke a twig. He thought at first that it might be one of the villagers, coming to look for him. But at once the step was silenced.

Warwick had a disturbing thought that the creature that had broken the twig had not gone away, but was crouching down, in a curious manner, in the deep shadows. Nahara had returned to her hunting.

4: "Some time I, too, will be a hunter of tigers," Little Shikara told his mother when the beaters began to circle through the bamboos. "To carry a gun beside Warwick Sahib—and to be honoured in the circle under the tree!"

But his mother hardly listened. She was quivering with fright. She had

seen the last part of the drama in front of the village; and she was too frightened even to notice the curious imperturbability of her little son. But there was no orderly retreat after Little Shikara had heard the two reports of the rifle. At first there were only the shouts of the beaters, singularly high-pitched, much running back and forth in the shadows, and then a pell-mell scurry to the shelter of the villages.

For a few minutes there was wild excitement at the village gates. Warwick Sahib was dead, they said—they had heard the shots and run to the place of firing, and beat up and down through the bamboos; and Warwick Sahib had surely been killed and carried off by the tigress. This dreadful story told, most of the villagers went to hide at once in their huts; only a little circle of the bravest men hovered at the gate. They watched with drawn faces the growing darkness.

But there was one among them who was not yet a man grown; a boy so small that he could hover, unnoticed, in the very smallest of the terrible shadow-patches. He was Little Shikara, and he was shocked to the very depths of his worshipping heart. For Warwick had been his hero, the greatest man of all time, and he felt himself burning with indignation that the beaters should return so soon. And it was a curious fact that he had not as yet been infected with the contagion of terror that was being passed from man to man among the villagers. Perhaps his indignation was too absorbing an emotion to leave room for terror, and perhaps, far down in his childish spirit, he was made of different stuff. He was a child of the jungle, and perhaps he had shared of that great imperturbability and impassiveness that is the eternal trait of the wildernesses.

He went up to one of the younger beaters who had told and retold a story of catching a glimpse of Nahara in the thickets until no one was left to tell it to. He was standing silent, and Little Shikara thought it possible that he might reach his ears.

"Give ear, Puran," he pleaded. "Didst thou look for his body beside the ford over Tarai stream?"

"Nay, little one—though I passed within one hundred paces."

"Dost thou not know that he and Singhai would of a certainty cross at the ford to reach the fringe of jungle from which he might watch the eastern field? Some of you looked on the trail beside the ford, but none looked at the ford itself. And the sound of the rifle seemed to come from thence."

"But why did he not call out?"

"Dead men could not call, but at least ye might have frightened Nahara from the body. But perhaps he is wounded, unable to speak, and lies there still——"

But Puran had found another listener for his story, and speedily forgot the boy. He hurried over to another of the villagers, Khusru the hunter.

"Did no one look by the ford?" he asked, almost sobbing. "For that is the place he had gone."

The native's eyes seemed to light. "*Hai*, little one, thou hast thought of what thy elders had forgotten. There is level land there, and clear. And I shall go at the first ray of dawn——"

"But not to-night, Khusru——?"

"Nay, little sinner! Wouldst thou have me torn to pieces?"

Lastly Little Shikara went to his own father, and they had a moment's talk at the outskirts of the throng. But the answer was nay—just the same. Even his brave father would not go to look for the body until daylight came. The boy felt his skin prickling all over.

"But perhaps he is only wounded—and left to die. If I go and return with word that he is there, wilt thou take others and go out and bring him in?"

"*Thou* goest!" His father broke forth in a great roar of laughter. "Why, thou little hawk! One would think that thou wert a hunter of tigers thyself!"

Little Shikara blushed beneath the laughter. For he was a very boyish little boy in most ways. But it seemed to him that his sturdy young heart was about to break open from bitterness. All of them agreed that Warwick Sahib, perhaps wounded and dying, might be lying by the ford, but none of them would venture forth to see. Unknowing, he was beholding the expression of a certain age-old trait of human nature. Men do not fight ably in the dark. They need their eyes, and they particularly require a definite object to give them determination. If these villagers knew for certain that the Protector of the Poor lay wounded or even dead beside the ford, they would have rallied bravely, encouraged one another with words and oaths, and gone forth to rescue him; but they wholly lacked the courage to venture again into the jungle on any such blind quest as Little Shikara suggested.

But the boy's father should not have laughed. He should have remembered the few past occasions when his straight little son had gone into the jungle alone; and that remembrance should have silenced him. The difficulty lay in the fact that he supposed his boy and he were of the same flesh, and that Little Shikara shared his own great dread of the night-curtained jungle. In this he was very badly mistaken. Little Shikara had an inborn understanding and love of the jungle; and except for such material dangers as that of Nahara, he was not afraid of it at all. He had no superstitions in regard to it. Perhaps he was too young. But the main thing that the laugh did was to set off, as a match sets off powder, a whole heartful of unexploded indignation in Shikara's breast. These villagers not only had deserted their patron and protector, but also they had laughed at the thought of rescue! His own father had laughed at him.

Little Shikara silently left the circle of villagers and turned into the darkness.

At once the jungle silence closed around him. He hadn't dreamed that the noise of the villagers would die so quickly. Although he could still see the flame of the fire at the village gate behind him, it was almost as if he had at once dropped off into another world. Great flowers poured perfume down upon him, and at seemingly a great distance he heard the faint murmur of the wind.

At first, deep down in his heart, he had really not intended to go all the way. He had expected to steal clear to the outer edge of the firelight; and then stand listening to the darkness for such impressions as the jungle would choose to give him. But there had been no threshold, no interlude of preparation. The jungle in all its mystery had folded about him at once.

He trotted softly down the elephant trail, a dim, fleet shadow that even the keen eyes of Nahara could scarcely have seen. At first he was too happy to be afraid. He was always happy when the jungle closed round him. Besides, if Nahara had killed, she would be full-fed by now and not to be feared. Little Shikara hastened on, trembling all over with a joyous sort of excitement.

If a single bird had flapped its wings in the branches, if one little rodent had stirred in the underbrush, Little Shikara would likely have turned back. But the jungle-gods, knowing their son, stilled all the forest voices. He crept on, still looking now and again over his shoulder to see the village fire. It still made a bright yellow triangle in the dusk behind him. He didn't stop to think that he was doing a thing most grown natives and many white men would not have dared to do—to follow a jungle trail unarmed at night. If he had stopped to think at all he simply would have been unable to go on. He was only following his instincts, voices that such forces as maturity and grown-up intelligence and self-consciousness obscure in older men—and the terror of the jungle could not touch him. He went straight to do what service he could for the white sahib that was one of his lesser gods.

Time after time he halted, but always he pushed on a few more feet. Now he was over halfway to the ford, clear to the forks in the trail. And then he turned about with a little gasp of fear.

The light from the village had gone out. The thick foliage of the jungle had come between.

He was really frightened now. It wasn't that he was afraid he couldn't get back. The trail was broad and hard and quite gray in the moonlight. But those far-off beams of light had been a solace to his spirit, a reminder that he had not yet broken all ties with the village. He halted, intending to turn back.

Then a thrill began at his scalp and went clear to his bare toes. Faint through the jungle silences he heard Warwick Sahib calling to his faithless beaters. The voice had an unmistakable quality of distress.

Certain of the villagers—a very few of them—said afterward that Little Shikara continued on because he was afraid to go back. They said that he looked upon the Heaven-born sahib as a source of all power, in whose protection no harm could befall him, and he sped toward him because the distance was shorter than back to the haven of fire at the village. But those who could look deeper into Little Shikara's soul knew different. In some degree at least he hastened on down that jungle trail of peril because he knew that his idol was in distress, and by laws that went deep he knew he must go to his aid.

5: The first few minutes after Warwick had heard a living step in the thickets he spent in trying to reload his rifle. He carried other cartridges in the right-hand trousers pocket, but after a few minutes of futile effort it became perfectly evident that he was not able to reach them. His right arm was useless, and the fingers of his left, lacerated by the mugger's bite, refused to take hold.

He had, however, three of the five shells the rifle held still in his gun. The single question that remained was whether or not they would be of use to him.

The rifle lay half under him, its stock protruding from beneath his body. With the elbow of his left arm he was able to work it out. Considering the difficulties under which he worked, he made amazingly few false motions; and yet he worked with swiftness. Warwick was a man who had been schooled and trained by many dangers; he had learned to face them with open eyes and steady hands, to judge with unclouded thought the exact percentage of his chances. He knew now that he must work swiftly. The shape in the shadow was not going to wait all night.

But at that moment the hope of preserving his life that he had clung to until now broke like a bubble in the sunlight. He could not lift the gun to swing and aim it at a shape in the darkness. With his mutilated hands he could not cock the strong-springed hammer. And if he could do both these things with his fumbling, bleeding, lacerated fingers, his right hand could not be made to pull the trigger. Warwick Sahib knew at last just where he stood. Yet if human sight could have penetrated that dusk, it would have beheld no change of expression in the lean face.

An English gentleman lay at the frontier of death. But that occasioned neither fawning nor a loss of his rigid self-control.

Two things remained, however, that he might do. One was to call and continue to call, as long as life lasted in his body. He knew perfectly that more than once in the history of India a tiger had been kept at a distance, at least for a short period of time, by shouts alone. In that interlude, perhaps help might come from the village. The second thing was almost as impossible

as raising and firing the rifle; but by the luck of the gods he might achieve it. He wanted to find Singhai's knife and hold it compressed in his palm.

It wasn't that he had any vain hopes of repelling the tiger's attack with a single knife-blade that would be practically impossible for his mutilated hand to hold. Nahara had five or so knife-blades in every paw and a whole set of them in her mouth. She could stand on four legs and fight, and Warwick could not lift himself on one elbow and yet wield the blade. But there were other things to be done with blades, even held loosely in the palm, at a time like this.

He knew rather too much of the way of tigers. They do not always kill swiftly. It is the tiger way to tease, long moments, with half-bared talons; to let the prey crawl away a few feet for the rapture of leaping at it again; to fondle with an exquisite cruelty for moments that seem endless to its prey. A knife, on the other hand, kills quickly. Warwick much preferred the latter death.

And even as he called, again and again, he began to feel about in the grass with his lacerated hand for the hilt of the knife. Nahara was steadily stealing toward him through the shadows.

The great tigress was at the height of her hunting madness. The earlier adventure of the evening when she had missed her stroke, the stir and tumult of the beaters in the wood, her many days of hunger, had all combined to intensify her passion. And finally there had come the knowledge, in subtle ways, that two of her own kind of game were lying wounded and helpless beside the ford.

But even the royal tiger never forgets some small measure of its caution. She did not charge at once. The game looked so easy that it was in some way suggestive of a trap. She crept forward, a few feet at a time. The wild blood began to leap through the great veins. The hair went stiff on the neck muscles.

But Warwick shouted; and the sound for an instant appalled her. She lurked in the shadows. And then, as she made a false step, Warwick heard her for the first time.

Again she crept forward, to pause when Warwick raised his voice the second time. The man knew enough to call at intervals rather than continuously. A long, continued outcry would very likely stretch the tiger's nerves to a breaking point and hurl her into a frenzy that would probably result in a death-dealing charge. Every few seconds he called again. In the intervals between the tiger crept forward. Her excitement grew upon her. She crouched lower. Her sinewy tail had whipped softly at first; now it was lashing almost to her sides. And finally it began to have a slight vertical movement that Warwick, fortunately for his spirit, could not see.

Then the little light that the moon poured down was suddenly reflected in

Nahara's eyes. All at once they burned out of the dusk; two blue-green circles of fire fifty feet distant in the darkness. At that Warwick gasped—for the first time. In another moment the great cat would be in range—and he had not yet found the knife. Nothing remained to believe but that it was lost in the mud of the ford, fifty feet distant, and that the last dread avenue of escape was cut off.

But at that instant the gasp gave way to a whispered oath of wonder. Some living creature was running lightly down the trail toward him—soft, light feet that came with amazing swiftness. For once in his life Warwick did not know where he stood. For once he was the chief figure of a situation he did not entirely understand. He tried to probe into the darkness with his tired eyes.

"Here I am!" he called. The tiger, starting to creep forward once more, halted at the voice. A small straight figure sped like an arrow out of the thickets and halted at his side.

It was such an astounding appearance as for an instant completely paralyzes the mental faculties. Warwick's first emotion was simply a great and hopeless astonishment. Long inured to the mystery of the jungle, he thought he had passed the point where any earthly happening could actually bewilder him. But in spite of it, in spite of the fire-eyed peril in the darkness, he was quite himself when he spoke. The voice that came out of the silence was wholly steady—a kindly, almost amused voice of one who knows life as it is and who has mastered his own destiny.

"Who in the world?" he asked in the vernacular.

"It is I—Little Shikara," a tremulous voice answered. Except for the tremor he could not keep from his tone, he spoke as one man to another.

Warwick knew at once that Little Shikara was not yet aware of the presence of the tiger fifty feet distant in the shadows. But he knew nothing else. The whole situation was beyond his ken.

But his instincts were manly and true. "Then run speedily, little one," he whispered, "back to the village. There is danger here in the dark."

Little Shikara tried to speak, and he swallowed painfully. A lump had come in his throat that at first would not let him talk. "Nay, Protector of the Poor!" he answered. "I—I came alone. And I—I am thy servant."

Warwick's heart bounded. Not since his youth had left him to a gray world had his strong heart leaped in just this way before. "Merciful God!" he whispered in English. "Has a child come to save me?" Then he whipped again into the vernacular and spoke swiftly; for no further seconds were to be wasted. "Little Shikara, have you ever fired a gun?"

"No, Sahib——"

"Then lift it up and rest it across my body. Thou knowest how it is held——"

Little Shikara didn't know exactly, but he rested the gun on Warwick's body; and he had seen enough target practice to crook his finger about the trigger. And together, the strangest pair of huntsmen that the Indian stars ever looked down upon, they waited.

"It is Nahara," Warwick explained softly. For he had decided to be frank with Little Shikara, trusting all to the courage of a child. "It all depends on thee. Pull back the hammer with thy thumb."

Little Shikara obeyed. He drew it back until it clicked, and did not, as Warwick had feared, let it slip through his fingers back against the breach. "Yes, Sahib," he whispered breathlessly. His little brave heart seemed about to explode in his breast. But it was the test, and he knew he must not waver in the sahib's eyes.

"It is Nahara, and thou art a man," Warwick said again. "And now thou must wait until thou seest her eyes."

So they strained into the darkness; and in an instant more they saw again the two circles of greenish, smouldering fire. They were quite near now —Nahara was almost in leaping range.

"Thou wilt look through the little hole at the rear and then along the barrel," Warwick ordered swiftly, "and thou must see the two eyes along the little notch in front."

"I see, Sahib—and between the eyes," came the same breathless whisper. The little brown body held quite still. Warwick could not even feel it trembling against his own. For the moment, by virtue of some strange prank of Shiv, the jungle-gods were giving their own strength to this little brown son of theirs beside the ford.

"Thou wilt not jerk or move?"

"Nay, Sahib." And he spoke true. The world might break to pieces or blink out, but he would not throw off his aim by any terror motions. They could see the tiger's outline now—the lithe, low-hung body, the tail that twitched up and down.

"Then pull the trigger," Warwick whispered.

The whole jungle world rocked and trembled from the violence of the report.

When the villagers, aroused by the roar of the rifle and led by Khusru and Puran and Little Shikara's father, rushed down with their firebrands to the ford, their first thought was that they had come only to the presence of the dead. Three human beings lay very still beside the stream, and fifty feet in the shadows something else, that obviously was *not* a human being, lay very still, too. But they were not to have any such horror story to tell their wives. Only one of the three by the ford, Singhai, the gun-bearer, was even really unconscious; Little Shikara, the rifle still held lovingly in his arms, had gone into a half-faint from fear and nervous exhaustion, and Warwick Sahib had

merely closed his eyes to the darting light of the firebrands. The only death that had occurred was that of Nahara the tigress—and she had a neat hole bored completely through her neck. To all evidence, she had never stirred after Little Shikara's bullet had gone home.

After much confusion and shouting and falling over one another, and gazing at Little Shikara as if he were some new kind of a ghost, the villagers got a stretcher each for Singhai and the Protector of the Poor. And when they got them well loaded into them, and Little Shikara had quite come to himself and was standing with some bewilderment in a circle of staring townspeople, a clear, commanding voice ordered that they all be silent. Warwick Sahib was going to make what was the nearest approach to a speech that he had made since various of his friends had decoyed him to a dinner in London some years before.

The words that he said, the short vernacular words that have a way of coming straight to the point, established Little Shikara as a legend through all that corner of British India. It was Little Shikara who had come alone through the jungle, said he; it was Little Shikara's shining eyes that had gazed along the barrel, and it was his own brown finger that had pulled the trigger. Thus, said Warwick, he would get the bounty that the British Government offered—British rupees that to a child's eyes would be past counting. Thus in time, with Warwick's influence, his would be a great voice through all of India. For small as he was, and not yet grown, he was of the true breed.

After the shouting was done, Warwick turned to Little Shikara to see how he thought upon all these things. "Thou shalt have training for the army, little one, where thy good nerve will be of use, and thou shalt be a native officer, along with the sons of princes. I, myself, will see to it, for I do not hold my life so cheap that I will forget the thing that thou hast done tonight."

And he meant what he said. The villagers stood still when they saw his earnest face. "And what, little hawk, wilt thou have more?" he asked.

Little Shikara trembled and raised his eyes. "Only sometimes to ride with thee, in thy *howdah*, as thy servant, when thou again seekest the tiger."

The whole circle laughed at this. They were just human, after all. Their firebrands were held high, and gleamed on Little Shikara's dusky face, and made a lustre in his dark eyes. The circle, roaring with laughter, did not hear the sahib's reply, but they did see him nod his head.

"I would not dare go without thee now," Warwick told him.

And thus Little Shikara's dreams came true—to be known through many villages as a hunter of tigers, and a brave follower and comrade of the forest trails. And thus he came into his own—in those far-off glades of Burma, in the jungles of the Manipur.

1922: *from Cosmopolitan Magazine*

SNAKE DOCTOR

by Irvin S. Cobb, who has been honored as one of America's most beloved humorists. Born and reared in Paducah, Kentucky, Mr. Cobb's formal education ended with the first year of high school. After a series of odd jobs which included delivering circulars, driving an ice wagon, and drawing cartoons, he found himself at sixteen a cub reporter on the local daily. At nineteen he was for a short time its managing editor—the youngest managing editor of a daily paper in the country. From that time on, till his death in 1944, Mr. Cobb was engaged in writing of one form or another. He wrote special articles, humorous skits, essays, fiction, columns for magazines and newspapers, numerous playlets, several plays, movie scripts, an autobiography—a total of some sixty-odd published books. Along with these pursuits he did lecture work, war correspondence, considerable traveling, and at the age of sixty took up acting for the movies.

In the North they call them Devil's darning needles. But in the South they are snake doctors, and for a reason. These harmless and decorative dragon flies with their slim, arrow-like bodies, their quick darting flight and their filmy wings, as though the arrows had been flecked with bits of drawn lace, are clothed down there with a curious fetish. When a cotton-mouth is sick —and if his feelings match his disposition he must be sick most of the time— the snake doctor comes hurrying to him with the medication for what ails him. Perhaps seventy-five or a hundred years ago some slave newly in from Africa saw a cotton-mouth moccasin sunning its flat, heart-shaped head on top of the yellow creek water, and along the creek came flashing one of these swift creatures seeking a perch upon which to leave its eggs, and the black man saw it suddenly check and hover and stand at poise in the air an inch above the snake's still head, and from that figured this strange bug was a voodoo bug, ministering to the ailing reptile. In such a matter any man's theory is as good as the next one's. The provable thing is that a good many

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of the whites and more than a good many of the Negroes believe in the fable for a fact; and nearly all of them, regardless of colour, know the libelled insect as snake doctor.

Now, one of the men I have intent to write about here was known as Snake Doctor, too; and for this, also, there were reasons. To begin with, he was very long and thin, a mere rack of bones held together under the casing of a taut yellow skin; and he had popped, staring eyes, and was amazingly fast in his bodily movements. See him slipping through the willows, so furtive and quick and diffident, with his inadequately small head, his sloped shoulders, his erratic side-steppings this way or that, and inevitably you were reminded thereby of his namesake. To top the analogy, he lived right among the moccasins, taking no harm from them and having no fear of them, seemingly.

Along Cashier Creek, where they throve in a wicked abundance, was his regular ranging ground. His cabin stood in the bottoms near a place notorious for its snakes. They were his friends, so to speak. He caught them and with his bare hands he handled them as a butcher might handle links of sausage. He sold them, once in a while, to naturalists or showmen or zoölogical collectors; there was a taxidermist in Memphis who was an occasional customer of his. In the season he rendered down their soft fat and drew it off in bottles and retailed it; snake oil being held a sovereign remedy for rheumatism.

By such traffickings he was locally reputed to have made large sums of money. But he rarely spent any of this money; so he went by the name of miser, also. Well, in a way of speaking, he was a miser; zealously he coveted what he got and kept it hidden away in the chinking of his log shack. But he was nowhere near so well-off as the community gave him credit for being. The snake business is a confined and an uncertain business and restricted, moreover, to its special markets. A dealer's stock in trade may be plentiful, as in this case, but his patrons must be sought. To be exact, Snake Doctor had ninety-seven dollars in his cache.

But swearing to the truth of this on a stack of Bibles a mile high wouldn't have made the people in the Cashier Creek country have it so. Popular opinion insisted on multiplying his means and then adding noughts. Nor could you, by any argument, have won over his neighbours, white or black, to a fair estimate of the man's real self, which was that here merely was a poor, shy, lonely eccentric touched in the head by hot suns and perhaps by spells of recurrent swamp fevers.

They had contempt for him, but mixed in with the contempt was fear. To them he was to be shunned as one having commerce on familiar footing with the most loathly and the most hated of all the creatures that crawl. There was a solitary exception to the current rule of prejudice; a single indi-

vidual among them who had a human compassion for him and a measure of understanding and right appraisal of him. This individual, curiously enough, was a woman. She was a minority of one. We'll come to her presently. The rest had forgotten his proper name or else had never heard it. By their majority voice he was Ole Snake Doctor. They knew he was familiar with the ways of the cotton-mouth; they half believed he spoke its language.

In this particular region ordinary folks believed many things that weren't so. Superstition, sprouting out of ignorance, had twisted honest nature into a myriad of perverted and detractive shapes. The innocent little blue-streaked lizard was a "scorpyun" and its sting killed. A porous white stone found in the bellies of rutting deer was the only known cure for a mad dog's bite; clap it on the wound and it clung fast like a leech and sucked the poison out. You never saw many jay-birds in the woods between dinner time and dusk on a Friday because then nearly all the jay-birds had gone below to tell the news of a malicious world to their master, the Devil. You rarely could hit a rain crow with a rifle bullet because this slim, brown, nervous bird enjoyed the special protection of old Nick. If a snapping-turtle closed his jaws down on your flesh he wouldn't let go till it thundered. A breath of warm air blowing across your path on a cool night in the woods meant a "witch-hag" had passed that way.

Or take snakes: the Prophet of Old put the curse on them forever after when in his story of the Garden he typified evil as a serpent; mankind has been enlarging the slander ever since. Moreover, in these parts, Caucasian ingenuity as regards snakes and their ways had overlaid a deep embroidery of ill repute upon an already rich background of African folklore. There was the hoop snake, which is mischievous and very deadly, and wears a deadly horn in its head, and there was the joint snake, which is a freak: both fabulous but both accepted as verities. All well-meaning snakes lay under the scandalous ban. Milk snakes, garter snakes, chicken snakes, puff snakes, blue racers and coachwhips were to be destroyed on sight; for their licking, forked tongues were "stingers" and dripped venom. If bitten by any snake your hope was first to drink all the raw whiskey you could get hold of. Or if within ten minutes after being bitten you clamped upon the wound the still-quivering halves of a young chicken which, while alive, had been split open with a hatchet or a knife, there yet was a chance for you. Lacking either of these cures or both of them, you must expire in torment. The bitten part would swell enormously; the poison, spreading and magnifying in your blood, would rack you with hideous pains; then swiftly it would reach your heart and you were gone.

Every sort of snake was tricky and guileful but the moccasin of the low grounds the most so of all. Kill a moccasin and spare its mate, and the mate would track you for miles, set on vengeance. It was the habit of the moccasin

when meat was scarce to lie beneath the yonkerpads—pond lilies, a Northerner would call them—with its head shoved up among the broad green leaves and its mouth stretched wide and gaping, a living lure for such luckless birds and bees as mistook the snare of the parted jaws with their white linings for a half-opened lily bud.

It was in accord with a quite natural law that the moccasin should be singled out for these special calumnies. Of the four venomous snakes of Temperate North America he is the least personable in looks and behaviour. He lacks the grace of his upland cousin, the copperhead, and he lacks the chivalry of his more distant kinsman, the rattler, which gives the enemy due warning before it strikes. He has none of the slimness of form nor patterned beauty of that streak of fanged lightning which lives in the palmetto scrubs, the coral snake. He is mournfully coloured and miserably shaped. The tones of dull creek mud and of stale creek slime mingle in his scrofulous mottlings. There is leprosy in the pale foxings of his lips, and dropsy in his bloat amidships. Only in the eyes of the taxidermist does he redeem himself for these manifold shortcomings. Being without bright tints to fade in the mounting, his stuffed skin needs no special varnishing to make it seem authentic. It is a poor compliment, perhaps, but his only one. On all other counts and for all other qualities he is copiously defamed and folks generally are prone to believe the worst of him.

Japhet Morner did, for one. For him, swamp water a-thrive with typhoid germs, or rancid corn pones in which the active seeds of pellagra lived, or mosquitoes carrying malaria and chancre in their bills, conveyed no sense of peril. The mosquitoes were to be endured, the water was to be drunk. And biliousness was the common lot of man, anyway. At least, in this neck of the woods it was. But snakes, now, were different; any snake and all snakes whatsoever. He accepted for truth all the hard things that might be said of a snake. Certain other things he likewise believed, namely, that first, his nearest neighbour, Snake Doctor, held unwholesome communion with the cotton-mouths; that second, Snake Doctor had a treasure in money hid away in his shack—on this point he was very sure; and that third, the same Snake Doctor was entirely too fond of his, Japhet's, wife, Kizzie Morner, and she of him.

So it would appear he had a triplet of reasons for holding the other in disfavour—envy of him for his stored wealth, a gnawing suspicion from seeing in him a potential philanderer, and finally, that emotion of fearsome distrust bred out of stupidity and credulity which his kind were likely to have for any fellowman in different likeness from the run of them. That the shambling, soft-brained Snake Doctor was as sexless as a dirt clod would have been apparent to any straight-seeing observer; and it should have been as plainly visible even to this husband of hers that Kizzie Morner was a good woman

and an honest one. But the jaundiced eye sees everything as yellow, and yellow is the colour for jealousy, too, and it suited Japhet Morner's mood to brew jealousy in his mind. Brewing it steadily there was strengthening his will for the putting through of a private project which for a long time he had been conning over in his thoughts. The issue came to a head on a certain day.

It was a day in that dreary season of the year when the birds have quit singing in the daytime and the locusts have started. Summer had sagged as though from the sheer exhaustion of its own wasted fervour. The lowland woods had lost that poisonous green sprightliness which came to them in early April and lasted until the August hot spell set in. Even the weeds, which in the bottoms grew rank and high and close-set, almost, as canes in a canebreak, were wilted and weary looking. The sun had come up that morning behind clouds. In the middle of the forenoon the clouds still banked together to hide the heavens, but the heat seemed intensified and pressed the unstirring air close down to the burnt earth. As Japhet Morner came out of the timber into the famished clearing behind his house the sweat dripped from him and he panted in the close, still humidity. His two dogs trailed him, their tongues lolling. One of them brushed against his leg. He hauled off and fetched the dog a sound kick in the ribs. He was not in a happy humour.

At sun-up, after a breakfast of cold scraps left from the night before, he had gone down to Cashier Creek to get a bait of sunfish. If he were lucky he might catch a catfish for his string. He had no luck, though. The creek was shrunken; it was lower than he ever remembered seeing it. The drought had sucked up its strength. At the shallows it was no more than a thin, sluggish trickle. In deeper places there scarcely was current enough to keep twigs and dropped leaves moving on the unrippled coffee-coloured surface.

Japhet fished and fished and was rewarded with no nibbles whatsoever; seemingly, even the littlest fishes were too languid to bite at the worms he dangled for them in likely spots. He came downstream to the Big Hole, so called, where, an eighth of a mile up from Snake Doctor's shanty, the creek widened to thrice its usual breadth. Here a tight wedge of driftwood blocked the waters. Each successive freshet added flotsam to the rude dam—lost cross-ties, uprooted trees, corn stalks, chips, dead weeds, sticks. Ordinarily this lesser riffle would cover the pool so thickly that, with the top dressing of cream-coloured foam, there was created the simulation of a solid footing; a stranger might have been pardoned for believing he could walk across and keep dryshod. But now all here was clear of gently eddying débris. The consumed stream, instead of slapping against the spanning driftage, ran under it with an oozy, guzzling sound. Directly in the middle there was a busy little whirlpool, funnelling downward.

On one of the lowermost of the bared logs a cotton-mouth was twisted up,

taking his ease in the congenial fever warmth. He was a big fat one—fully two feet long and as thick through his girth as a boy's arm. From the bank edge above Japhet saw him and looked about for something to throw at him. In a section where gravel is rare and all rock formations are buried a hundred feet down under the silt, the verb "to stone" is neither used nor known. Your weapon invariably is a "chunk" and with it—a hard clod or a lump of wood or whatever it is—you "chunk" away at your target. The man found a sizable missile, a heavy, half-rotted sycamore bough, and he snapped it off to suitable length and flung it, twirling, at the motionless mark. His aim was good. The stricken snake flapped out of coil and dragged its broken loops from sight into an interlacing of naked limbs on the farther side of its log. The stick bounced hard and splashed in the pool. Japhet saw how then it swirled around and around and then, briskly, was sucked beneath the jam. With a quickened curiosity he moved downstream a rod or two and waited. Although the jam was now, so to speak, a suspension bridge, and in places stood inches clear of the water, the stick did not emerge into view below it. No drift showed there, either; the creek for a space flowed clear of rubbish. Evidently, objects caught in that small whirlpool above were carried in and under to lodge and be held fast by some submerged trap-work of soaked and sunken limbs. Probably they would stay there for months, perhaps stay there always. Turning the matter of the phenomenon over in his mind, he flung away his bait can, spun his fishing cane so that the line wrapped around it, and made off through the woods for his home, nearly a mile away. The two dogs racked along at his heels. Coming out of the woods one of them made the mistake of nudging him.

Having disciplined the scrooging dog with his boot toe he slouched out into the six-acre "dead'nin'." His puny patch of corn, for lack of the hoe, was smothering in weeds. In bare spots where the thin soil was washed so close down to the underlying clay-pan that here not even weeds would sprout, the crawfish had pushed up their conical watch towers of dried mud. Tall ash boles, girdled and dead, threw foreshortened shadows across the clearing—shadows such as gallows trees might cast. His house, of two rooms and built of unpainted up-and-down planking, squatted in the inadequate shade of a stunted chinaberry tree. A well was at one corner. There was no flower bed, no truck patch, no fencing. Across the open space, with the heat waves dancing before him, the outlines of the house seemed to waver and twist like an object seen through smoke. It stood a foot from the earth on log props. Because of seepage there were no cellars in this neighbourhood. The inevitable dogs lived under the houses and bred their fleas there, and the hogs, too, if so be a house owner had any hogs.

It was nearly noon now. His wife, in a skimpy blue frock open at the throat, was cooking the midday meal, the principal meal of the three. He

came up to the door and she, looking up from the cook stove where she was turning the strips of sizzling fat meat in the skillet, saw the look on his face. Her mouth twitched apprehensively. By the signs she knew when he was in one of his tantrums.

"Ketch anything, Jafe?" she asked, nervously.

"Ketch anything this weather?—whut'd you expect I'd ketch?" From his voice it might be figured that, vicariously, he blamed her for the failure of his expedition.

He hunkered down on the doorstep, his fishing pole still in his hands.

"That pore ol Mist' Rives come by here a spell ago mighty nigh shook to pieces with a chill," she said, after a bit.

"Oh, he come by, did he?" His tone, purposely, was disarming. "Well, did he come in?"

"Jes' fur a minute."

"Jes' fur a minute, heh? And whut did he want?"

"He wanted could I give him somethin' fur his ailmint. He jes' about could drag one sorry foot before the other—barely could make it up here from his place. I reckon he must be down in bed with the fever by now; I could tell by the touch it was risin' in him when he left here and started back home ag'in. It'll be mighty pitiful, him down flat of his back and nobody there to do nothin' fur his comfort. I give him a dos't out of our Butler's Ager Drops. I would 'a' give him a little smidgin' of licker only—only——" She left the sentence unfinished. "That pore shackly Mist' Rives, he—— *Oh*, please don't, Jafe!"

Turning, he had cut viciously at her with the long cane. She shrank back as it whipped through the air, and took the lashing stroke on her forearm, thrown up to fend off the blow.

"Mist' Rives! Mist' Rives!" He mimicked her, furiously. "How many times I got to tell you that there old hoodoo's name is Snake Doctor? Him that'd skin a louse fur its hide and taller and you callin' him 'Mist' Rives'! You'll be callin' him 'Honey' and 'Sugar' next without I learn you better. Pet names, huh? Well, I aim to learn you."

She flinched at the threat, rubbing the welt on her skin; but he made no effort to strike her again. He sat glowering, saying nothing at all as she made hurry to dish up the food and put it before him; she hoped the weight of victuals in his stomach might dull the edge of his temper. For her part, she had the wisdom to keep silent, too. She ate on her feet, serving him between bites and sups, as was the rule in this household.

After dinner he stretched himself on the floor of the inner room. But he did not sleep. He was busy with his thoughts. One thing he had seen that day, and another thing he had heard—he was adding them together, as the first sum in a squalid equation. She drew a cane-bottom chair outdoors and

sat under the chinaberry tree, fanning herself and "dipping" snuff with a peach twig which she scoured back and forth on her gums. After a little while she was driven into the kitchen. It began to rain in sharp, violent showers. The rain made the house inside no cooler; merely changed it from a bake-oven to a putrid steambox.

It was getting along toward four o'clock before Japhet emerged from the front room. He drew on his heavy knee-length boots, which he had removed before lying down, and laced them up. This done, he spoke to her for the first time since noon.

"Where's that there vi'l of licker?" he said. "Fetch it here to me."

They kept a small store of whiskey by them—all in that district did the same—for chills and possible snake bites. She brought him a pint flask nearly full and he shoved it into his hip pocket. Then immediately, as though moved by a fresh idea, he hauled it out again and put it down on the kitchen table.

"Come to think about it," he said, "I won't be needin' to tote no sperrits along with me where I'm goin'. Cotton-mouths is all down in the slashes or else along the creek, and where I'll be all this evenin' is up on Bailey's Ridge in the high ground."

He was not given to favouring her with explanations of his motives or accounts of his movements. This departure from fixed habit emboldened his wife to put a question.

"Fixin' to go shootin', Jafe?" she asked, timidly.

"I aim to gun me a chance of young squirrels 'twixt now and dusk time. I heard 'em barkin' all 'round me this mornin'. Ef they're that plenty in the low ground they'll be out thicker'n hops after the mulberries and the young hick'ry nuts up Bailey's Ridge."

He took up his single-shot rifle where it stood in a corner, and from an opened box on a shelf scooped a handful of brass shells. Then he went outside and tied up both his dogs. One was a hound, good for hunting rabbits. It was proper that he should be left behind. But the smaller dog, a black mongrel, was a trained squirrel dog. As his wife stood in the doorway, Japhet read the dumb curiosity which her face expressed.

"With the leaves ez thick ez the way they air, still huntin' is best this time o' year," he explained. "So I won't be needin' Gyp. Don't let neither ones of 'em gnaw hisself loose and follow after me. Set me up a snack of cold supper on a shelf. Likely I won't git back till its plum' nighttime—gunnin' fur them squirrels is best jes' before dark, and I'll be away off yonder at the fur end of the Ridge, three miles from here, when I git ready to start back. 'Tain't ez ef I wuz rangin' in the low ground."

He turned north through the struggling corn rows and in a minute was gone from her sight into the dripping woods. He kept on going north for

nearly a mile until he came to where a wild red mulberry tree stood in a small natural opening. Some of the overripe fruit, blackened and shrivelled, still clung to the boughs; and where there are mulberries in the summer woods, there squirrels almost certainly will likewise be. Very neatly he shot two young grays through their heads. Japhet was a master marksman. It was his only gentlemanly accomplishment. In all other respects he was just plain white trash, as one of his negro neighbours would have phrased it—behind Japhet's back. But unsuspected by any who knew him, he had a quality of mind which is denied many of his class—an imagination. It was in excellent working order this day. He now was proving that it was.

He tied the brained squirrels together and swung them, tails downward, over a strap of his suspenders. If needed, they were to be evidence in his behalf—part of his alibi. Next he sat down under a tree awhile. He sat out two brisk showers with the intervals between them. Then, getting up, he set off, keeping always to the deeper woodlands, in a swing which would bring him down Bailey's Branch, now wasted to a succession of lazy dribbles, and along the skirts of Little Cypress Slash to the sunken flats edging Cashier Creek. The arc of his swing was wide. It took him all of two hours, travelling carefully and without haste through the steamy coverts, to reach the point he aimed for.

He came to halt, cautiously and well sheltered, behind the farthermost fringes of a little jungle of haw bushes where the diminishing woods frayed out in a sort of green peninsula fifty yards or so back of Snake Doctor's cabin. This was his chosen destination, so here he squatted himself down in a nest of sodden leaves and grass to wait. It had begun to shower again, good and hard. He was drenched. No matter, though; he figured he would not have so very long to wait. As it turned out he didn't.

There was no house dog to come nosing him out and barking an alarm. That Snake Doctor owned no dog would have marked him, in this part of the land, as a person totally different from his fellows, even had there been lacking other points of variance. What Snake Doctor did own was a mare, or the ruins of one. She was housed in a log crib a few rods behind the only slightly larger log cabin of her owner. Where he stooped, Japhet could hear her stirring restlessly in her stall. He might have seen her through the cracks between the logs of her shelter except for a brush fence which bounded the small weed-grown clearing.

His plan was simple enough and yet, as he saw it, fault-proof. Feeding time was at hand; soon Snake Doctor, ailing though he was, surely would be coming out from his cabin to bait the old rack-of-bones. Japhet counted on this. He'd get him then, first pop. He'd teach him what the costs were of colleaguing with another man's lawful wedded wife, and the lesson would be the death of him. At a half crouch in his ambush, Japhet told himself that

his motive was jealousy; that he was here as a white man and an injured husband for the satisfaction of his personal honour and in the defense of his threatened threshold. By a conscious effort of his will he kept in the background of his mind the other purpose that had brought him on this errand. It had to do with money—with Snake Doctor's hoarded money.

The next step after the principal act would be to dispose of the body. That should be easy. He could carry the meagre frame over his shoulder for a mile, if need be. And he wouldn't have to carry it for a mile, either—only as far as the Big Hole; then lower the burden into the water and let it slip in under the log jam. The chunk he had killed the moccasin with had stayed under there; skinny old Snake Doctor would stay there, too. This done, he would come back here to the cabin and hunt out the hidden treasure. He figured it shouldn't take him a great while to find it; he already had a sort of notion as to its whereabouts, a strong clew to start on. Having found it he would circle back up through the woods, reëntering his field from the upper or northern side, with two squirrels flapping his flank for proof that he had been hunting on Bailey's Ridge. Suspicion never could touch him. Why should it?

He counted on the rain which was now falling to wipe out his tracks in Snake Doctor's horse lot. Anyhow, it probably would be days or weeks before any one missed the hermit and made search for him; in that time the tracks would have vanished, rain or no. It was greatly in his favour that when Snake Doctor was from home, or supposed to be, folks religiously refrained from setting foot on the premises. They mightily feared the cotton-mouths with which the recluse was reputed to consort. There was even a story that Snake Doctor kept for a watchman in his house the granddaddy of all created cotton-mouths and set this monster on guard when he stirred abroad. So he needed no locks on his doors nor bar for his single window, the legend amply protecting his belongings in his absences.

Two minutes passed, fifteen, and Japhet was up on his knees, his rifle at poise, his eyes vigilant through the tops of the weeds which fringed the ambuscade. Something or other—something quick and furtive—stirred behind him. Startled, he turned his head, saw that the disturber was a belated catbird, and looked front again. In that brief space of time the victim had come into sight. Through the rain and the slackening daylight he could see, above the ragged top of the intervening brush fence, the white patch of Snake Doctor's loppy old straw hat and below the hat the folds of a dark coat drawn over a pair of hunched narrow shoulders as the wearer of these garments came briskly toward the stable, which meant also toward him. At this distance he couldn't miss.

Nor did he. At the shot, the figure jerked backward, then went over face forward. The killer rose upright, exultation contending with tautened nerves within him. He stole up to the fence, set a foot in the tangled brushwood

with intent to climb it, and then, at what he saw, froze into a poised shape of terror, his eyes bulging, his mouth opened in a square shape, and his rifle dropping from his twitching fingers.

He had just killed Snake Doctor—killed him dead with a 32-calibre slug through the head. And here on his doorsill stood Snake Doctor, whole and sound, and staring at him! And now, Snake Doctor, dead by all rights and rules, yet living, was uttering a cry and starting out of the doorway toward him.

Japhet Morner had sucked in superstitions with his mother's milk. He believed in "ha'nts," in "witch-hags" and "sperrits," believed in "conjures" and "charms" and ghosts and hoopsnakes; believed that those under the favour of infernal forces might be killed only with a bullet molded from virgin silver. And his mistake was, he had used lead out of a brass shell.

Power of motion returned to him. He threw himself backward and whirled and ran into the deep of the darkening woods, making whimpering, whining sounds like a thrashed puppy as he went.

Terror rode him into the dense timber. Exhaustion, dizziness, the feeling that he must get under the shelter of a sound roof, must have the protection of four walls about him, brought Japhet Morner out again; this was along toward midnight. The rain had ceased; the moon was trying to come forth. A short distance southeast of his place he struck a dirt road which would lead him there. Beyond the next bend he would be in sight of home.

Around the turn he saw coming toward him a joggling light—a lantern hung on a buggy or light wagon, he figured—and heard the creak of wheels turning in the muddied softness. Nameless horrors had made a fugitive of him; the fugitive instinct still possessed him. He flattened down in a clump of bushes to hide until the traveller passed.

Moving briskly, the rig was almost opposite him when, from the other direction—the same direction he had been following—came a call:

"Hello there!—who's joggin'?"

"Whoa! Stiddy, boy!" Whoever was driving pulled up his horse, which had shied at the sudden hail. "Me—Davis Ware," he answered back. "That you, Tip Bailey?"

"Yep, hoofin' it out from the Junction, and tolerable tired, if anybody should ask you. What's bringin' you out this hour of night, Davis—somebody sick?"

"Sick nothin'! There's been hell poppin' in these bottoms to-night."

Behind the weed screen ten feet away the listener stiffened, his blood drumming in him. He knew the speakers, both neighbours of his, one of them a local leader. The foot passenger hurried up alongside the buggy; his face, inquisitive and alarmed, showed in the dim circlet of lantern light.

"What do you mean?"

"A killin'—that's what I mean. An abominable, cold-blooded killin' ef ever there wuz one."

"God! Who's been killed?"

"I'm fixin' to tell you, man. It happened jes' shortly before dusk at ole Snake Doctor's place."

"Was it him was killed?"

"Gimme time, can't you?" This Ware was one who must tell his tale his own way or not at all. "It seems like Snake Doctor's been chillin' lately. He wuz purty bad off to-day—I mean yistiddy. And so, right after supper time when the rain wuz lullin' a little, Mizz Kizzie Morner she footed it down from her place to his'n, fetchin' some physic with her and a plate of hot vittles fur him. It seems like she wuzn't feared to go there. I'd 'a' been, I'll own up, but she wuzn't. Well, purty soon after she got there it seems like he tried to git up out of his bed to go feed that old crow-bait sorrel nag of his'n. It had started in ag'in by then, pourin' down hard, and so she made him stay where he wuz. And she put on his old hat and throwed his old coat round her to keep off the wust of the wet, and she started out of the back door to do the feedin'. And no more'n she'd got outside in the lot than a shot come from the aidge of the woods right over the fence and down she went with a bullet through her brains."

"God's sake! Dead?"

"No, not dead, but same ez dead. She barely wuz breathin' here not ten minutes ago when I left her house. Old Doctor Bradshaw, he's there with her now and he says it's a miracle she's lasted this long. Well, it seems like Snake Doctor jumped up at the shot and run out to see whut had happened and there she lay a-welterin'. And him—well, he's been takin' on like all possessed ever since. I wouldn't 'a' believed he could 'a' had so much feelin' in him ef I hadn't seen him with my own eyes. It wuz him run for help, though—he did have sense enough left to do that. He found me in my tobacco patch and I dropped everything and took out fur there, and a bunch of us picked her up and toted her home on a wagon bed. She's shot in the left side of the head just over the temple; the bullet went clean through and come out on the right side."

"But who did it?"

"I'm comin' to that. 'Twuz that low-flung husband of hers done it—that's who. It seems like he must 'a' followed her down to Snake Doctor's and laid in wait fur her and felled her ez she come out. Gawd knows why onless 'twuz jes' pure pizen meanness."

"The murderin' dog! They're certain 'twas him, then?"

"Shore ez gun's iron 'twuz him. Snake Doctor ketched a quick look at him over the fence ez he darted off. And right there they found his rifle where he'd dropped it before he whirl't and run—fool thing fur him to do—and I seen

his tracks myself, in the soft ground, goin' and comin', and where he must 'a' stood when he fired. I seen 'em by lantern light after I got there—and fully half a dozen others did, too. There's a long red streak on her arm where he must 'a' been whuppin' her durin' the day."

"Hangin's a sight too good! Did they catch him?"

"No, but they will. Some thinks he's made fur the slashes and hid out there—his tracks led off that way. There'll be a line of men throwed all the way round Little Cypress before sun-up. They're organizin' the posse at the Morner place."

"Sheriff got there yet?"

"No, but he's due by daylight or sooner. They telephoned in from Gallup's Mills to him and he's already started fur here with his pack of dogs. The trail ought to lay good, ground bein' damp the way it is. Ole Snake Doctor he's carryin' on and ravin' round, sayin' the Lord's goin' to strike the murderer down in his tracks. But I'm puttin' my main dependence on them bloodhounds—on them first, and then mebbe on a good stout plough line and the limb of a tree. Oh, they'll ketch him, and when they do I 'low to be there! I'm jes' puttin' out fur my place to roust out my oldest boy and fetch him back with me. There's a good size crowd already."

"Don't let me hold you up any longer, then," said the pedestrian, a deadly grimness in his tone. "I'm ready now—got a pistol here in my hip pocket. That poor thing! She always was a good-hearted, hard-workin' woman and mightily put upon. As for Jafe Morner—well, if I should be so lucky as to be the one to jump him out of the sticks, I'm goin' to shoot first and ask questions afterwards. I'll be waitin' there at Morner's, Davis."

He broke into a half run.

In the patchy moonlight which sifted through the shredding rain clouds Snake Doctor's house made a black square against the lesser blackness of its background. To it, panting in his haste, came the assassin, running. He feared the place—to the bottom of his desperate soul he feared it—but a fear yet greater was driving him hither. Previously it has been stated that this man had a powerful imagination. To a literate person it might have been a gift. To him, in this emergency, it was a curse. It set his sore and smitten nerves on end; still, it honed his wits to a sharper edge.

What he overheard back there on the dirt road had remodelled his formless flight into a shaped intent. Now he had to deal, not with phantoms and haunting apparitions, but with tangible dangers; dangers not less frightful than those others perhaps, but to be coped with and—if his luck held—outwitted by physical devices. There was no remorse in him. After all, he fairly well was suited by the outcome of his mistake; getting safely away was what concerned him. In his present plight, weaponless, without a cent in his pocket, with the countryside rousing to hunt him, escape was out of prospect.

But with money to buy his way along he'd have a good chance. Let the sheriff come on with his dogs, then, let the mob form, with their talk of a rope and cold lead. With any sort of break he'd best them. He would strike through the deep timber for the river; in six hours of steady travelling he could make it. At the river he would hire a shanty-boater to ferry him across to the Arkansas side; in some town over there buy clothes and get his hair cut; then catch a train and travel as far west or as far south as the steam-cars would take him. And it was Snake Doctor's cash that would buy the way for him! He had little time, though.

Mighty little. He knew the interior arrangements of Snake Doctor's one room—the pallet in this corner, the fireplace in that, the chair and table drawn out on the sagging floor. In the one spying visit he ever had paid Snake Doctor two weeks before, when this shooting scheme first formed in his mind, he had noted these things in detail. He had marked also the very spot where he felt certain the place of concealment for the money was. All through his stay Snake Doctor, tremulous and plainly apprehensive, had manœuvred to keep between the unbidden, unwelcome caller and the corner where his comforters and blankets were placed. Also, the recluse's eyes had helped to betray him; time and time again they had turned nervously to the wall just beyond and above the bedding, a point, say, five or six feet above it. Just about there, probably in a concealed gap between or behind the logs, the loot surely must be.

He thrust through the planked door, sagging on its leather hinges, and crossed directly to the fireplace. There was no fire in it, but, stooping and fumbling with his hands he found chips there ready to be kindled, and under the chips scraps of paper—good! He needed a light of sorts to search by. He had matches in his pocket, corked in a bottle, water-tight. He got them out as quickly as his shaking fingers would let him. There were only four of them. One after another he struck them. But the paper was damp from rain coming down the mud chimney, and no fire caught until the fourth and last match had been struck. Then it merely flickered; it ran slowly along the edge of the charring paper, threatening to go out.

All right, then, let it go out if it wanted to. He could see in the dark as well as the next one, and had hands to feel with. He made for the corner diagonally across the cabin and ran his hands swiftly along the exposed upper surface of a certain log, probing for any deep depressions in the rotted bark adhering to it, nicking the dried clay mortar with his nails. He tried that log without result, started on the log above it—and sucked in his breath as loose scraps of bark fell away at his touch from where they covered a niche in the joining. The cavity thus exposed was roughly circular in shape, the diameter, about, of a man's arm; he could tell that by fingering its edges. This must be the hole. Greedily he thrust his right hand in. It touched something—

something slick and firm and smooth—and there came a quick darting sting as pointed things, sharp and keen, jabbed his thumb, tearing the skin as he jerked his hand out.

In that same breath the feeble flame in the fireplace caught well and flared up, its blaze filling the cabin with a wavery, unreliable radiance. Japhet Morner, flinging his hand up before his face, saw by that red brightness that on the inner side of his thumb were two tiny torn punctures, half an inch apart, from which drops of blood had started; and then, on beyond, two feet away, at the level of his stricken eyes he saw the forepart of a thick snake, its hideous dull-marked head lifted and thrust back just within the round of the orifice, its mouth wide open, with the cottony linings revealed, its neck taut and curved as though ready to strike again.

He gave a strangled, slobbering howl and leaped to the other side of the room, sobbing, gasping, uttering fragments of formless sound. The blood pumped and spurted from his flirted thumb to prove the wounds though minute were deep.

He must have whiskey to drink or the cloven, hot carcass of a freshly killed chicken to bind fast to the bite, or he was done for. At his house half a mile away was whiskey and there chickens were asleep on their roost. He might make it. He whirled about, then recoiled as though a hard blow had stopped him. He couldn't go where men were assembling, ready and anxious to stretch his neck for him.

Now then, his brain told him that, already and thus soon, quick pangs were leaping down his thumb, through his hand, flaming along his wrist and up his arm. The poison must be racing in his veins, mounting and growing, as he had heard it would. He had a feeling that his hand was swelling, making the skin tighter and tighter. There was no help, and even did help come now it would come too late. He howled and dropped and rolled on the floor.

Up in the creviced wall the forward length of the snake showed, its head still guardingly reared on its slim neck, its lidless pale eyes, like twin bits of blurred glazing, aglow in the shifting firelight.

He got upon his feet, and a terrific pain struck at his heart, squeezing and wringing it. His throat closed and he choked. A second pain twisted his heart.

With a drunken leap he cleared the sill of the rear doorway, ran in a wavering course a few strides out across the horse lot and then, as his knees gave way under him, he pitched forward on his face, his lolled mouth full of weeds and muddy grass stems. The cramping fingers of his outstretched right hand almost touched a reddish black smear where the earth was trampled and the grass flattened down.

"Good reddance, by gravy! I'd call it that; wouldn't you, doc?"

The speaker was driving Doctor Bradshaw back to his home near Gallup's

Mills. The other raised his head wearily. He had been up all night and he was an old man.

"Well," he said, "I'd not have wished the death he died on any man, no matter what he'd done to deserve it. Yet I reckon there was a sort of rough justice in it, too. Anyway, we've been saved a lynching or else a regular hanging. And one would have been a scandal on the county and the other an expense to the taxpayers. Maybe you have got the right idea about it, Jim Meloan.

"I'm looking at it more from the professional point of view. I've had two strange experiences this past night, Jim. I've seen an under-nourished, sickly woman, after being shot through the brain, linger for nearly seven hours before dying, and I've examined the body of a man who'd been killed by a snake bite—killed good and quick, too, judging by the evidences."

"Well, doc, ain't that the way a cotton-mouth always does kill a man—sudden like? I've always heard tell——"

"Never mind what you've heard," said the old doctor; he was cross because he was sleepy. "I'm going by the facts, not by fairy tales. I was born and raised down here, and I've been practising medicine in this county for going on forty-six years. And I tell you that in all my life I've never known of but two or three people actually being bitten by water moccasins, and until this morning early I never had personal knowledge of anybody at all dying from the bite of any kind of snake. Horses?—well, yes. Dogs?—maybe so. But not a human being.

"Still, the proof is clear enough in this case. I think I'll write a paper about it for the next meeting of the State Medical Society. The places where the fangs nipped him were right there in the ball of his thumb—two bloody deep little scratches, side by side. And then there was that look on his face —*ugh!* I'm fairly hardened, but I'm not going to forget Jafe Morner's face in a hurry. He died quick, I'd say offhand, but he died hard, too; I'll swear to that part of it. Well, he was the kind who likely would flicker out pretty brisk under certain circumstances. Ever notice the colour of his skin and those heavy pouches under his eyes? Bad whiskey and bad food and swamp fevers didn't put those signs on him. The late Japhet had a rotten bad heart, Jimmy."

"He shorely did," agreed Meloan, fervently. "Yistiddy proved that."

"I don't mean exactly in that sense," explained the physician. "I mean there was an organic weakness. Curious thing, though, there was no swelling round the wounds nor any swelling in his hand or arm; no noticeable blotching of the skin, either. And yet, if there's anything in the accepted theories of the toxic effects of a venomous snake's bite, those conditions should have been marked. Oh, I'll have quite a paper to read before the Society!"

"Mebbe the swellin' had done went down before you got to him," suggested the morbidly interested farmer.

"No, he couldn't have been dead more than a short while when they went down there to set the dogs on the trail and found him; Sheriff Gill tells me he was still warm. And I was there not ten minutes after that. It's a mighty unusual case—several features about it that puzzle me. F'rinstance now, what about the snake that gashed him? Which-a-way did it come from beforehand and where did it head for afterwards? I didn't see any snake tracks in the ground close to where he was laying—I looked for 'em, too. Still, the horse lot was pretty well trompled. Now, that poor forlorn old creature that you people in this neighbourhood call Snake Doctor, he's got his own pet theory about it. He keeps on saying it was the vengeance of the Lord falling upon a red-handed murderer. He thinks the fellow was drawn back to the seat of his crime—well, that might be so; I've heard of such things before—and that the Divine Wrath lit on him. But if I was him I'd be poking under the stable or the cabin for a whopping big snake.

"He tells me, though—and he ought to be an authority on the subject if anybody is—he tells me that a water moccasin never travels many yards away from the water and that nighttimes they always den up somewhere, being cold-blooded creatures that love the sunshine. And on top of that he swears to me that there never have been any moccasins close about his diggin's unless he'd brought 'em there dead or else as prisoners in a sack."

"Why, looky here, doc," broke in Meloan, "he lied to you, then. There's always been a sayin' round here that Snake Doctor kept a huge big cottonmouth right with him in his house all the time!"

"Yes, that's true. I saw it myself, not an hour ago," said the doctor, smiling a little. "I reckon the old fellow's smarter than folks give him credit for being. He took me in his shack and showed it to me."

"But I thought you jes' now said——"

"Wait till I finish. He took me in and showed it to me, just as I'm telling you. But it was deader than Hector. It was a stuffed snake—with glass eyes and all. It seems a professional taxidermist who was up here from Memphis some years ago mounted it for our eccentric friend. Well, I'll tell the world he made a good job of it. Lifelike?—you bet you! See it in a poor light and you'd almost be ready to swear you saw it move its head. I wouldn't have the thing round me for any amount of money. But it seems this old fellow had a purpose in keeping it.

"That point came out in a sort of a peculiar way, too. It's been common gossip, I understand, that Snake Doctor had a store of money laid by. No doubt you've heard exaggerated stories about the size of his wad; but I'm prepared to tell you it wasn't much—just under a hundred dollars, all told. After he'd calmed down he told me he didn't crave to keep it any more. He

said he wanted it spent, paying for a proper funeral for that poor woman—said she was the only friend he'd had in the world; the only one that ever gave him a kind look or a kind word. So he asked me and Tip Bailey to take charge of it and then he took me in his shanty and got it out from the secret place where he'd kept it hid. It was tucked down in behind a break in the chinking between two of the side logs. And—listen to this, Jim—right in front of it, just back inside the mouth of the opening, he'd set that stuffed cotton-mouth of his, figuring that the bare sight of it, with its neck all bent like as if it was fixing to lunge, and its jaws wide open, would kind of discourage anybody who might take a notion to start exploring in there.

"And then, for a further precaution—oh, he's plenty smart in his way!—he'd gone and lined the inside of the hole all round the edges and halfway down to the bottom with coils of barbed wire, with the points sticking up every which-a-way. Anybody who rammed his hand in there suddenly would certainly get gaffed. Not that anybody would who'd seen the snake first."

The old doctor yawned heavily. "Purty cute little notion, I'd call it."

1923: *from Harper's Magazine*

PRELUDE

by Edgar Valentine Smith, a native of Alabama, who lived all over the South. He had no peer among his southern contemporaries, no other author being more familiar with the people he chose to portray. Throughout his literary career he was devoted to expressing, through his stories, those characteristics which are the soul of the Old South. In addition to winning first prize in 1923 with "Prelude," Mr. Smith is represented in the 1924 volume of the series with "'Lijah," and again in 1931 with "Cock-a-Doodle-Done!"

When she was fifteen years old Selina Jo was doing a man's work in Pruitt's turpentine orchard; properly, though, her story begins earlier than this.

It was shortly before his daughter was born that Shug Hudsill brought his young wife, Marthy, to a sandy land homestead—twenty-five miles from the nearest railroad—in that section of the country which borders the Gulf of

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Mexico. There followed shortly the inevitable log-rolling, at which the neighbours—mostly Hudsills themselves—contributed their labour. Shug furnished refreshments in the form of "shinny," an unpalatable, but unusually potent, native rum. Otherwise, his part in the erection of his future home was largely advisory. Despite this, though, the house, a two-room cabin of the "saddlebag" type, was soon erected. Hand-split pine boards covered the roof and gave fair promise of keeping out the rain. An unglazed window and a door in each room, which would be closed with rough wooden shutters during inclement weather, served for ventilation and lighting. A stick-and-clay chimney at one end of the cabin gave outlet to the single fireplace which was to answer the dual purpose of cooking and heating.

By devious methods Shug accumulated two or three runty, tick-infested cows and a few razorback hogs. These were left, in the main, to shift for themselves. There were tough native grasses available and the canebrakes in Shoalwater River were close by. During severe weather such of the cows as chanced to be giving a few pints of thin, watery milk daily were fed a little home-grown fodder and corn on the ear. With proboscides inordinately sharpened for the purpose, the hogs probed for succulent roots in the rank undergrowth of the nearby swamp. When hog-killing season arrived Shug would shoulder his gun and slouch away for his winter's supply of meat. Neighbours charged it against him that he was not always careful to see to it that they were his own shotes which he killed. Since it was a simple matter, though, to snip off the telltale ear markings of a dead pig, his pilferings, if a fact, were never proved.

Corn sprouted slowly in the thin soil; it grew up dispiritedly and came to maturity stunted as to blade, stalk, and ear. Sweet potatoes yielded generously in new ground; each year a fresh plot was cleared, broken, and planted to these. A patch of sugar cane was always grown for molasses; a portion of this, it was generally conceded, was finally made into "shinny," since Shug was known to be an adept at its manufacture. Certain it is that he made frequent extended trips away from home with his wagon and yoke of oxen, never troubling to explain the reason for his absence.

It was amid these surroundings, sufficient in themselves, one would have said, to hinder physical, mental, and moral growth, that the girl Selina Jo was born. The occasion was in no sense of the word an event with Shug and Marthy. Since all married people of their acquaintance had children, the baby simply represented, to them, the inevitable. With the birth of the child, though, Marthy became barren.

For the first eighteen months of her existence the baby crawled about the cabin unnamed. Then it occurred to Marthy that their offspring ought to be christened.

"Shug," she suggested casually, "seems to me we ort to be namin' that air young 'un."

Shug, lolling in the shade of a water oak, shifted his quid and spat disinterestedly. "I ain't objectin' none," he replied.

"How 'bout callin' her 'S'liny Jo'?" Marthy asked.

"Fittin' enough name fer her, I reckin," Shug yawned.

As the child grew up she came to accept her parents as they had long since accepted her—merely as a bald fact. There was never the slightest evidence of parental affection upon the one side or of filial attachment upon the other.

Once Marthy came upon Shug whipping the girl with a switch.

"What you whippin' her fer?" she asked. Her tone was one of simple curiosity, nothing else.

"All young 'uns needs it," Shug replied virtuously, as he tossed the switch aside. "Hadn't been my daddy usetah whale me powerful, I wouldn't a been nigh the man I am now; not nigh."

It was a matter for remark between the parents that, even at a tender age, Selina Jo rarely emitted any outcry under punishment. There burned in her sloe-black eyes, though, the flame of an emotion which she checked upon the surface.

One would have expected the girl to respond to the influence or heredity. Her parents, the cattle, the hogs, even the crops about her were stunted, half-starved in appearance. By contrast, Selina Jo, upon a daily ration made up almost exclusively of corn pone, molasses, and home-cured pork as salt as ocean brine, defied all known dietary laws, and flourished amazingly. She was precocious, too. When she was only seven years old she could swear just as well—rather, just as wickedly—as could Shug himself. She learned early, though, that, as a source of information, her parents were practically *nil*. Thenceforth, the questions that had rushed to her lips were succeeded by a look of eternal interrogation in her sombre eyes.

It was shortly after her twelfth birthday that a young school-teacher—the only one the community ever knew—came into the Hudsill settlement. Selina Jo was grudgingly allowed to attend the school. For six months the young man's enthusiasm held out. Then it waned and died. Few of the older people could either read or write, and the opinion among them seemed to be universal that what was good enough for them was good enough for their offspring. But before the school closed Selina Jo had learned the alphabet and a portion of the old-fashioned first reader.

She missed the school, and she always kept, close at hand, her thumbed and dog-eared book, the only one that she possessed. The school-teacher had lighted the fires of ambition within her. She came to be troubled by the realization that her mental development was lagging behind her physical growth.

"S'liny Jo," she informed herself one day in a fit of musing, "you air as p'izen strong as a gallon o' green shinny, but you don't know skercely

nothin'." A moment later she added dejectedly: "Ner ain't got no chancet o' learnin', neether; not nary par-tick-le of a chancet!"

Shoalwater River afforded her chief means of diversion. She never remembered when or how she learned to swim. Every day that the weather permitted she enjoyed a plunge in the river. Soon she noticed that no less pleasant than the contact of the water with her naked body was the comfortable after-feeling of cleanliness. Following this, came a feeling of repugnance toward her shiftless and slovenly parents.

She had long since begun to assist with the crops. With the manure scraped from the cow lot she made the beds for the potatoes. At planting time she pulled the slips and set them out. She hoed the sugar cane and thinned the corn. During harvest she did almost as much work as Shug and Marthy combined.

Before she was fourteen she had broken a pair of young steers to the yoke. She split the rails and laid the fence for a new potato patch. Using for the purpose the young oxen which she had broken, she prepared the ground for planting. She was as tall as her father now, a slender, wiry creature, her symmetrical young body as free from blemish as the trunk of a healthy pine tree.

A vague unrest troubled her at times, though. Something occurred one day which intensified this. In a corner of the cabin she found a dust-covered photograph. Brushing it off, she gazed upon a face that was unfamiliar. She took the picture to Marthy.

"Maw," she asked, "who is this?"

Her mother glanced at it indifferently. "Me," she answered listlessly.

"*You?*" Selina Jo gasped.

"Yeah. Ruther, it usetah be. Tuck when I married yore paw."

Selina Jo scanned the comely pictured face for some likeness to the slatternly creature who had given her birth. Wild resentment against something —she scarcely knew what—flamed in her heart. Suddenly she dashed the photograph to the floor and hurried from the cabin. As one reads the chronicle of her words, it must be remembered that her vocabulary was patterned after that of her father.

"Oh, Goddlemighty!" she burst out tempestuously, "I don't want to be like her! I ain't goin' to, neither!"

Her acquaintances were limited to the score of families, most of them relatives, and all of them mental and moral replicas of her own, who lived near by. There was an almost abandoned church in the neighbourhood where, at rare intervals, some itinerant preacher held services. Upon one occasion, though, Shug took the family to preaching in what was known as the Briggs settlement which was ten miles nearer the railroad. It was here that Selina Jo had it impressed upon her young mind just how people of her stripe were looked upon by those cast in another mould.

Shortly after they had seated themselves in the church, Shug, uncouth and unshaven on the men's side, and she and her mother on that reserved for her sex, Selina Jo heard one of the women whisper to her neighbour:

"Some o' that Hudsill tribe!"

As the girl caught the slur in the words her face flushed darkly. She began to notice the unfavourable looks with which the men of the congregation were regarding her father. Even the children stared superciliously toward her mother and herself. Puzzled, vaguely hurt, at first she wondered why.

Lingering just outside the church at the close of services, she waited, shyly hopeful that someone would speak to her. No one paid her the slightest heed. In a land where a lack of hospitality was the one unpardonable sin, this alone was enough to convince her that something was terribly wrong somewhere. But she held her peace until they had completed the tedious homeward journey.

"Maw," she demanded abruptly, as soon as they were alone, "how come we ain't like other folks?"

"What air you talkin' about?" Marthy intoned querulously.

"Them folks in that air Briggs settlement."

"Wa'l?"

"They looked slanchwise at Paw when we went in an' set down." Selina Jo waited a moment, her face clouding at the thought. "An' them li'l' old gals looked slanchwise at me, too. Durn 'em!"

"How kin I he'p the way they looked at us?" Marthy whined. "Treatin' us thatta way just 'cause we air pore."

" 'T weren't that, neither," the girl insisted stubbornly. "Them men—most of 'em—was wearin' overhalls. The school-teacher said rich folks don't wear them kind o' clo'es to meetin'."

"Tryin' to git better 'n yore raisin', air you?" Marthy suddenly showed unwonted spirit. "Wa'l, gal, you kin just make up yore mind to be like yore pore maw an'——"

"I ain't goin' to be like you!" The words shot out with sudden passion. "I ain't!"

"God ha' mercy!" Marthy's usually expressionless face showed a trace of surprise at this outburst. "But I've allus said seein' lots o' things gits notions inta young 'uns' heads what ain't good fer 'em."

"Ner that ain't all I seed, neither," Selina Jo retorted. "They didn't none o' them folks—not nary one o' 'em—ast us home to eat a Sunday dinner with 'em."

At the conclusion of the church service she had seen invitations to the noonday meal being extended and accepted right and left by the Briggs settlement householders. Since it was the custom to include the veriest stranger in these, the fact that none had been offered her people left room for only one

conclusion: the Hudsills were looked upon by their neighbours as being unworthy to receive one. Slowly the impression fastened itself upon her brain that her family was hopelessly low in the social scale—"poison low-down," she would have phrased it. This conviction gripped her. It stung—and it stayed with her.

Fortunately, something occurred about this time to divert her thoughts temporarily. Three miles from Shug's home, Pruitt Brothers, turpentine operators, established a woods commissary. Selina Jo's first visit to the store left her gasping with pleasure. Filled with the usual gaudy assortment carried in stock by the general country store, to the half-starved eyes and soul of the woods-bred girl, the place was a wonderland. Dress goods in loud patterns dazzled her sight; vari-colored ribbons flaunted themselves tantalizingly before her gaze. But the one thing that charmed her, that held her spellbound, was a cheap, ready-made gingham dress. She made frequent unnecessary trips to the store merely to feast her eyes upon it. She would look from it to the faded homespun that she wore and sigh enviously. Once she even mustered the courage to ask the price. It was an insignificant sum, but the thought struck her with sickening force that it might just as well have been a thousand dollars. She had never owned a piece of money.

Slowly, as her yearning for the dress became almost unbearable, a plan formed in her mind. Coming in from her tasks one day, she found Shug, just returned from one of his mysterious periodical trips.

"Paw," she began timidly, "I—I got a hankerin'."

"S'pose you have?" Shug's manner was more surly than usual. "A hankerin' never hurt nobody, yet."

"But, but I shore 'nough want sump'm."

"Wantin' an' gitten' is diffe'ent things. What is it?"

"They's the purtiest dress over to Pruitt's store," Selina Jo began eagerly, "an' it's made outen real gingham."

"Gingham?" Shug whirled about with a snarl. "What air you talkin' about, gal?"

Selina Jo's heart sank. "I ain't never had nary one," she offered placatingly. "An'——"

"Ner ain't never li'ble to, neether. Homespun's good enough fer yore pore maw an' it'll hatter be good enough fer you. I ain't goin' to be workin' myse'f to skin an' bone to be fittin' out no young 'un in fancy riggin's."

"But, Paw, it don't cost much."

"It costes just that much more 'n you're goin' to git. Shet up!"

It was then that Selina Jo unfolded her plan. "I'm goin' to git me that air dress," she announced dispassionately. "I'm aimin' to pay fer it myse'f, too."

"How?"

"Yearnin' the money at public work."

"You?" Shug snorted derisively. "Whare'll you git any public work?"

"In Pruitt's turkentime orchard. They's a heap o' the work I kin do. I could do scrapin' er dippin'; reckin I could even do hackin'."

Shug had slumped into the one comfortable chair in the room. Turning his head, he glared at his daughter.

"You air not goin' to work in no turkentime orchard," he rasped. "You air goin' to stay right here an' he'p yore pore maw an' me. I told you oncet to shet up!"

It struck Selina Jo suddenly that life was, somehow, terribly one-sided and unfair. Other girls in the community, who didn't work as hard as she did, were beginning to wear gingham dresses for Sunday. She thought bitterly that in return for her slaving she had received bed and board—nothing more. By everything that was right, she reasoned, she had earned at least one store-bought dress. Yet it was roughly denied her. Some of the thoughts which had been haunting her for months struggled for expression. Her soul cried out against what was a patent injustice. But she managed to speak calmly.

"Fer as I kin figger it out, Paw," she said, "I been doin' my sheer o' keepin' this here fambly up. I broke them last yoke o' steers, an' one of 'em you was afeared to tech. I've split rails an' laid fences; I've broke new ground. An' the fu'st time I ast fer anything you say I cain't have it."

She ceased speaking for a moment, but her steady gaze never left Shug's face.

"Now, I'm goin' to work fer Pruitt," she continued slowly, "till I git me the money I need."

Something must have occurred during Shug's recent trip—probably a hurried flight from officers—to increase his normal perverseness. He had risen from his chair. Taking a heavy leather strap from the wall, he started toward Selina Jo.

"You air, huh?" Advancing, he fondled the strap suggestively. "You'll git a larrupin', that's what!"

With the first evidence of her father's intention, Selina Jo's face had flushed a brick-red. Now it paled suddenly. She had not even been threatened with corporal punishment for years. Wild rebellion surged within her. A carving knife lay upon the rude deal table beside which she was standing. One slim, brown hand dropped down beside the knife. Her emotion visible only in the tumultuous heaving of her breast and the white, set expression of her face, she waited, motionless, her dark, sombre eyes gazing unwaveringly into Shug's face.

"Paw," she said evenly, "just you tech me oncet with that strop an', as shore as God gives me stren'th, I'll cut yore heart out."

An innate coward, Shug recognized a danger sign when he saw it. The hand which held the strap dropped to his side. He backed slowly away.

"You . . . you . . ." he sputtered and stopped.

"You an' Maw been sayin'," Selina Jo continued, "that I'm tryin' to be better 'n my raisin'. But I ain't forgot how them Briggs settlement folks looked at us slanchwise. 'Tweren't 'cause we was p'izen pore, neither. They knowed, somehow, we was plumb low-down an' ornery. That's why they didn't none of 'em ast us to a Sunday dinner. They seed we was trash. Course I'm honin' to be better 'n that kind o' raisin'—an' I'm goin' to, too!"

Shug had retreated to the doorway, where he stood watching this new daughter of his with furtive, fearful eyes. The meanest of petty tyrants, when he held the whip hand, doubtless he expected that Selina Jo would exhibit the same trait. There was nothing of the bully in the girl, though. Threatened with what she considered to be undeserved punishment, she had simply acted upon the dictates of her immature mind and had seized upon the only means at hand to escape it.

It was several moments before Shug mustered courage to speak. "Sence you air goin' to do public work," he whined presently, " 't ain't nothin' but right you ort to pay fer yore bed an' board."

Selina Jo was glad to agree to this arrangement. When informed of it later, Marthy sullenly acquiesced. She would have to do the housework now, which was no more to her liking than the realization that Shug would permanently pocket the money for their daughter's board.

It was the next day that Selina Jo sought out Lige Tuttle, woods foreman for Pruitt Brothers.

"I'm lookin' fer a job," she announced bluntly.

"Sorry," Tuttle answered brusquely, "but all our cooks are niggers."

"Cook?" was the scornful answer. "I ain't astin' to be no cook. I want shore 'nough work."

Tuttle smiled patronizingly. "What can you do?"

"Scrapin', dippin', er hackin'," was the confident answer.

"You?" Tuttle laughed softly. "Why, that's a man's work. It's hard."

"Any harder 'n breakin' bull yearlin's to the yoke? Er splittin' rails an' breakin' new ground?"

"Mean to say you've done all that?"

"I most bardaceously have!"

Labour was scarce at the time. Tuttle considered the girl's request carefully, asked a few more questions, and decided to take a chance.

"What's your name?" he asked.

"S'liny Jo."

"What else?"

It was the first time Selina Jo had ever been asked her surname; she felt the blood rush to her face.

"What's your last name?" Tuttle repeated.

The answer came almost inaudibly: "Hudsill."

"Shug Hudsill's young 'un?"

"How kin I he'p it?" the girl burst out passionately. "If you'd a been borned a Hudsill, you'd hatter be one, too!"

"Don't get mad, child." There was something in the spirit of this strange creature that Tuttle could not understand; but he respected it. "I wasn't aimin' to low-rate you none just because of your daddy. Come here tomorrow mornin', an' I'll try you out."

Selina Jo found that the work *was* hard. The dry, slippery pine needles underfoot made walking itself a task. She carried a heavy bucket into which she dipped the raw gum, emptying the bucket, when filled, into barrels scattered about the orchard. From sun-up till sunset, and later, she toiled; not once, though, did she grumble. She was too foolishly happy. What she was undergoing was the prelude to real existence, as she saw it. What better, she asked herself, could any strong, healthy girl desire than a steady job dipping turpentine for which she was paid real money?

Occasional passersby, strangers to the vicinity, amazed at seeing a girl engaged in such unusual work, would pause to ask friendly questions. The first flush of pleasure that this gave Selina Jo was quickly erased by the bitter after-tang of reflection: these people were kind because they did not know she was a Hudsill.

While with practice she developed skill, it was three months before she had saved the money she needed. The gingham dress had been laid aside for her. But her ambition had soared. A beautiful dress above a pair of bare legs and feet would never do. Then, too, since her only item of headgear was the sunbonnet which she wore every day, she would need, besides shoes and stockings, a hat.

The day came at last, though, when she could make her purchases. With her arms filled with bundles, she started out joyously on her three-mile walk home.

A half mile from the commissary she paused indecisively at a crossroads. The right-hand road, leading to Shoalwater River, meant the lengthening of her journey a full mile; but the river, with its promise of a cooling plunge, enticed her. As she stood hesitant, trying to decide, she observed a stranger approaching on horseback. She drew aside to let him pass, but he reined in his horse and hailed her.

"Evenin', little sister! Live hereabouts?"

"Down the left-hand fork a piece." Selina Jo bent her steady glance upon the stranger. "Who air you?"

"I'm Holmes—sheriff of the county."

Instinctively the girl drew back. "What air you wantin' o' me? I ain't done nothin'."

by Edgar Valentine Smith

"Lord bless you, little sister," the sheriff laughed, "I'm not after you. Thought maybe as you live round here you might tell me something I want to know."

It seemed that a murder had recently been committed in the bay-shore country ten miles distant. Circumstances pointed to the guilt of two men who had been arrested. Assuming that the murderers had passed through the Hudsill section en route to or from the scene of the crime, the sheriff was seeking evidence to prove this.

Strangers were enough of a rarity in the neighbourhood to be remembered easily. Selina Jo recalled two men who had passed that way whose description fitted those charged with the murder.

Sheriff Holmes was elated. "Would you like a trip to Eastview?" he asked.

"Eastview?" Selina Jo's heart skipped a beat. "That's town, ain't it—whare the railroad trains is at?"

"Yes. We'll want you there a week from to-day." The sheriff filled in a blank subpœna and extended it to the girl. "Look me up in the courthouse soon as you get to town."

Selina Jo's breathless announcement that she was going to court created a flurry at home until Shug learned why she had been summoned. Then he breathed easily.

It was decided that she could use the oxen and wagon for the trip, as Eastview was twenty-five miles distant. This method of travel, being slow, would necessitate an early start on the day before the trial. When that day dawned, though, one of the oxen was found to be indisposed. Selina Jo assembled a lunch of corn pone and side meat, filled a small bottle with molasses, and, dressed in her new finery, set out on foot.

Within an hour the new shoes began to pinch. She took them off, tied them together by their strings and slung them over her shoulder. The stockings were rolled into balls and stuffed into her pockets.

Late in the afternoon she bathed her feet and legs in a brook just outside Eastview and donned shoes and stockings again.

It was dusk when she arrived at the sheriff's office. An overflow crowd at the single hotel necessitated her staying with Sheriff Holmes's family that night.

With the inborn timidity of the woods-bred girl, she remained there until summoned to court in the late forenoon of the following day. By the time her evidence was concluded, though, she had partially overcome her shyness, and was ready for sightseeing.

Wandering about the interior of the courthouse, she marvelled at the white plaster walls. Then she watched several people using the sanitary drinking fountain. Presently she found courage to try it herself. The technic she

found to be rather difficult, but after she had mastered it she became a frequent patron.

Later, she ventured outside the courthouse.

Sheriff Holmes found her during the noon recess. She had commandeered a small goods box which she was using as a seat. Her enraptured gaze was fastened upon a scene across the street. Three large, two-story frame buildings, painted a dazzling white, stood upon a lot which occupied an entire block. Beneath the branches of huge water oaks, were scores of girls, dressed in white blouses and dark-blue skirts.

Sheriff Holmes smiled understandingly. "Like it?"

Selina Jo did not even turn her head. "Whose is them air li'l gals?" she asked breathlessly.

"The state's—for the present," was the answer.

"Who?"

"The state. That's the reformatory for girls."

It was plain that the remark conveyed no information to Selina Jo. "Do which?" she asked.

"When girls—young ones, like you—break the law," the sheriff explained, "they bring them here to be reformed."

"What's re-formed?"

"Well . . . it's like this: before they let a girl go again, she has to prove that she's been changed for the better."

"Changed?" Selina Jo looked up with a quick indrawn breath. "They make 'em diffe'ent f'um what they was?"

"Ye-e-es . . . that's about it, I guess."

"Do they learn 'em outen books in there?"

"Oh, yes; they have regular hours for study."

"An' could—could a gal git in there what didn't know nothin' but a part o' the fu'st reader?"

"You don't understand, yet, child. It's only for girls who do wrong. Now, a girl like you never would go there."

Selina Jo sighed dejectedly. Her eyes caressed the buildings with their spotless white walls and wide-flung shutters, and the groups of girls scattered about the lawn.

Presently she pointed to a high iron picket fence which enclosed the lot. "What's the fence fer?" she asked.

"Why, if that fence wasn't there, little sister, half the girls there would light out before midnight," the sheriff answered.

"They'd run away?" Selina Jo shook her head incredulously. "F'um them purty houses?"

Since it would be impossible for her to reach home that day, she spent another night with the sheriff's family. In her dreams she saw white-painted

buildings fashioned of real lumber. There was real glass in the windows, too; they weren't just yawning black holes in the walls. And the chimneys were of brick; so different from the flimsy stick-and-clay affair that leaned drunkenly against one end of the cabin at home. Home! She seemed to sicken at the thought.

Her dreams were peopled with girls in white blouses and blue skirts, thousands of them, it seemed to her. They were all within an iron-fenced inclosure, beckoning to her to enter; and she was always just on the outside.

With morning came thoughts of her work in the turpentine orchard. Inexplicably, a vague dissatisfaction awoke within her. The idea began to burn itself into her consciousness that, though she might spend a lifetime in honest toil there, she would always be referred to as "one of that Hudsill tribe." Apparently there was no escape from that.

During breakfast she was unusually quiet and thoughtful. With a shy acknowledgment of thanks, she accepted the liberal lunch provided by the sheriff's wife and made her adieus. Two miles outside the town she left the highway. A hundred yards from the road she seated herself upon a log and grimly prepared to wait.

Darkness had fallen when she again entered Eastview and cautiously approached the reformatory from the rear. She scaled the iron fence with comparative ease. Crouching low, she crept toward a lighted window on the ground floor. Two girls of about her own age sat at a study table. Standing before the window, Selina Jo spoke.

"Kin I come in?" she asked softly.

One of the girls screamed slightly; the other, after her first involuntary start of amazement, seemed wonderfully self-possessed.

"Sure, Rube!" she invited cordially. "Step right in!"

Selina Jo climbed over the low window sill into the room.

"What you doin' here?" one of the girls asked.

"I'm j'inin' o' this here re-formin' place," was the unruffled answer.

"You're *wha-a-at?*"

Very simply Selina Jo made known her intentions.

"But you'll be caught, sure as shootin'," one of the girls objected. "In the first place you've got no uniform."

Naturally, Selina Jo expected to be discovered sooner or later; but she had prepared for this eventuality—as she thought.

"Maybe we can fix that," the other girl broke in eagerly. "There's that old blouse of mine and your extra skirt. Gee! I wish we could put it over! Wouldn't old Iron Jaw be wild?"

Between them they rigged a uniform for Selina Jo. At the nightly inspection she crept under the bed. Later, she slept on a pallet.

The fortunate indisposition of a girl across the hall solved the breakfast problem. Selina Jo, taking the vacant place in the formation, passed undiscovered for the moment.

Among the many contingencies which she could not have provided against, though, were the sharp eyes and keen memory for faces possessed by Mary Shane, the matron in charge. As the girls were forming for certain duties shortly after breakfast, Selina Jo felt a heavy hand upon her shoulder. She looked up into the stern face of the matron.

"What are you doing here?" was the curt inquiry.

"Me?" Selina Jo's attempt at surprise was ludicrous. "I—I b'long here, ma'am."

"You do? You ought to know me then. What is my name?"

Instinct told the girl that this must be the matron. "Old Iron Jaw," she answered unabashed.

Mary Shane smiled grimly. "Come with me," she ordered.

She led the way, Selina Jo following meekly, to her little cubby-hole of an office.

"Now, then," the matron commanded sternly, "tell me the truth. How did you get in here?"

"I—I clumb that fence."

"Why?"

"Just 'cause, ma'am, I nacherly got to git re-formed," was the perfectly serious answer. "I ralely b'long here. I'm so p'izen mean they ain't no other place fitten fer me."

"What's your name?"

Now it came, not hesitantly, but proudly—even defiantly: "S'liny Jo Hudsill!"

Mary Shane knitted her brows thoughtfully: "Hudsill?"

"Yes'm. Them low-down, sneakin', ornery Shoalwater River Hudsills, ma'am. Ever'body in the country knows 'bout 'em. They air the shif'lesses' fambly that ever was borned. An' what's furdermore, I'm the hellraisin'es' one o' the intire gin'ration!"

"What are you trying to tell me, child?"

"Just how tarnation mean I am, ma'am."

In her plans for forcibly entering the reformatory, Selina Jo had hit upon the idea of charging herself, when her presence should be discovered, with an assortment of crimes sufficient to insure her incarceration for an indefinite period. It seemed to her now that the moment for her confession had arrived.

"Last mont', ma'am," she continued earnestly, "I burned down three cow stalls. Right atter that I went inta my own blood uncle's cornfiel' an' pulled up ever' smidgin's bit o' his young corn—pulled it smack up by the roots, ma'am. Ner that ain't all, not nigh all. I almost hate to tell you this'n,

ma'am. But last week I stobbed a li'l nigger baby to death. Killed him dead. Dead as——"

"Hush, child, hush!" the matron ordered. "You did none of those things. Now then: Tell me—the truth!"

It came then—the truth—a story haltingly told of a child's scarcely understood heartache for self-betterment. Selina Jo didn't want to stay in the reformatory long, she said; only long enough to learn all there was in the books. Then she would be willing to leave. She would change her name and go away off somewhere. Maybe the folks there, not knowing that she was a Hudsill, would invite her to a Sunday dinner when she went to meeting.

People, some of them, rather, said of Mary Shane that her long association with the so-called criminally inclined young had rendered her immune to every human emotion. But as the recital progressed, the matron turned her back suddenly and strode over to a window.

Presently the story was finished.

"An' please, ma'am," a voice was asking hopefully, "I kin stay now, cain't I?"

Mary Shane did not reply, for a moment. "I'm afraid not, child," she said presently. Few who thought they knew her would have recognized the matron's voice. "You—you've done nothing to be kept here for. You'll have to go home."

Then it was that Selina Jo's heart broke. She flung herself upon the matron.

"Oh, God, ma'am," she sobbed, "please don't make me go back! I *ain't* goin' back! I don't want to be one o' them low-down Hudsills all o' my endurin' days. I want to be somebody, like other folks is. I don't want to have a passel o' dang li'l old gals lookin' at me slanchwise when I go to meetin'. You don't know what it is, ma'am, to have a hankerin'. I want to be changed! I want to be made diffe'ent! Ma'am, I just *got* to git reformed!"

Mary Shane had opened her mouth to speak, to check this outburst; suddenly her iron jaws closed with a snap.

"Come with me, child," she said. "We'll see the superintendent." A moment later she added: "Jim Wellborn generally runs this reformatory to suit himself, anyway!"

The matron was the one person connected with the institution who took whatever liberties she chose. When she wished to be particularly impressive, she addressed people by their full names.

"Jim Wellborn," she said brusquely, as she and Selina Jo entered the superintendent's office, "this girl wants to tell you something. You listen closely."

Wellborn, big and broad-shouldered, had glanced up as they entered. His quizzical glance had rested first upon the girl; now he looked at Mary Shane.

"When you've heard her story," the matron continued, "if you can't find

some way to keep her here so she can learn to live the life that Almighty God has shown her that she's fitted for, why I'll undertake the job of looking after her myself and the reformatory can get another matron."

"H-m-m-m!" Superintendent Wellborn's gray eyes twinkled; but he did not smile outright. "Well . . . the reformatory is fairly well satisfied with its present matron. Good-day, Mary Shane! Sit down, little girl."

The matron closed the door and returned to her office. For nearly an hour she sat, idle, at her desk. It was the first of the month; there were statements to be prepared, reports to be rendered, bills to be checked. But it was patent that her mind was upon none of these things. From time to time she glanced up impatiently at some noise in the hallway. Presently there came the sound of hurrying footsteps. She whirled her chair about.

Selina Jo stood in the doorway. Questions, answers, were unnecessary. The flush in her cheeks, the flame in her sloe-black eyes, blazoned her happiness to the world. As she realized what the superintendent's decision had been, an answering light gleamed, momentarily, in Mary Shane's face. Characteristically, though, it was quenched upon the instant, as she slipped once more, automatically, into her habitual mask of granite.

But even a granite mask—since it is only a mask—cannot stifle a heart song; at best, it can only muffle it. For as she went about the prosaic business of acquainting Selina Jo with her duties, Mary Shane was well aware that, somewhere, deep within herself, a small voice was chanting, chanting over and over:

"For this one—just this one, Lord—who comes of her own accord to be changed, for this single one who wants to be made different, I thank Thee!"

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THE SPRING FLIGHT

by Inez Haynes Irwin, who has been prominent in many activities. With Maud Wood Park she founded the National College Equal Suffrage League, she was a member of the advisory council of the National Women's Party, and is a past president of both the Authors' Guild of America and the Authors' League of America. She has corresponded for various magazines in England, France, and Italy and has been a frequent contributor to English

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by Inez Haynes Irwin

and American magazines. Among her books are The Lady of Kingdoms, Angel Island, Gideon, *and the famous* Maida *juvenile series. Mrs. Irwin now resides in Scituate, Massachusetts.*

The first chilling shadows of the April dusk had settled over London when Shakspere drew rein in front of the wigmaker's. The day had been untimely hot. His horse was in a lather and he too was dusty and tired; fretted. The city smells caught him; and in that mood he was prepared to dub Silver and Muggle the foulest corner in London. For a moment, nobody within seemed to take note of his arrival and then a sudden babble burst. " 'Tis Will, husband! 'Tis Will Shakspere!" he caught the characteristic tinkle of Mistress Montjoy's voice, turned shrill with delight. In an instant both the Montjoys were hurrying through the doorway on to the cobbles; Mistress Montjoy, an azure dart, swift and sure and smooth as a swan; the long side ruffles of her white muslin overdress shearing the air, her iron-gray curls maintaining their perfect alignment. Montjoy himself, big-nosed, mottle-faced, dull-eyed, the puce of his suit the exact shade of his hard cheeks, not a hair of his glossy brown wig disturbed, moved more slowly from force of weight, bulk, or perhaps from his instinctive dislike of Shakspere. Behind, the doorway filled for an instant with crop-headed 'prentice lads, gaping; then emptied precipitately as Montjoy threw his heavy glance back on them. But by this time, Mistress Montjoy had Shakspere's hand; had smacked him heartily.

"Well, well, lad!" she exclaimed. "Welcome and plenty! We did not expect thee for a month yet. How camest thou to London so early?"

Shakspere shook hands with his host. He laughed, but not mirthfully. "Upon my word, mistress, of that you know as much as I. A whim! An impulse! I work not well these days. I've worked not well for months. There's a strange slowness to my mind. And then of a sudden, Stratford sounded dead and London smelled fresh. Is my chamber vacant, mistress? I can go a dozen places else."

" 'Tis vacant and aching for thee, Will," Mistress Montjoy asserted. "But why stand we here for all London to jibe at? Come ye in, lad!"

Montjoy unstrapped the saddle bags, handed them to a boy whom he summoned by another heavy glance, and led the horse away. Shakspere followed his hostess into the house. A half-dozen apprentices, sorting or stringing hair, were making, now that the master had disappeared, but a pretense of work. They gaped; cast slant glances. At one side, a trio of Montjoy's master assistants, their weaving-needles stuck in wigs fitted to featureless, head-shaped blocks on the long table, idled openly. A girl's face, set with two stark, blue O's of eye and one wondering soft red O of mouth, peered through a door.

"A jug of water, Nan!" Mistress Montjoy called shrilly after her. "And fresh face linen, Joan, for the guest chamber! Ink, a quill, and paper! Candles! Hurry, wenches! Fetch the saddle bags, Con!"

Close on her words came clatter and clash from the kitchen. Mistress Montjoy ran nimbly up the stairs and Shakspere followed close on the heels which flittered like stripes of red out of the azure petticoat. They entered a wide, low-ceiled room at the back of the house. Talking volubly, Mistress Montjoy threw open the casements of the two windows. Coolness, alternately staled by the stenches from the city streets and freshened by odours from Mistress Montjoy's early-blooming garden, flowed into the unaired languor of the room. Came also the twilight sounds: the near shouts of children at play—boys at ball, little girls singing, "London Bridge Is Falling Down"; the far, faint cry of the apprentices on Cheapside, "What d'ye lack? What d'ye lack?" The flood of the silvery-umber twilight, stained scarlet from the sunset, oozed into the room, filmed the fine polish of the floor as with a visible wetness. A low, wide bed, a broad, use-blackened table, two stools, a carved chest, made black hulks in this rose-argent sea. Shakspere stood in the centre of the room, a little dazed, staring about him. He was conscious alternately of a sense of fatigue . . . relief . . . release . . . fatigue . . . something like peace . . . fatigue. . . .

"Thou'rt tired, lad," Mistress Montjoy commented, compassionately. "Yet how comest thou worn with that sun-blackened face? Thine eyes are lacklustre too."

It was true that though country tan had turned his olive colouring almost black, Shakspere's eyes were hollow. The faint luminosity that lay in their hazel depths seemed to come, not from within, but from without—as though the force back of them had died down, leaving them to reflect mere light. Nevertheless, his moustached lips were firm and full; and they produced a smile whose quick glint gave to his face all the candid pleasantness which had distinguished its old-time mirth. The flash of smile lasted but an instant. The look which was normal to him—of a quiet, a reserve almost enigmatic, and touched now with weariness—blanketed it completely.

Mechanically Shakspere sat down; extended his feet for the boy to pull off his boots. Mechanically he watched Mistress Montjoy rummage in his saddle bags until she found his shoes; as mechanically he watched the boy draw them on. "Tired!" he repeated. "Tired. Aye. My body's tired. I've ridden four days. But that's not the whole tale. My mind's tired. In truth, I'm staled by country life and country folk and country thought. The quiet . . . the damned, dead, dull quiet. . . . And maybe by age . . . I know not." He laughed out again, mirthlessly. "By Lady, thou'll not believe it, mistress, but I, Will Shakspere, the industrious apprentice—'tis weeks since I have writ a line. Hours I've sat, my head in my hands, my brain stewing, festering.

Then five days agone, on to my horse I leaped; turned his nose Londonward —and here am I. How I came, or by what roads, or what degrees, I know not. One night at Oxford at St. George's Inn comes clear; beside that naught but long days of dust and rain."

Mistress Montjoy's brisk glance played a gleam of blue obliqueness upon him. "And Mistress Davenant," she asked in even tones, "how goes it with her? And thy god-child?" She removed his cape; took his hat from his unresisting fingers.

"Well, well; both well," Shakspere answered. His tone was absent. And when the two maids entered—Nan, blue-eyed and flaxen-curled with the full hips of the country; Joan, dark and waxy, shapely too, though only a slim bit of cockney flesh—he considered their movements but absently. Nan placed candles on the table; took Shakspere's cape and hat; disappeared. Joan put a pewter ewer and basin on the stand, wiped up a slop of water; disappeared. Nan returned with a slender sheaf of paper, a pewter inkstand, a quill; Joan with linen. All the time, Shakspere was answering Mistress Montjoy's inquiries about his family.

Yes, Anne was well. And Sukey and Judy were well. Joan was well. And her three boys, Will and Tom and Michael, were well. Sukey's little Betty—for the first time Shakspere's jaded face gleamed brilliantly as he talked of his only granddaughter—bloomed fairly. Yes, Betty was a great girl for her age, a gay, winsome, lovesome child, the pet of the family. Outwardly, Mistress Montjoy seemed to take no note of the perfunctory quality in Shakspere's answers. But she finally interrupted the flow of her own interrogations with orders to the two maids for supper: "Fish to be fried . . . a meat pie . . . a gooseberry tart, Joan. And plenty of ale, Nan . . . and cakes. . . . Now hurry, wenches!" And on the instant of their departure—had Will heard of the new theatre, the Hope? The town was full of the talk of it. It was to be an addition to the Paris Gardens. Henslowe and Meade—surely Will remembered Meade, the great roaring, hairy bear of a waterman!—were building it. There would also be a new inn built in the Gardens, The Dancing Bears, and there Meade would live. It was to be the finest theatre in London, so they said. . . . Yes, for plays. Oh, and, of course, for bear- and bull-baiting too. They were a shrewd pair, those two! Had he heard they were opening the old Swan? And indeed London was play mad. Surely Shakspere knew that the unreputable country parson, Daborne, whom astute old Henslowe had rescued from a debtors' prison, was going to have a company of acting children. Fletcher's *Faithful Shepherdess* had proved a poor thing. And for her own part, she considered that Fletcher would never hit the public taste alone. But with Beaumont—— It was true enough that their *Maid's Tragedy* had scantly pleased. But consider the *Scornful Lady*, which the town had well liked, and their *Philaster*, over which it had gone mad!

Chapman had deserted play-writing; was away somewhere, Southampton's guest, translating the great ancient Greek poet Homer, a task that would take months. Permitting her guest to extract what comfort he might from this schoolmanly preoccupation of his rival, Mistress Montjoy veered swiftly away from talk of Chapman, but so skilfully that, in another moment, they were discussing Jonson's latest success as though it flowed as a matter of course from the talk of Chapman and Homer. Ben's *Alchemist*, according to Mistress Montjoy, had positively fired London. Burbage, as usual, was playing the lead and according to Mistress Montjoy, with rare spirit. She confessed to as great a liking for Burbage as a misliking for his rival, Field. Compare Burbage with Field. She had seen his Richard—here Mistress Montjoy pulled herself up short as though suddenly remembering that her guest was a playwright—and Will's *Richard Third*—three times. Burbage stirred the blood, whereas Field—— She herself had slept listening to Field's slow, cold chanting. She favoured the *Silent Woman* above all Ben's work—oh, yes, far beyond the *Alchemist*. But for an afternoon's entertainment, give her the *Woman Killed with Kindness* or the *Shoemaker's Holiday*. The woman did not live whose heart could not respond to the sadness of the one and the gaiety of the other. She had always said and would always maintain that Ben knew naught about women. She considered that the *Silent Woman* proved this contention. Had not *Epicœne*, his best woman, turned out to be a man? For herself, she liked plays that dealt with people like those about her; women she could have been and in scenes she might have known. Not for her the bloodless nymphs of the *Faithful Shepherdess* or *Philaster* on the one hand, the strange walking dolls that Ben made on the other. As for the *Woman Killed with Kindness*—there was a heroine might have been her own sister, Bess, so natural was she! And so on, and on, and on until Montjoy's grating voice called from below, "Aho there! Shall we never eat? 'Tis well said, 'A woman's tongue. . . .'"

The slow spring twilight had settled into complete darkness when Shakspere at last pulled away from the Montjoys. A long, slim new moon had slunk almost to the horizon. Yet it shed light enough to reveal a faint wet wash of street; blank parallel stretches of half-timbered walls; black rectangles of street signs. The night had turned chill; a sharp and knifelike wind searched out the openings in his cape. He drew it closer about him as he turned in the direction of Cheapside. Physically, the bath, the delectable hot supper, the delicious cool ale had refreshed him. But mentally——! He could not say that Mistress Montjoy's chatter had inspired him; at times, even, it had hurt: but at least for a while it had ousted from his mind the accumulated melancholies of the last three months. Now that her cheerful presence had gone, these humours flowed back in a sinister black flood. And indeed, one

or two of Mistress Montjoy's remarks had pricked into faint being a dead desire, a lost regret. . . . Southampton and Anne . . . For an instant the old pain seared a fiery trail across his heart. Women named Anne had played important parts in his life, he reflected; Anne, his sister, the playmate of his childhood—pink-and-white, doll-faced, dead ere she had matured. Anne Hathaway, the sweetheart of his boyhood! Sleek-haired was Anne Hathaway and dove-eyed; the brown of the country sun struggling with the pink of the country air for the mastery of her cheeks. Anne, as round and warm as a pigeon—and as unthinking. And then Anne Davenant, the passion of his maturity. What had there been about Anne Davenant that could make a half-decade of agony in a sane man's life? She was not beautiful. He himself, in one of his bitter rebellions against her spell, had avowed that in verse. But there was something—— No, her face was not beautiful; it was the colour of whey and it kept, except at the creeping-in of her silver smile, a strange, still look. And her little flat figure was not beautiful, though it was so delicate that she moved like a shadow. Nor her jet-black, straight, coarse hair. Nor her rather slitted, heavily lidded eyes, so shadow-smooched, so vivid and sparkless. But the combination of all this with her mouth! Surely no woman had ever owned a mouth like Anne's—so wide-centred and deep-cornered, so cool and so warm, so lusciously crimson that, flaring out of the pallor of her face, it was like a blood-hot signal to the senses. Southampton and Anne . . . The image of his friend—and rival—suddenly hung clear in his mind: the lithe, long, white-skinned youth with his chestnut curls and his brilliant colour; his brown eyes shot with red lights; his dashing aspect and his dreaming look; his profundities of thought; his elegances of expression. Well, at least now he could put the two names together in his mind without a sense of utter spiritual annihilation. And even as his pain dulled, their images vanished from his mental vision. His real problem lifted its gaunt face there.

Should he ever write again? Had it gone for good—that rushing, flooding impulse which, on command, had turned his youth to a creative orgy, had sometimes evolved and finished a play in a week? Was this paralysis but a temporary mental deadness or was it old age . . . the flickering out of the creative faculty? He had accommodated himself to many things in a lifetime of work. Once he had created the dramatic mode, had led. Now he followed, aped other men's efforts and at, it seemed, a slower and slower pace. Those younger blades of the drama—Beaumont, Fletcher. . . . How *they* poured it forth, and in what variety and with what felicity! Well, he must follow where their star led. Aye, he was content to follow, if he could only produce a big thing in the new mode. But he could produce nothing. What had happened to him or what was the fault in him? Always he had wondered—and now he considered the problem afresh—if a man's work were so closely

engaged with a man's life that he must live a life especially constructed for that work. For himself, try as hard as he could to disengage himself from mortal tangles, he had had to live long segments of his life as though his work had not even existed. Southampton had, of course, dominated such a segment; Anne Davenant another. And whatever the cost of his work, he would not part with even the memory of that magic madness. Long living it had been with him at first and short working; then longer and harder working, shorter and shorter living; until now life was all working. Perhaps that was the flaw in him—that very concentration may have marred his quality.

Yet there was Ben! No man had worked harder than Ben; and Ben had for decades lived a life that was but pendant to his work. Of course, Ben's youth had sown vigorous wild oats . . . that interval in the Low Countries. For that matter, Ben had killed his man and gone to prison. . . . But he had chosen London for the scene of the major portion of his work and in filthy, greasy, stinking London he had stayed, dominating the literary life of the town as indeed—there had never been an atom of jealousy in Shakspere's admiration for Ben—he deserved to dominate it. On the other hand—Marlowe! At his youth's peak, Kit had thrown himself into the flaming abyss at the very centre of life, had let its fires eat his vitals; had died of his love of life; had died at the hands of life itself. Did Marlowe have the right of it? And Kyd and Greene—those wasters of heydey? "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships and burnt the topless towers of Illium?" God, it was worth going out in one hell-hot stab at joy to have written those lines. They too—the whole trio—had stayed in the city, had drunk deep of its poison. Was, after all, the swift thrust at life the wiser way? However, it was useless now to regret that he had not followed other men's paths, led they to sanity or madness; for *he* could not stay in the city, try as hard as he would. Just as London had held him in hot enchantment in the beginning, she had released him frost-cold in the end. And then the country had begun to pull on him. He had deafened his ears to the luring plea as long as he could. But in the end, it had haled him back to Stratford—that low, wild-dove call. Another motive came in here—in honesty he had to admit it. He wanted to write the Shakspere name strong on Stratford life again. It was a sacred duty; his father had laid it on him. *That* was one of the things a man must do; he had no choice there. And yet again—doubt. Should a poet engage in commerce with sacred obligations? What had he to do with that pale-blooded wench, Duty? Was not the poet his own law? Well, like the oaf he was, docilely, without question, he had followed the incitement of the Shakspere blood. He had returned to Stratford. He had made the Shakspere strain a power. New Place was pointed out, gaped at. . . . And Anne had risen in importance as his position increased. Of course, there had been

the old wound of his years of absence in London, but that wound had healed. Anne was a placid woman whose heart held its own tenderness, rejected its own bitterness. And fate had brought her fair social fortune in her two daughters. Sukey had made a notable match; Judy had been bridesmaid at the Harvard wedding. . . .

Perhaps it was because he was not entirely of the city nor entirely of the country that he wrote well of neither. The *Woman Killed with Kindness* . . . the *Shoemaker's Holiday* . . . Mistress Montjoy's babble again. . . . No, *he* never could equal either Heywood or Dekker in their chosen fields, he told himself. Once in an attempt to rewrite *Three Ladies from London*, he had essayed to paint the town and once, in *Cardenna*, the country. But he had failed; failed so lamentably that he gave over the blurred, confused, half-written things, the one to Heywood, the other to Fletcher. He himself liked to write of lands so far away, of times so long ago, or of countries and ages so entirely imagined that no critic could dispute his fancyings. Such a fantasy his new play was to be! If ever it came into existence at all . . . God, how tortured he was with its formlessness and vagueness! An island. Somewhere? No, nowhere. An island floating between sea and sky. An island as airy and gossamer as a cloud, as delicately imagined as a vision. And on it three beings. A maiden. A slim, pure, virgin thing, Mirandola? Mirala? Mironda? No, Miranda. Yes, that was it, *Miranda*. And an old man, a wiseacre, a sage—Prospero. An old man who had exorcised that island in a breath, could banish it in an eye-wink! "We are of such stuff as dreams are made of and our little life is rounded with a . . . sleep." Already some of the lines were drifting into his head. And then for contrast with those two, unnamed as yet, unbodied—for, strain mind and soul as he would, he could not see him—an ugly, misshapen creature, hobgoblin, leprechaun, gargoyle. The whole thing should be a film of faery—a work to make the *Night's Dream* seem of the earth and clodlike. The name was clear, *A Summer's Tale*.

And that was all!

That had been all for three months. The island and the three people on it and the name, *A Summer's Tale*. Perhaps it was too much of faery. At any rate, it hung impalpable, shapeless and colourless in the high, dry ether of his mind. Months, months, months, it had been since that fiery uprushing torrent of the spirit had made precipitation. Nothing he had done would produce more. Not thinking until his brain turned. Not reading until his eyes ached. Not walking the lanes about Stratford until his legs cramped. Not talking until he hated the town and every soul in it. Not dreaming. Not cursing. So now to see what London would do—the London which, at his appearance, had opened her gate, tempted him with the clue to success, and then, by the mere poisonous hap that Anne Davenant visited there her sister,

fed like a cold-crazed, thirst-crazed monster on the fires and dews of his youth.

It seemed to Shakspere that he had been walking a long time, so fast and so painfully had his thoughts sped. Yet, in reality, it had been but a few moments from Silver Street to Cheapside and along Cheapside to the Mermaid Tavern. Only an occasional figure now and then had passed him on the street, and now he entered a silent courtyard. Hooded wagons made vague, looming shapes under a sprinkle of stars. In the shadows, horses fretted with hoof-pawings and tail-swishings. A white cat flashed from under his feet. But no human stirred, and the Inn was quiet. He made off at an angle toward the left, and at a corner room on the first floor, knocked with a peculiar and vibrant tattoo. Without waiting for a summons to enter, he opened the door and stood on the threshold of a fair-sized room, light in colour, heavily raftered, with big casement windows on two walls and a vast fireplace at one end.

His appearance produced an instant of petrification among the half circle of men sitting about the fire. Then, "By God, 'tis Will!" exclaimed the huge creature who was the keystone of their arch. He raised his unwieldy bulk off the double-sized stool which supported it and paddled like a hurrying bear toward the door. It was a bear-hug, too, to which he subjected Shakspere, and after the embrace was over, he patted him on shoulders, arms, and back with his monstrous paws. "God's wounds, I'm glad to see you. Marry, you smell of the country, lad—clover and new-mown hay."

The others, except one who sat writing in a corner, crowded about Shakspere. That other was a tall, lean, yellow fellow of a cadaverous and moustached mien. He made a sudden gesture, and instantly they all chanted in unison: "An upstart crow, that with his tiger's heart wrapped in a player's hide, supposes he is as able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you!" They ended with a vigorous "Hail, Will of Avon, hail!"

Shakspere grinned as he shook hands with them—Burbage and Beaumont, Fletcher and Hemminge.

"How beats the tiger's heart?" the man in the corner asked cheerfully, still bending to his work.

"Fiery as of yore," Shakspere averred, shaking his disengaged hand. "On my word, Tom Heywood," he declared to his interlocutor, "and be God my witness, when I departed for Stratford last spring, I left you scribbling in this corner and on my return, I find you busy at the self-same spot. How many plays have you writ in these twelve months?"

"Five!" Heywood declared laconically, stopping to twist his long, thin, out-standing yellow moustaches and to impale Shakspere with a humorous glare from his cadaverous face. "And acted in all of them—and I've turned some verses besides. And according to my wont all writ on tavern bills."

by Inez Haynes Irwin

"Not another heroic poem, I pray thee, Tom!" Shakspere said with the out-handed gesture of one fending off offence.

Before Heywood could reply, the rafters rang with the long-sustained, boisterous derision of his companions. And so, instead of answering, he kept on tranquilly writing until they had stopped. "Keep up those alarums," he threatened, "and I write an epic to-night."

"Come close to the fire, Will," Ben Jonson ordered, "and let's see how the rural air likes thee." The company resumed their places in a crescent about the blaze. Hemminge placed a stool for Shakspere at Jonson's right. "We lack cheer!" Jonson exclaimed, first peering into the depths of the enormous tankard which he held in a colossal paw and then shaking it with a circular motion. "What ho, boy!" he called. As there was no immediate response, "Boy! Boy!" he boomed in successive roars. And when the door opened on a peaked, smirched slice of scared boy face, "Bring us on wine, boy, Canary now, of the best and plenty of it. At once! You hear? I'll cut your gizzard out before your eyes and roast it at this very fire else." As the door precipitately closed, he turned on Shakspere an enormous visage, all rounded leathery contours from which emerged at the chin a straggle of black beard, picked with white, and above the forehead a scratch of hair, black and stiff as wire. Somewhere between the two and in the deepest folds of the leathery skin were set the mere black twinkles that were his extraordinary eyes. "Tell us of Stratford, Will. By God, bully boys, I long for green fields. The city tires and drags me. Some day, Will Shakspere, I'll take you at your word and come to Stratford on a visit. 'Twas but yesterday Drayton and I spoke with longing of that future junket."

"Come, Ben, do!" Shakspere entreated. "New place has rooms we use not. Come, all of you!" He smiled about the circle, now sitting on stools before the fire, their empty mugs beside them, their eyes on him. Then the smile crooked, shrank, disappeared as another consideration, more acerb, curdled it. "But talk we not of Stratford, I pray thee. It's yon accursed country quiet I've run away from. Give me talk of London. Odds, how I've thirsted for it! What's new here? No pretty chatter of court and politics an it please you, lads! I yearn for gossip of hussies and harlots, cutthroats and cutpurses, gulls and conies."

"Would you had but come a moment since," Dick Burbage answered. "The two Toms, Dekker and Middleton, were here and full of their new comedy the *Roaring Girl*. Knew ye ever Moll Frith, Will?"

Shakspere nodded dissent. "But ever I've heard talk of her," he added.

"Well, yon twain have spent long days—and longer nights, 'tis likely—studying the ways of that fair filthy dame—their Roaring Girl. By Lady, Will, she's unpaired in my experience. Full of strange oaths and stranger talk. And tales! Man, she pours adventure as others pour out dullness."

"How looks she?" asked Beaumont's voice from the other end of their row. And, "Before God, Frank, we've seen the jade!" came Fletcher's comment from the same quarter. Burbage turned and crossed his legs in the direction of the query. As ever, when Burbage was present, Shakspere followed his motions. How could a man so fleshed melt movement into a grace so exquisite? Just as on the stage, though tallow-faced and thickly featured, he transformed himself into a god. And as inevitably as Shakspere watched his friend's motion, he listened for his friend's voice—that sleek, silky voice that could make thunder of a whisper and turn every woman in the pit white with the stilled passion of its love-sighing. What a Romeo he had been—the beautiful noble face of him! And then his Richard, which had turned the affrighted city madams faint; had made them forget who wrote that Richard. Acting in the same play with Burbage, Shakspere reflected whimsically, he had often acted better than he could—that voice had made him. Dick, Shakspere reflected, had had his problems too. Should he have acted or painted? And had he chosen acting—Shakspere had often pondered this—because of that old debt, or because it was easier drifting. . . .

Beaumont, on the other hand, presented always one aspect to the world, albeit a noble and beautiful one. He was the handsomest man of them all, tall and fair, golden-bearded, with wide-opened, strangely set green eyes; statuesquely cut as to figure. No one of them really knew Francis Beaumont, except it be Fletcher; and Shakspere had his moments when he doubted if even John knew his partner and collaborator. It was not his university education that held them off from Beaumont or him from them; for both Fletcher and Jonson had equal learning. Or his court connections, for the Mermaid circle had the imperviousness to rank which associated genius often begets. No, it was a quality of remoteness from which nothing in life or any degree of living could ever free Beaumont. . . . What had dragged Beaumont down from those mental mountain fastnesses to go to play-writing?

Fletcher was as different from Beaumont as he well might be; little, dark, tousled-looking, effeminately made; of an extraordinary silver-wittedness, mental warmth and, above all, creative fecundity. John spawned plots as he talked. It was a perfect collaboration, Shakspere had always thought; for Beaumont supplied judgment, taste, a sense of proportion, constructive ability, workmanlike scrupulosity, and a real poetic quality. Fletcher, on the other hand, brought to their work a virgin forest of thought and idea, plot and plan. Shakspere admired and respected Beaumont, but he had a strange mental affinity with Fletcher.

"You'd remembered Moll Frith, had you seen her, John," Burbage informed Fletcher, dryly. "She's as tall as Frank and I'll not say as big, but bigger. She can hold two lads with her one hand while she murders them with the other—a fist as big as the hoof of a horse. A handsome wench

besides—red-headed and yellow-eyed. Her hair comes to her heels and sometimes it pleases her to wear it in that fashion. 'Tis a blaze then, running from her head to the ground. She's fought her way, every inch, to her bawdy throne. No woman loves her, nor would dare cross her, but would give her soul to be chosen as her friend. No man crosses her, nor would dare love her, but would give his ears to be picked as her swain. She's fleeced more gulls and conies—— Not at all unlike," he added, dryly, "although their spheres be far separate, our late noble virgin majesty, Elizabeth."

" 'Tis pity, Will, you saw her not first," said Hemminge.

And at that, the room filled with ribaldry. The adoring reverence, the admiring worship that poor stupid John Hemminge held for Will Shakspere was the jest and butt of the Mermaid Club. Ben, especially at this moment, shook like a mountain of jelly. Hemminge was placidly aware of his derision and as placidly indifferent to it. He turned now his big gray eyes—save for their love as expressionless as those of a hound—upon the object of his solicitude. He was a big, bulky creature—Hemminge. Beside Beaumont he was as a farm stallion to a knight's charger. Yet on their trips through the stews of the town, it was to John Hemminge, not to Beaumont, that the Dolls and Molls and Polls shot their first lewd welcomes of glance and greeting.

"True, John!" Shakspere applauded, dryly. " 'Tis pity I saw her not first. 'Tis pity—I know you think, and I agree—that any of these poor scribblers here was ever born to take from me dramatic share of the romance and poetry that lies bound in merry England."

"Oh, Will"—Fletcher turned the talk—"hast heard of Daborne and his new children's company? More 'little eyases' to make us trouble. Of the new theatre near the Paris Gardens. . . ."

The talk went on. The smoochy waiter lad—his scared eye scuttling at Jonson's every move to Jonson's face—filled their tankards with Canary again and again and again. The big fire died down at intervals, but someone always replenished it from a pile of logs at the side. When the flames burned high, they turned the little rounds of opaque glass in the casements to files of glaring eyes; the room seemed crowded. They illuminated the farthest corner, except that one, already illumined by the flame of a candle, where twinkling Tom Heywood wrote steadily on, despite the talk—wrote steadily on even though he joined in that talk. The big plain room had an aspect of home to Shakspere; for it had housed thousands of wine-bedewed, discussion-ridden nights whose talk had touched the stars. Every drawing on its walls was familiar to him, every ribald couplet. And the men in it were his friends, true and tried. Not that he had not had his differences, major and minor, with them; not that he liked them equally. But no one among them but was linked in some picturesque or glorious way into the chain of his London existence. And when the blaze died down to a softer glow that failed to pick

out faces, its gleam on pewter tankards, on laughter-filled eyes, companioned the room again for him. Shakspere listened and drew them out for stories; listened and, if the talk threatened to run into one of their uproarious duels of wit, drew them out again. But that did not happen often. By sheer force of will, he made it a night of anecdote and reminiscence. There was plenty of talk. There were the latest tales of Henslowe's niggardliness—no Mermaid night was a success without a Henslowe interval. From Beaumont there were stories of the production of the *Knight of the Burning Pestle;* from Fletcher, of the handsome way Tom Heywood had helped them in their satire on him; from Ben, of the production of the *Alchemist* and of the difficulties he was having with a new play, *Cataline*—"a damned dull drama of desperation!" he described it. So dull had it become, indeed, that he had begun a new, highly contrasting one. When the talk turned to the past, Jonson spun a long yarn of the week he and Marston and Chapman spent in prison the time *Eastward Ho!* was produced. Burbage told of his acting experiences as a child—those reminiscences went as far back as *Hieronimo*—interspersed with such bits of impromptu acting as made his auditors hold their breath. . . .

As long after midnight Shakspere turned into Montjoy house, it was with a sense of perfect calm. All his melancholies had vanished in the high, clear wind of London talk. To-morrow he would sit down and write, write—oh, God, how he would write!

But next morning, although the day was rare and the sun poured its heartening gold over the entire London world, though quill and white paper were close at hand, though Mistress Montjoy by whispered bribes or threats held the entire household under the spell of a quietude like death itself, write he could not. Eyes closed, mind held taut, he tried to relive last night's rapturous mood; to distill it into the day's expression. All useless! He scribbled half-lines and broken phrases, drew strange amateur pictures, thought hard with his down-bent head clutched in his hands; thought hard, pacing the room the while, thought hard, face-down upon his bed. All useless! Anything else he might accomplish. But of a certainty one thing he could not do—and that was write. It added to his sense of gloom that out of his early-morning talk with Mistress Montjoy he had gleaned a coming trouble in the Montjoy family. The old dispute in regard to their daughter Juliet, and her dowry. . . . Montjoy and his son-in-law no longer spoke; there were whispers about a suit at law. Of course, in that case, he'd be summoned as a witness. Well, he'd stand with Juliet—the pet of his long years of living with the Montjoy family. This phantom care kept coming between him and his thought. Maddened at last by his ineptness and deadness, he seized his hat and cape; sallied forth. Automatically he made toward Cheapside.

It was a fair London scene, the day clear, the wind flawing but brisk; and

in other times or in another mood, Shakspere's heart would have leaped to the colour and bustle and gaiety of it all. Cheapside was crowded with shoppers and strollers; housewives with baskets; gallants in plumes and laces; homespun gawks from the country, pop-eyed with amaze. The shops were wide, and the brilliant sun caught on diamonds and jet, on taffeta and linsey-woolsey, on silver and leather, on feathers and laces. Above, swinging vigorously in the wind, the shop-signs made a moving aërial frieze, painted in violent scenes with colours equally violent. Horsemen passed with an imperious swiftness through the crowd which edged off to give them room. Once, one of the decade's newfangled riding-contrivances—a coach—drove leisurely, with its span of horse, into their midst. Still a rarity in that busy district, it provoked all the ridicule, ribaldry, and raucousness of which the 'prentices of Cheap were capable, notwithstanding the lovely lady inside, who, displaying a rosy indignation, hastily put on her mask. In the midst of all this, an inquisitive fellow lolling at his work, an idle eye raking the street, got glimpse of Shakspere. Immediately his shrill cry, "Ho, lads, 'tis Will Shakspere! Will of the Globe! Will of the King's men!" was caught up by his fellows till all about the streets rang with "Hi, Will!" and "Ho, Will!"

Shakspere doffed his hat and waved it with his most professional—and mechanical—smile. How his heart had jumped the first time Cheap had cheered him! He had not written, on that long-ago thrilled day, a single word—but it was not from mental sterility, only from surplusage of charmed emotion. Now that chorus was as hollow to him as the beating of a child's hand on a drum. He was conscious only of the city stinks and, for the first time, of a longing for the sweet freshness of the Warwickshire air. "Hi, Will! Ho, Will!" The cry ran down the street as successive lines of shopmen took it up. Shakspere continued mechanically to smile, gracefully to wave his hat. Presently the cheers ran down. He turned on the bridge, slowed down his brisk walk to a saunter. Now the scene, though less gay, was more beautiful. He stopped and listlessly surveyed it. The Thames—it was the brief interval between tides—stretched like a vast carpet of satin, taut except where now and then, as though insecurely fastened, it rippled in the breeze: and blue save where the sun—— His mind made little flicker at verse. "Faint, gilded pools where yet the——" And then it caught with violence on that oral snag, *gilded*, and ceased. Was ever poet haunted by a single word as he by *gilded*? A cold, stark disgust with certain crystallized habits of expression added its burden to his mood. Apathetically he continued to gaze on the scene.

Boats were gliding from shore to shore over the suave river surface, and the cries of the boatmen, "Eastward ho!" and "Westward ho!" came in a faint music to his ears. Close to the banks swans drifted. Along the north shore—flower gardens linking them softly with the river and the velvet

lawns holding them rigidly apart—stretched the splendid pile of palaces which was the haughtiest element in the city's many-faceted beauty. Along the same bank, but back of him, nondescript shops and dwellings ran to the square, geometric gray hulk of the Tower. Between them, as though offering sacred barricade against social admixture—huge as a great ship, but anchored—bulked St. Paul's. Beyond them all, made soft by the city's spire-pierced smoke, rolled vivid green hills. Across the river, the theatres and gardens, the stews and bagnios huddled together as though in a desperate effort to conceal the true quality of their entertainment. And apart from them all, wrapped in austerity, St. Mary's Overy mourned and meditated. The breeze flawed. One moment it brought strongly to his nose the odours from the palace gardens; another it carried faintly to his ears the roar of the lions in the Tower.

After a while, he moved—almost without direction—on. His professional eye, sweeping the South Bank, had noted that no flag hung out at the Globe. No performance that day. He wondered vaguely why. In the same apathy, but following his habit, he looked up as he passed off the bridge to the superstructure which topped it. Yes, his luck symbol of other days—the skull of some poor long-dead, traitorous devil which had always seemed, most amiably and encouragingly, to grin on him—still stuck to its pike.

He had thought he would continue on to the Globe, but the absence of the flag changed his mind. After a moment of indecision, he turned to the left, plunged into a maze of tiny streets. They grew broader and more residential in character as they pulled away from London Bridge. Finally, he came to a trim little common. On the daisy-specked grass, children were playing. A line of geese drew a white streak over the green as they rocked toward a watering trough in the centre. At one of the small houses, half-timbered and of a smiling domestic appearance, Shakspere paused, knocked.

"Why, it's Master Shakspere!" exclaimed the black-eyed, warmly hued woman who opened the door to him. And frankly she held up the bursting bloom of her lips to his kiss. "How now, Mistress Harvard," Shakspere answered, saluting her. "How dare'st flower so in the London air? Or is it Stratford roses that still glow in thy cheek? And how fairly you are placed!" he added, as she conducted him inside.

The room they entered was bigger than, from the outside, the house seemed able to contain. High casements were partly open to the breeze and, burning through their bulleyes, the sun had flecked the floor with its own marquetry. At one side, a bunch of spring posies filled a pewter bowl; and the bowl lay beside a big volume that nearly covered the table. Mistress Harvard drew a chair—high-backed and carved—for Shakspere, seated herself in another, the hand of each arm clasping the dimpled elbow of its fellow. "Tell me of Stratford," she begged, her big eyes, a trifle too full for

real beauty, dancing; the warm colour flooding and receding. Shakspere conscientiously told her the news of the town. That was what interested her most, though she made perfunctory inquiries as to his work, ending with—was it a new play had brought him to London? To Shakspere's great relief, however, she did not ask its name, nor what it was about. Adroit as he was in conversation—and he had enough instinctive sympathy and sense of humour to produce unlimited volume of even Mistress Harvard's kind—he was conscious of a feeling of relief when her husband appeared.

John Harvard was one of the few of the younger generation in Stratford with whom Shakspere had a real mental clutch. He was a big, raw-boned man; his broad shoulders in perpetual stoop; his gray eyes always gaunt with his midnight studying. Harvard had none of the poet in him; but he was a student of an inspired order.

Shakspere had often gone to him when, in his work, he struck snags of history, science, medicine, or the law. The big book on the table, a recent purchase which he immediately displayed to Shakspere, was an evidence of a scholarly rather than a religious trend in him. It was that new version of the Bible, of which for months there had been so much talk. The two men drew up to the table, lost themselves in examination and discussion. "We have it not yet at Trinity," Shakspere said.

In the meantime, Mistress Harvard slipped out of the house. When she returned she was carrying a struggling, lusty, round-cheeked urchin whose eyes—as big and black as his mother's—were pouring tears at being yanked untimely from his play. " 'Tis young John Harvard!" Mistress Harvard interrupted the two men to announce, "and you may tell them all, Will Shakspere, when you go back to Stratford, that you had to come to London to see a child who was born a man."

He had called on the Harvards—Shakspere admitted it frankly to himself—not so much for old friendship's sake as in the hope that talk with Harvard would set those diamond-sharp creative wheels in motion. But no such phenomenon manifested itself. Their talk, enthusiastic on Harvard's side, perfunctory on his own, had resulted in nothing—that is if you called that sudden burning desire, unexpected as it was uncontrolled, for Stratford nothing; that sudden avid itch for the country quiet, the large lustred country stars, the dew-wetted, cooling dark, the country sunshine with its flower smells and summer colouring, nothing. . . .

The game was up!

London had failed him. To-morrow he would go back to New Place.

He did not know—so long and aimlessly had he wandered the Bankside streets—how he came to arrive at the Globe. Habit, of course, he reflected, wearily. He had gone like a homing horse straight to the familiar stall. But once at the Globe, he suddenly found himself fatigued. He went in.

Ah, that was the reason the flag was not up! And, of course, now he remembered that in the course of a long droning talk from his point of view as secretary of the Globe, Hemminge had told him last night that the theatre was closed temporarily! Some unexpected repairs after the ravages of the winter storms had suddenly become necessary. A pair of carpenters—rough fellows enough—were pulling up the rotten boards in the centre under the big blue patch of open sky. At the side was a pile of fresh boards; tools. Shakspere seated himself on a second pile of boards, surveyed with the lack-lustre eyes the empty boxes, the long stage protruding into the body of the house. The carpenters gave one look in his direction; accepted him apparently as a part of this strange theatrical world; went on with their talk. Low-voiced at first, it presently ignored him, rose to a normal tone. The sun lifted higher and higher. An agreeable wood smell emanated from the boards which made his seat. Shakspere fell into a muse that was so without thought that it was almost without consciousness. It was as though his will, exhausted by his efforts, had dropped her hand from the wheel of creative impulse; had gone to sleep. The younger carpenter had been talking about his strange adventure for a minute or two before his words began to penetrate to Shakspere's hearing. For that interval, vaguely soothed by his own mental quiet, Shakspere tried not to hear him. Then one detail more acid than the rest broke into that void, roused all his sense of life to sudden ravenous sensitiveness. He listened.

"Aye, Rafe," he was saying, in answer to his companion's question; "I be sailor ever since I was lad. Aye, I was one of Sir Jarge Summer's men. Aye, I took that voyage into the new western sea. Aye, I seen and heard things thou'd not believe, man!"

Rafe was older and dry: a hollow-cheeked, dull-eyed, lantern-jawed yokel—Shakspere knew the type well enough—full of yawning buffoonery and ribald skepticisms. "Aye, Stephen," he commented, with a burst of laughter. "Well, I know you sailormen and your tales and your lies. I mind me, my wife's brother went with Raleigh to Ginny. What he told—— We doused him well in the horse-trough one morn, and after that, his tales grew smaller."

Stephen laughed too—and not ill-naturedly. He could afford to laugh. He was a big, black-browed, thick-bodied lad with a neck like a bull's. As he tore and lifted, Shakspere saw through his ragged shirt the swift play under the skin of muscles netted with blue and red tattoo. He had a long, sea-cleared gray gaze that now took quiet measure of his fellow. Perhaps it was the certainty that he could have thrown the skeptic over his head that made him answer mildly: "Aye. 'Tis true. Sailormen do oft make romance where the plain truth would seem more strange." And then he followed this statement by an irritating—but beguiling—silence.

by Inez Haynes Irwin

For a moment no sound fell but the splintering of planks, the hammering home of wooden nails.

"Tell thy tale, Stephen," Rafe suddenly burst out. "For aught I know, ye be the first truthful sailorman that e'er I met. Tell thy tale in peace. I'll give thee my ears."

"'Tis strange," Stephen answered. "'Tis passing strange—this tale of mine. And I ask no man to put his faith on't. Yet 'tis no lie! I give ye but God's truth and there's an end on't. We sailed from London—as good and strong a crew as e'en the queen, good Bess, God rest her soul, could e'er have wanted. Englishmen all—save one. And that one, a black-avised fellow —not blackamoor, you understand; yet hairy as an ape with a face so gnarled and strange 'twould frighten children. 'A was humped a little in the back and 'a swung in's walk. And 'a had arms so bulged with strength 'a could squeeze a man to death like a bear. Rings 'a wore in his ears, of gold, and a kerchief on's head, red and yellow, gay as a fairing and a knife in's belt as had a curving blade would carve a man's guts out at one stroke. His name was some outlandishness we ne'er could twist our tongues to . . . so called we him Cal."

"Those little twisty men be fearsome powerful in the wrestle," Rafe declared.

"We sailed with fair weather and the fair weather sailed with us. The sea—'twas as smooth as—smooth as—smooth as the top of the mug when the foam's settled. 'Twas a glad crew we were at first, too; full of japes and jests and the strange talk of land and sea all sailorfolk know. But one thing we lacked—drink. 'Twas a skipper that knew the sea and a brave trouncer of men, but a niggard of grog. The days crept by and still no grog. Came more days and still none. The men fretted and murmured. But the sun kept with us and there was no real crying out until we struck the islands——"

"What islands, Stephen?" Rafe asked.

"The Bermoothes, man. Hast not heard what Sir Jarge Summers found? A group of little islets, some no bigger than your hand, some bigger than all London town, spread out on a sea, green and blue, like a peacock's tail. We hove to there and rested. Sir Jarge and his fellows went ashore to see if there might perchance be treasure of gold or precious stones——"

"And were there treasure?" Rafe cut in, eagerly.

"Not that I have heard. But once they'd gone, among us crew, the murmurs grew for grog. Grog we asked—grog! If not—plain beer or ale. But whene'er we asked—polite and civil though we were—plain *no* was all we got. So one night, late, this hairy man, this Cal, he steals him a firkin of wine from the ship's stores and three of us—me and him and old frosty gaffer, Trink—we three slipped over the side of the ship into a boat and rowed us to the shore."

" 'Twas fair venturesome," Rafe commented.

"Venturesome. You'd say venturesome, indeed, knew ye all. But list! Over the island we went, stopping to gaze at all about us and drinking as we gazed. 'Twas passing fair, that scene; flowers like jewels and sweet-smelling shrubs; no high trees but bushes that were mountain-size and all a-bloom and birds that sang most hurtsome sweet. And the air so glad and soft. . . . We gazed and gazed, and the more we gazed, the more we drank and the more we drank, the more we gazed. . . . And then the dusk came on and still we gazed and drank. But once 'twas dark, by God, fear caught us. For lights began to come, to flash in the air, to dance; lights so thick and big and bright as though the stars had fallen, and always a-dance, here, there, everywhere. . . ."

" 'Twas glowworms!" Rafe skeptically announced.

"Man, I say 'twas dancing lights; there, low on the ground; here, higher than a man's head. They sparked and went out and sparked again. We tried at first to catch one—as well try to catch and hold the sunshine. And then a great fear came across us for, on a sudden, we saw—not far off, yet so near we could have touched him—a little minnikin. . . ."

"A little minnikin? What mean ye?"

"A little man-thing, no taller than my arm. It danced before us—all wound up in white, mist-like, with shining jewel eyes and mouth that smiled, beguiling, like a maid's. And 'a beckoned! We chased it. Cal, Trink, and me, in the fairy light we chased it, over hill and brook, through briar and bush; but still we catched it not. 'Twas, fairy too—it floated with unfair aid from wind and breeze. But on we ran, and on and on. And as we ran a tempest came—tempest with roaring thunder as broke my ears and such lightning as split the sky in twain, twin sheets of fire. And rain—'twas like a monster fagot pack beating us on backs and faces. And in that tempest, all the fairy lights went out; the minnikin leapt away. But fright had sucked the very guts from out us! We ran in that pouring sea till we could run no longer; fell; raised up; ran once more, staggering-like, till we all three dropped on our faces—slept, with the tide of rain pouring on us; slept till noon. . . ."

"And what came of it?" asked Rafe.

"Naught! When we woke 'twas bright blue day, the sun shining round in the sky. The minnikin—we saw it not again. But through it all, Trink holds him fast to the firkin. And when we two, Cal and me, woke chatter-toothed, 'Here's my comfort!' says Trink; and pulls long at the wine."

"And how came you back to the ship?" Rafe demanded.

"Oh, they put out from the ship a gang who searched until they found us."

"And what punishment gave they you?"

"Irons for sennight and bread and water in the hold. But Sir Jarge—too pleased he was a'd found the Bermoothes to hold his anger long—so soon on deck we came and made our voyage fair and safe to England."

by Inez Haynes Irwin

"How now—did Cal and Trink mind them of that minnikin after their drink had passed?" Rafe asked, shrewdly.

"Never came we twain together without talk of it," Stephen asserted, gravely. "I see him now—the little misty wight, with eyes a-mock like elves, lips smiling, beguiling like a maid's, and wee hands beckoning. . . ."

Shakspere arose from his seat as from a dream. He moved so quietly that Stephen and Rafe took no note of his departure. He walked slowly at first, then swiftly across the bridge, up Cheapside to Silver and Muggle. As he neared the Montjoy house, he broke into a run. Once indoors, "What's happened to thee, Will Shakspere?" Mistress Montjoy asked. "Thy eyes are coals; thy colour fever-high."

Shakspere did not answer her query. "Send up paper to me, mistress," he begged. "All thou hast and then send out for more!" He ran, light as a lad, over the stairs. Once in his room, he seated himself at the table; drew a blank sheet to him. Writing swiftly, he inscribed, *A Summer's Tale*. Then he drew a line through the title; wrote

The Tempest

Scene: A ship at sea. A storm with thunder and lightning.

1925: *from Red Book*

MR. BISBEE'S PRINCESS

by Julian Street, novelist, essayist, and writer on gastronomy, who was born in Chicago in 1879. He began his literary career as a newspaper reporter on the New York Mail and Express *in 1899. In addition to his short stories and novels Mr. Street was the author of two popular travelers' guidebooks,* Paris à la Carte *and* Where Paris Dines. *He collaborated with his close friend, Booth Tarkington, in writing the comedy* Country Cousin. *Mr. Street has twice won an O. Henry Memorial Award; "A Matter of Standards" appeared in the 1930 volume of the series. He died in 1947.*

The genial young clerk at the mail window of the hotel glanced at the badge on Mr. Bisbee's coat and at the card bearing his forwarding address.

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"Then you're leaving us before the end of the convention, Mr. Bisbee?" he remarked in a tone of polite regret.

"Yes," Mr. Bisbee replied. "We've got through our important business, and I can't hang around till Saturday just for the pleasure of riding back on the special. I'm a busy man." He raised his chest slightly and thrust down his chin, making a little pouch of it between the pointed wings of his collar. "Will you kindly see if there's any mail for me? I'm expecting important letters."

Over his shoulder the clerk passed the request to an invisible Miss Burns, and while waiting they conversed, Mr. Bisbee mentioning the rapid growth of the Midwestern city in which he lived and had his business, while the clerk spoke of fortunes lately made in real estate in this part of California.

"But," he suggested, "I guess you're familiar with this section?"

"As a matter of fact," replied Mr. Bisbee, "this is my first trip to the Coast, and I'd like to look things over a little, but my rule is business before pleasure. It wasn't by chasing around the country having a good time that I built up the largest retail silverware and jewellery concern in the southeastern part of my State."

"I guess that's right."

"Ye-es," Mr. Bisbee went on, looking upward and adopting as nearly as he could the drawling, reminiscent tone in which old Mr. Ephraim Rathbone used to tell about the town's early days, "when I founded the William P. Bisbee Company—let's see, it'll be twenty-six years ago this coming September tenth—I laid down certain business policies that I——"

But at this juncture, just as he was planning to show the young man a copy of the article the *Daily Sentinel* printed about him last year, he was cut short by the arrival of Miss Burns with several letters.

"Ah, *here* we are!" he exclaimed, and having put the letters into his pocket, shook hands with the clerk and started across the lobby with the bellboy who was carrying his bags.

"Where you going, Bisbee?" The shout came from Phil Kreinig, of Joseph Kreinig's Sons, who was standing near the street door, talking with Mr. Sackett of the Sackett-Thompson Company.

"Home, Mr. Kreinig, home." Kreinig was not only considerably his junior but had inherited his business, and Mr. Bisbee spoke stiffly.

"What you doing that for? Now that these old birds have taken up three days with blatting about resolutions and amendments, the big bust begins. We're going out to Hollywood this afternoon and look over the bathing beauties. You better stay." He winked broadly.

Mr. Bisbee raised his chest and thrust his chin down between the wings of his stiff collar.

"Thank you, Mr. Kreinig," he returned coldly, "thank you, sir, but I'm a busy man."

"I know you are," the other answered, unabashed. "That's what's the matter with you; you're busy as a little bee, buzzing and buzzing, but you better wait. I got ahold of a case of old Scotch last night, and I'm going to have it on the special." Evidently he had been drinking.

"Let me say to you, sir," returned Mr. Bisbee with supreme frigidity, "that intoxicating liquors and so-called bathing beauties occupy no place in my life."

Mr. Sackett evidently approved of this rebuke, for he took Mr. Bisbee's arm and walked with him toward the door.

"Sorry to see you go, Bisbee," he said. "Been counting on a talk with you going home."

"My loss, Mr. Sackett, my loss, I'm sure." He liked to be called "Bisbee" by Mr. Sackett, a dignified and responsible merchant whose badge showed him to be vice-president of the National Retail Silverware and Jewellery Association of America.

"When my friends urged me to wait over," he continued as they stood in the warm sunlight beside the taxicab, "I said I had to go on account of important business, but I don't mind telling you that there isn't any particular business taking me. I'm in position to do pretty much as I please; my right-hand man Charley Doelger runs the store first-rate; but when I founded the business, nearly twenty-six years ago, I laid down the policy that I wouldn't ask of any employee what I wouldn't do myself. They get two weeks' vacation every summer, so that's all I take."

"Good sound policy," commented Mr. Sackett.

"I'm glad to hear you say so," said Mr. Bisbee, shaking hands before stepping into the taxi. "The approval of a merchant of your standing and experience is all the more gratifying because, as a matter of fact, there's been some opposition to my policy."

The opposition of which he spoke was not, as his auditor may have supposed, commercial, but domestic; as he drove toward the station he recalled mournfully his last altercation on the subject with his wife and his daughter Pauline. For some time they had been nagging at him to take them abroad, contending that in these days it was as disgraceful not to have been abroad as not to own a motor, and his statement that his two-weeks'-vacation policy made such a trip impossible they contemptuously brushed aside.

"The truth is," his wife had told him scornfully, "you don't want to go anywhere except to your deadly conventions. If you'd go to a place like Paris and look around a little you'd find out why people like the Murchisons and the Rathbones don't trade with you."

Her mention of the Murchisons and the Rathbones, the city's most im-

portant families, acted as a red rag upon whatever bull-like qualities may have been contained in Mr. Bisbee's nature. For years he had resented increasingly the fact that members of these families never came to his store except for insignificant repair work.

"Let me tell you, Stella," he replied, deeply moved, "if those nabobs had the local pride they'd ought to have, they *would* trade with me. It would pay 'em, too! Take those silver service plates we saw at Mrs. Emory Rathbone's reception for the Governor—they're nothing but a stock pattern. They're Kleebold & Jenks' Number Two-ought-eight, that's what they are, and I could of sold 'em to her same as any dealer in New York City. Or take Alice Murchison's pearl necklace everybody says cost fifty thousand. All I can say is, if she paid that much, she got stuck. She left it to have us look at the clasp, and I swear I could duplicate that strand for around forty-two thousand!"

"Oh, forget it!" Mrs. Bisbee gave a mocking laugh. "You'll never get their trade, my little man. You're always telling folks this town's plenty good enough for you, and you never spoke a truer word. You're a stick-in-the-mud, that's what you are—just a plain stick-in-the-mud!"

At intervals in their twenty-three years of married life Mr. Bisbee had been struck with amazement at his wife's faculty for completely misunderstanding him, but never before had she made a charge so stupefying. Stick-in-the-mud! He, of all people, a stick-in-the-mud! He, whom the *Daily Sentinel* had mentioned among the city's captains of industry, the largest retail silverware and jewellery merchant in the southeastern part of the State!

To the memory of the outrageous term, remaining with him, was definitely due the fact that he was now driving to the train; he didn't want to leave California yet; he wanted to wait over and go home with his friends; but he knew that, were he to overstay his self-imposed two-weeks' time limit, Stella and Pauline would seize upon the fact, using it as a lever for the reopening of the entire European controversy.

His reflections were frequently interrupted by the taxi-driver, who had been making money in real estate and, wishing to tell about it, kept turning around to talk, and Mr. Bisbee was relieved to find himself safe at the station.

On boarding the train he suppressed a desire to go immediately to the observation platform and instead settled himself in his Pullman section and, turning his eyes resolutely away from the window, gave attention to his mail.

The first letter he opened was from Charley Doelger, who was in charge of the store in his absence, and who mentioned, among other things, that the invitations for Alice Murchison's wedding had been engraved by a fashionable New York stationer.

This was a disappointment. Soon after the engagement was announced, Mr. Bisbee had met the young lady's father at a Chamber of Commerce

luncheon and had informed him—without making too much a point of it—that the engraver he employed was a first-rate workman who could turn out plates equal in all respects to anything done by the big New York concerns. Evidently, however, Mr. Murchison hadn't caught the idea.

A letter from his daughter Pauline, who seldom wrote to him, also mentioned the forthcoming wedding, informing him that the Murchisons (who had never before invited the Bisbees to anything) had sent them invitations. "Mamma and I are delighted," she went on, "and we want our wedding present to make an impression. She says for you to be looking round for something suitable."

"There's a nice situation for you!" Mr. Bisbee said to himself indignantly. "Have their engraving done out of town, and then practically hold me up for an expensive present. I've got a blame good notion not to send them anything at all!" The threat made him feel better, although he well knew he would not execute it. On the contrary, he would select from his stock a handsome present equal in quality and workmanship to anything the Murchisons had in their house. He would astonish them, that's what he would do, doggone them!

After lunch Mr. Bisbee went to the rear of the train and, finding the observation platform crowded, sat down in a green plush chair inside the car. Other passengers near him were also waiting for vacancies outside, but Mr. Bisbee kept close watch and was first to the door when presently a seat was vacated.

The empty place was between an old gentleman wearing a round felt hat and a lady whose chair stood in the sheltered corner. Her hat and dress were black, but there was something about them, and about the lady herself, that differentiated them from other hats, dresses, and ladies, and Mr. Bisbee, taking his seat beside her, found himself wondering, as might a person more expert than he in matters of style, what that something was. Had he been asked to describe her, he might have said that, without resembling her, she made him think of a younger, handsomer edition of Mrs. Emory Rathbone, and Mrs. Emory Rathbone, be it noted, was famous in her youth as one of the beautiful Perry girls of Cleveland.

Such an association would have sufficed to make him faintly fearful of this lady even if he had not glimpsed, as he approached, a necklace, evidently not intended to be seen, but visible beside the collar of her gown. If the pearls, as at first glance they appeared to be, were genuine, the necklace was of fabulous value, and the fact that she concealed it beneath her dress lent colour to this theory.

Having settled himself in his chair, pulled up his trousers at the knees, and put on his gray silk gloves, he turned his head slowly, as if following the

range of mountains bordering the landscape, until his eyes rested upon the lady. Pearls they certainly were, large, white, perfectly formed and of rich orient; he would stake his standing in the jewellery trade upon them.

The inspection accomplished, he took from his pocket the patent Protecto spectacles he always carried when travelling, unfolded them, and put them on. Presently, the old man in the round felt hat lighted a cigar, and the fragrance of it made Mr. Bisbee wish to smoke. He drew from his pocket one of his favourite panetelas, amputated the end with his flat gold cigar-cutter, and was about to light it when he observed that a back-draft was causing the smoke of the old man's cigar to eddy in the corner where the lady sat. He hesitated, then reluctantly returned the panetela to his pocket; but at this the lady, who had seemed unaware not only of his existence, but of the existence of all other people on the platform and in the world, turned and addressed him, saying:

"If you wish to smoke, it will not in the least trouble me."

"Thank you, madam," he replied, "thank you very much indeed."

After lighting his cigar, he sat wondering whether it would seem presumptuous to seek further conversation, but the question was settled for him automatically, for as he pondered the gap of silence widened beyond bridging.

The other occupants of the platform were for the most part young people who had lost no time in becoming acquainted and seemed now to be proceeding on the theory that shouting and squealing would advance their friendship. A ukulele and a braying tin instrument were produced, and they all began to sing, stopping only to greet section gangs and railway-station idlers with whoops and arm-waving.

Once, when the train stopped, the din drew a knot of loafers around the observation platform, and as the wheels began to turn again, one of the youths rose to his feet and leaning over the brass railing addressed the gaping crowd in a manner clearly intended to ridicule the art of political oratory, saying that the name of the great and good man to whom he referred was none other than William Jennings Bryan—although Bryan was not at the time running for any office. The other young people applauded in an exaggerated manner, and the old man in the round felt hat laughed as if he thought it very funny.

Mr. Bisbee, though he always voted the straight Republican ticket and was no supporter of Bryan, was not amused; no statesman of whatever party was in his opinion a fit subject for such jesting; this youthful disrespect for everything was undermining the foundations of the country. With the purpose of indicating disapproval he turned coldly away from the buffoons, and as this brought the lady again within his vision he saw that she was leaning forward, evidently in pain, rubbing her eye with her handkerchief.

"Don't rub it," he admonished sharply. "Try pulling the upper lid down over the lower one."

"I did. It made it worse."

"If you'll let me look at it, madam, perhaps I can help you."

She turned blindly toward him, and he slipped off his gloves, lifted the lid by the long lashes and examined the eye.

"Look down toward your nose." And as she did so: "Yes, I see it. Just a minute now—hold still. Give me your handkerchief. No, it's too soft; I'll have to use mine if you don't mind."

"Please do."

"I always carry a fresh one," he said, brushing at the eyeball with the point of the hem. "There, it's out."

She moved her eyelid up and down, doubtfully.

"The irritation will go away," he assured her. "Wash it with something soothing. Have you any witch-hazel?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I can let you have some. I use it after shaving."

At that she gave him a sudden smile.

"You are very kind and very skillful."

"It's a thing I often have to do," he replied. "I'll go and get you the witch-hazel now." But she stopped him, protesting that the eye was better.

"You are a doctor?" she asked.

"No, as a matter of fact I'm in the retail silverware and jewellery business; we have an optical department in our store, and people come in when things blow into their eyes."

"Fortunately for me," she interjected.

"It's funny how big the tiniest speck of dust feels in your eye, isn't it?" he went on. "It makes me squirm to see people suffering that way." He paused, reflecting upon the curious fact that eyes luminous and dark, like hers, suggested greater capacity for suffering than reddish-brown eyes like his wife's. Then he continued:

"You'd be surprised how many people come in the store for help, especially in spring and fall when it's windy. Not that the town's dirtier than most other places—I wouldn't want you to get that idea—but we're the third fastest growing city in the State, so we have a good deal of manufacturing and cinders."

"Many of your American cities seem to have manufacturing and cinders," she remarked.

"You're a foreigner?"

"Yes."

He was not surprised. At first it had struck him that she spoke like the Murchisons and the Rathbones, who were commonly said to affect the

English way of speaking, but the more he listened, the more he seemed to detect in her speech something even more foreign than that.

"Well," he said in the reflective tone of old Mr. Ephraim Rathbone, "we've got a great country here. There's no place under the sun that's a patch on it, I guess. I've never been abroad myself, but that's what my friends tell me." And as the lady did not answer, but only smiled faintly, he went on: "I guess the people over in England kind of wish we hadn't broken away from them in 1776, don't they?"

"I never heard an English person discuss it."

"Oh, you aren't English?"

She shook her head.

"You certainly speak it first-rate."

"I learned it before I learned my native tongue."

As he was about to inquire what her native tongue was, he was distracted by seeing her raise her handkerchief to her eye.

"Excuse me, madam, but I wouldn't rub it," he said quickly.

"No, I just want to shield it."

"Why," he exclaimed, "I don't know what on earth I could of been thinking of! Here I've got these Protecto spectacles right on my nose, and they're the very thing you need!" He hastily removed them and exhibited them to her. "An excellent article for travel. The deep bevelled rims protect the eyes from foreign substances, and the tinted lenses relieve eye-strain." He folded and unfolded them. "Notice the double-hinged nose-piece and the adjustable telescopic bars, making them compact, suitable for the purse or the vest pocket when not in use. Just try them on, madam."

"But you need them yourself."

"Not at all, I assure you." He pressed them into her hand.

"They are very comforting," she declared, having put them on. "I am most grateful, but I——"

"The pleasure is all mine, madam, all mine." He gave her a ceremonious little bow, and in obedience to a polite instinct which told him that a gentleman who has handled a lady's eye and given her a pair of spectacles ought to introduce himself, he took from his pigskin pocketbook a neatly engraved business card and gave it to her.

"Ah, yes." She glanced at the card, nodded, and tucked it into her black silk handbag, but she did not mention her name or offer him her card in return. Women, he reflected, were shyer, less experienced than men in these little niceties of travel. Never mind, he would learn her name later.

On his westward journey a friendly flagman had told him a good deal about this part of the country, and he was thus equipped with information which enabled him to point out to the lady alfalfa fields, orchards watered by irrigation ditches, and, where the land was unreclaimed, chaparral, lupine,

yellow and blue, and tall yucca plants crowned with clusters of white flowers.

Prospect holes visible here and there in the warm-coloured mountain-sides marked spots where gold and silver had been sought, and the mention of precious metals led easily to his favourite topic. He told her of his start in life, of the growth of his business, of his commercial policies, and thus he managed presently, without making too much a point of it, to draw from his pocketbook the two-column article the *Daily Sentinel* had published last year.

"You might be interested in glancing over this," he remarked in a casual tone. And partly as a hint to her, he added: "I always think it's pleasanter to know something about the people you meet, don't you?"

She assented, smiling, and as she read the article, Mr. Bisbee leaned back in his chair and tried to look modest, but he couldn't help glancing over her shoulder now and then to see what part of the article she had reached, and it thus happened that when she came to the place where the folding of the paper had all but obliterated the print, he was ready to fill in the gap.

"Right there," he said, pointing to the place, "it reads: 'At sixteen William P. Bisbee was a slender but nearly full-grown lad, with a level head and a wholesome interest in many things including——' And from there you can read on again."

She thanked him, turning her head to give him a bright smile, and when she had finished reading she smiled again as she said:

"We in Europe of course hear of America's captains of industry, and it seems quite wonderful that I should have chanced to meet one in this way."

"Oh," drawled Mr. Bisbee in the Ephraim Rathbone manner, "that's something of an exaggeration, I'm afraid. You know how newspaper men are when they come around for an interview—always trying to make the most out of everything. I guess they think it's good for the town. But"—he dropped the easy-going tone—"what they say about me being the biggest retail silverware and jewellery merchant in the southeastern section of the State—that part's perfectly true."

"I am sure it is." She held out the clipping.

"Keep it if you wish," he said generously. "I can get other copies. My wife and daughter have several around the house." This statement was not quite accurate, the extra copies of the *Sentinel* were not kept by Stella and Pauline, but were in the drawer of his desk; he felt, however, that the inaccuracy was justified because it let her know he was a family man. He was not one to sail under false colours when away from home the way young Kreinig did, and he indicated as much to his companion, telling her at length of the convention.

He had taken from his pocket the blue and silver badge of the N. R. S. J. A. A., and was exhibiting it to her, when a pleasant-faced elderly woman appeared on the platform and handed her a cape, whereupon Mr. Bisbee rose

quickly from his chair expecting to be introduced, but after they had spoken briefly in some foreign language the elder woman bowed and went in.

His first thought was that this might be the lady's mother, but the matter-of-course manner in which she accepted the service suggested that she was a companion or a maid.

"What language is that you talk?" he asked.

"French."

"I sort of thought so." He was pleased at his astuteness. "You'd certainly enjoy hearing my daughter Pauline speak French. She wants to go over there and polish it up—says her accent isn't right yet, but it sounds Frenchy enough to me. I suppose you live in Paris?"

She shook her head, saying:

"I am not French."

"No?" As she did not avail herself of the opportunity to say where she lived, he asked, but the name she spoke in reply was unfamiliar to him.

"Ma'am?"

She repeated it, but still he did not understand, and he was deterred from asking her to spell it by a fear that it was some important place he ought to know about. A woman with pearls like those didn't come from a jay town.

He was thinking about this when she rose and offered him the Protecto spectacles, saying she was going in, but he insisted that she keep them.

"You'll need them," he said, and also rose, adding: "I'll go with you and give you the witch-hazel, Mrs. uh—Mrs. uh——?"

It was a system by which he ascertained the names of customers in the store, but though he paused significantly upon the note of interrogation, she only smiled and thanked him, whereafter he followed her through several Pullmans to his own section, opened his Gladstone bag in such a way as to display the silver fittings, produced the flask of witch-hazel and handed it to her.

"Thank you very much."

"The pleasure is mine, I assure you," he returned, and before he could make up his mind whether in a case of this kind a gentleman ought to walk on with a lady to her own car, so as to open the doors for her, she was upon her way.

At dinner that night, at breakfast next morning, and again when he went to the dining car for lunch, he watched for her in vain; nor had she appeared in the observation car when, some hours after the train passed the summit of the great divide, a stop was made at a junction city, a Spanish settlement of long ago, where Indians in brilliant costumes were peddling native baskets, pottery, and trinkets.

As the stop was a long one, the cars quickly emptied, and Mr. Bisbee, who

had begun to fear that the lady's disappearance was due to further trouble with the injured eye, was pleased when he caught sight of her walking ahead of him on the wide, brick-paved platform.

"I've been reading," she told him when he overtook her.

They strolled along together looking at the squatting Indians and their wares, and came presently to the stand of a photographer where a Navajo chief was prepared to pose with all comers, the photographer agreeing to deliver three postcard photographs, stamped for mailing, before the departure of the train.

"Come," cried the lady, and taking her place beside the old brave, beckoned Mr. Bisbee.

To be photographed with an Indian seemed to Mr. Bisbee rather undignified, but the lady's manner was compelling, and he joined her, raising his chest as he faced the camera, thrusting his chin down between the points of his collar, and assuming the slight frown of the man of affairs. However, his attitude was disrupted by the savage, who held out his hand to be clasped. At first Mr. Bisbee pretended not to see the hand, but when the Indian tapped him on the arm, grunted, and renewed the offer, he was obliged to take cognizance, and drew back, shaking his head sternly.

The audacity of the Indian must have amused the lady, for she burst out laughing, and her laugh was so merry that Mr. Bisbee was forced to smile.

While waiting for the photographs to be finished, they visited a near-by shop where the lady purchased woven baskets, a pottery urn, and a bracelet consisting of wide bands of silver set with matrix turquoise, all of which were wrapped in a large bundle which Mr. Bisbee carried for her.

On returning for the photographs, he discovered that the shutter had caught him smiling. The effect wasn't bad; he and the lady were looking at each other across the Indian, and her smile was lovely in the picture, showing her nice white teeth and that sparkling look in her eyes.

"You must sign one of them for me," he said as he accompanied her to her stateroom. Evidently the elderly woman was a maid, for she relieved him of the bundle and moved to the compartment next door. It must cost an awful lot, he thought, to occupy all that space.

"Will you stop for a cigarette?" The lady sat down and offered her open case, and he took a cigarette in order to get a look at the black enamel box with its delicate diamond ornament. Then, having given her a light, he seated himself, reflecting as he did so that in view of what he always said about cigarette-smoking women, it was just as well his wife and daughter couldn't see him. There had been an argument about it just before he came away; Pauline had said smoking was fashionable, but he had told her plain enough that if the women of to-day thought less about being fashionable and more about being respectable, they'd be a whole lot better off. It was queer how he en-

joyed smoking with this lady; her being a foreigner made it seem all right.

He drew out his gold-mounted fountain pen and with a sense of victory watched as she signed her name across the bottom of the postcard photograph. Now he would know what to call her. The writing was large and angular, and there was a flourish under the signature. He sounded the syllables over to himself before venturing pronunciation.

"As near as I can make out," he said, "it's Gabriella Lescaboura."

"Yes."

"Mrs.?"

She nodded.

"Well, I'm certainly much obliged, Mrs. Lescaboura," he said, and put the photograph carefully into his pocketbook. "I'll keep this as a souvenir of a very pleasant acquaintance." He drew slowly at the cigarette and after blowing the smoke away continued reflectively: "It's funny the people you meet travelling, isn't it? People from all over. That's why I always maintain travel's broadening: there's no place like a train to study human nature."

"Very true," she said, glancing out of the window as the train slipped away from the town.

"Or you can look at it another way," he went on, "and it makes you realize how small the world is, after all. I live here in America: you live away off in Europe: but here we are."

"Exactly." She gave him a bright look.

This was a mighty interesting talk they were having; he would have enjoyed continuing it, but having finished his cigarette, felt he ought to go.

Next day, while he was at lunch, she came into the dining car, and on his way out he paused, wished her good-afternoon, and dropped a casual remark about hoping to see her later on the observation platform; but though he spent the afternoon there, she did not appear.

It was the last day of the journey, and as evening approached, he pondered the advisability of calling at her drawing room and inviting her to dine with him, and that night, as he lay in his berth, he found himself regretting that he had not mustered courage to do so. Probably she'd been sort of expecting him to invite her. He could have done it in an offhand way, as if he had just chanced to think of it as he went by. Certainly he could have done it! Now in the dark he could formulate the right words: "I was just heading for dinner and it struck me you might be going in, too. Won't you join me?"

He could imagine her face lighting up with that smile as she rose to accompany him, and could picture himself walking with her into the dining car, facing her across a softly lighted table for two, giving the waiter a dollar and saying: "George, I want you to do your best to-night." They'd have had another interesting talk; he could have told her about the time they made him chairman of the committee to consider the reorganization of the Cham-

ber of Commerce; that story would have entertained her, but probably he wouldn't ever get to tell her about it now. Too bad!

Well, anyway, he'd see her in the morning. Maybe there was something he could do for her in Chicago; if she wanted him to take her any place, he could wait over and take the one o'clock for home.

Next day he woke early and had dressed and breakfasted before most of his fellow passengers were up; but for fear of disturbing her, he did not knock on her drawing-room door until the train was entering the outskirts of the city.

"Ah," she said as her maid opened the door, "I was just going to send you these souvenirs." She indicated the package of Indian curios, adding: "For your daughter."

"Are you going to stop in Chicago?" he asked eagerly, after having thanked her.

"Only a day or two. I am sailing from New York, Saturday week."

"New York's a great city," he said, "but I wouldn't live there if they'd give me the whole town with a fence round it." He told her of the N. R. S. J. A. A. convention held in New York three years before, and having catalogued the defects of the metropolis, was speaking highly of the Hippodrome and the Aquarium when the porter came and carried out the baggage.

"It's certainly been a great pleasure to of met you, Mrs. Lescaboura," he said, "and I've been thinking maybe I could make things pleasant for you in Chicago. I know the city pretty well, and I thought, if you'd enjoy it, I'd get a taxi and take you to see Lincoln Park or the Stockyards or——"

She thanked him, saying: "I'm sorry, but friends are meeting me."

"Well, anyway," he said, disappointed, "I'll come and see you safely to the gate." He took up the package. "I don't know how to thank you for all these lovely things. Pauline'll be taken right off her feet."

The train had hardly stopped in the Chicago terminus when Mr. Bisbee got off and ran forward to her car. She was among the last to alight, and as he walked with her toward the gate he was sad at the thought of bidding her farewell.

"Mrs. Lescaboura," he began, "I hope you understand how greatly I've enjoyed the pleasure of your acquaintance. I've taken many a railroad journey, but I can truthfully say that I never before had the——"

There, however, he found himself cut short by the arrival of a gentleman with a flower in his buttonhole, who came rushing up to her, and bending over, kissed her hand. There was no mistake about it; Mr. Bisbee was right there beside them and witnessed it with his own eyes. Also he heard distinctly what the gentleman said. He said:

"I hope Your Highness had a pleasant journey."

Dazed as he was, there passed through Mr. Bisbee's mind echoes of fairy

tales read in childhood which told him what a "Your Highness" is. From the first he had sensed a mystery about her, a curious fascination, and now, like a man in the dark whose surroundings are suddenly revealed to him by a flash of lightning, he understood the pearls, the little diamond crown on the black enamel cigarette-case, the reluctance to tell her name.

And he had been calling her *Mrs.* Lescaboura!

Concluding that the easiest way out of it would be to slip off and let her think he had lost her in the crowd, he dropped behind, walking slowly and letting the maid and the porters pass him, and he was looking for some means of egress from the train shed other than the gate ahead of him, when he saw her waiting.

She had not forgotten him. As he approached, she smiled, holding out her hand.

"Good-bye, and thank you again," she said.

Mr. Bisbee took the hand, and like a man who shuts his eyes and jumps from the top of a skyscraper, bent and kissed it.

"The pleasure is all mine." He swallowed, and the sound of the ingurgitation seemed to reverberate above the station noises. "The pleasure is all mine—Your Highness."

As he put on his hat and moved away, there came from behind him a shrill cackle of Negro laughter, but instead of turning to see what caused the mirth of the coloured porters, he raised his chest, thrust his chin down between the points of his stiff collar and proceeded toward the taxi stand with the step of a dignified and very busy man.

On the journey from Chicago to his home Mr. Bisbee did not converse with other passengers but sat pondering the unbelievable experience, and the more he turned it over in his mind, the more romantic it appeared. Why, you could make a movie out of it! He could do it himself, if he had the time, and it would be a better picture than nine tenths of those you saw on the screen. The hero meets a lady in distress and without knowing who she is, hastens to her assistance. (Surely no knight of old ever aided fairer lady than he did when he picked the cinder out of her eye.) They got acquainted, and just at parting he discovers her identity.—"Your Highness!" Bowing low, he kisses her hand.

Would their paths ever cross again? Who could say? There came to him a vision in which he saw himself seated in a softly cushioned chair in the lobby of a magnificent hotel. It was in Europe. There was a fountain; an orchestra was playing and aristocratic people strolled to and fro; suddenly one of them, a beautiful dark woman in a low-neck gown, with a crown of large, high-grade white diamonds on her head, rushed over to him.—"Why, if it isn't Mr. Bisbee!"—"Yes, Your Highness, I've been travelling around some,

looking over the stock of the leading European jewellery manufacturers."

He saw himself dining with her, driving with her, the cynosure of all eyes, strolling at her side in spacious gardens, on broad flag-paved terraces, through vaulted halls with soldiers on guard at the doors—like in that movie of Mary Pickford's.

He was but half aware of realities around him when, having left the train, he took a taxi home. In his earlier fancies he saw himself alone with her, but as he neared his house the imagined scene in the hotel was amended to include his wife and daughter—though as characters distinctly minor. How they would stare when she came over to him! In the dark cab he chuckled silently. They wouldn't have any idea what to do. Usually so uppity with him, they'd find that in a pinch he was the one that knew the ropes.

The princess would be lovely to them.—"Your husband and I are old friends. You must all of you pack your bags and join us up at the castle." He guessed Stella wouldn't be calling him a stick-in-the-mud any more—not after that!

The cab stopped; he got out, and with his bags and the precious bundle started toward the front porch. There were lights in the parlour and the hall; a pleasant-looking house, he thought—nothing ostentatious, but a nice home with two bathrooms on the second floor. You could invite anybody there without apology—anybody at all. In his mind he saw Fairview Avenue filled with the automobiles of the best people. They would invite the Murchisons and the Rathbones to meet her, of course. He guessed that would give them something to think about!

The front door stood open but the screen door was hooked, and so he rang and was presently admitted by Ella, the Negro cook, who waddled down the hall wiping her hands upon her gingham apron.

"How-d'ye-do, Ella."

" 'Do, Mist' Bisbee."

"Family out?"

"No suh, Mist' Bisbee, dey upstehs. Miss Pauline, she dressin' foh pahty."

He was glad they were upstairs, for it gave him time to unwrap the Indian souvenirs, and he arranged them on the parlour table as carefully as if he had been dressing a show window in the store. When Stella and Pauline came down, they would see the presents there and would naturally ask about them; whereupon, by way of reply, he would tell his story.

After a time he heard them on the stairs.

"Oh, here's Papa," said Pauline as he went to the hall to greet them.

"I wish you'd let me know when to expect you," said his wife in an aggrieved tone. "I thought you'd be home for dinner, and I ordered too many chops."

"East or West, home's best," he remarked cheerfully, quoting from the

works of the manufacturer who had supplied the oak mantelpiece in the dining room.

"What's all this?" demanded Pauline, catching sight of the trophies.

"Indian things—a present somebody sent you."

Pauline picked up the bracelet and examined it critically.

"You don't expect me to wear a manacle like this, do you?"

"Yes, I do, when you know who it's from."

"I guess the Prince of Wales must of been at the convention," remarked his wife, but the thrust rather pleased him.

"You'll find you're not so far off as you think," he answered, but Mrs. Bisbee wasn't listening.

"I'm not going to have my parlour cluttered up with truck like this," she said.

"We'll see, we'll see," he replied, smiling mysteriously.

"We certainly will!"

"Oh, come on out with it, Papa," said Pauline. "What new victim has fallen for my frail blonde loveliness?"

"Well, what would you say, for instance, if I was to tell you it's from a princess?"

"Pooh!" she answered. "I had my palm read by a princess at the street fair last week. She had dirty fingernails and was all covered with this kind of hardware." She put down the bracelet.

"This wasn't any gipsy princess," he told her. "She's a bona fide princess and a thorough lady. She had a string of pearls that would make Alice Murchison's look like fifty cents' worth of glass beads, and she——"

"Your poor father's been seeing too many movies," interrupted Mrs. Bisbee. "Seems like his mind's giving way."

"Oh, is that so?" he retorted angrily. "Well, I tell you she *was* a princess, and a mighty good-looking one, too! I conversed with her three days, and we——"

"I bet you did!" put in his wife drily. "I hope you didn't forget to show her that write-up in the *Sentinel* that cost you fifty dollars."

"I certainly did show it to her, and I might add she was a lot more interested than certain other people I could name! Her Highness has got some sense!"

"Say, what's this 'Highness' stuff, anyway?" Pauline gazed at him curiously. "You mean to say you seriously think you picked up a real princess?"

"I object to that expression!" he said stiffly.

Pauline turned gravely to her mother.

"Some woman's been kidding him," she observed, speaking quite as if her father were not present; and before he could voice his indignation, she inquired:

"What kind of princess did she claim to be?"

"She didn't claim anything about it! The ambassador met her at Chicago. He told me who she was. If you want to see what she looks like"—he reached for his pocketbook and drew out the postcard photograph—"here's her picture that she gave me. What do you say to that?"

Pauline examined the picture and shook her head, saying:

"She's no princess, she's too good-looking. Princesses look like cows."

"Let's see," said Mrs. Bisbee. She took the photograph from Pauline's hand and scrutinized it. "I don't see how you can call that good-looking! Her mouth's big, and she smirks."

"What does she claim her name is?" Pauline asked.

"Her Highness's name," he proclaimed, lifting his chest and thrusting his chin between the points of his collar, "happens to be Princess Gabriella Lescaboura. That's her autograph on the picture."

"Who ever heard of such a name!" commented Mrs. Bisbee with a derisive laugh.

"Wait a minute, Mamma!" Pauline had dropped to her knees beside the table and was searching through the magazines on the lower shelf. "I wouldn't be surprised if it's so. I think she's the very one I was reading about!"

"Sure she is," said Mr. Bisbee confidently.

Pauline had drawn from the pile of magazines a thin one, the cover of which bore the title *Chit-Chat*, and having risen was rapidly turning the pages.

"Yes, here it is!" She looked at him as if with new eyes. "Well, what do you know about Papa!"

"Read it, read it," he invited nonchalantly, and Pauline obeyed:

" 'The beautiful Princess Lescaboura, who has been passing the winter at Santa Barbara, will soon sail for Europe, and those in the know——' "

"She's sailing a week from Saturday," he interjected.

" '—And those in the know will be interested to learn whether she rejoins her noble husband either at his château on the *Côte d'Azur* or at the Lido, for which spectacular resort he last year exhibited a marked preference.' "

"Perfectly correct, perfectly correct," said Mr. Bisbee, who was strolling up and down.

" 'The Prince and Princess,' " Pauline continued, " 'are known by those *au courant* with society in the smart resorts of Europe, as an emancipated pair. By reason of their vast wealth and their assured position, their intimates are the *crème de la crème*, but their interests are wide and their love of amusement is reflected in a distinct penchant for excursions into Bohemia.' "

"That's correct," said Mr. Bisbee, nodding. "They go there too."

Pauline read on:

" 'If, as Dame Rumour has it, the Lido attracted the dashing young nobleman because of the presence there of a svelte young *danseuse* not unknown to the Parisian stage, it must not be supposed that his Princess repined. She had, as always, a legion of admirers, and the heterogeneousness of her taste in swains was exhibited in a quartet of ardent devotees who constantly danced attendance and showed some jealousy of one another. The group was composed of a member of the Spanish royal family, an American cinema comedian, Lord Wapshott the British rubber magnate, and Mr. T. Percival Beggs of New York and Santa Barbara.

" 'It may be only a coincidence that the grounds of *Mon Plaisir*, the delightful villa which the Princess occupied at Santa Barbara, adjoin the Beggs estate, but the fact remains that within a fortnight after her Highness's arrival, the ever-watchful Vida Beggs, who is said to be six years older than her attractive polo-playing husband, dragged him off to durance vile in Honolulu, where, according to report, he sulked the winter away.' "

Mr. Bisbee stopped walking.

"How did that dirty scandal sheet get in my house?" he demanded.

"I bought it to read about this Mr. Thresher that Alice Murchison's going to marry," Pauline answered, unabashed. "It seems he was engaged to a——"

But Mr. Bisbee was not interested in the gossip about Mr. Thresher.

"I don't want to hear another word it says!" he broke in.

At that, Mrs. Bisbee spoke:

"If there is anything more about this woman your father's taken up with, read it, dearie."

"No, she won't!" he cried. "It's a pack of lies!" He turned to Pauline. "I'm surprised your mother'd let you touch such a paper! Give it here!"

"Don't you do anything of the kind, Pauline," ordered her mother. "He was pleased enough until it showed up this fine lady of his! Give it to me, dearie." She took the paper and huddled over it by the lamp, arching her back to prevent his reading over her shoulder.

"H-m!" she murmured as she read to herself. "H-m! She's a nice one! It says that while this Beggs was at Honolulu with his poor wife, your Princess Flibbertigibbet carried on with a lot of other married men. It says a young officer committed suicide on account of her. It says she——"

"Shut up!" he howled. "I tell you it's a pack of doggone lies!"

"You told Pauline to read it. Now you just listen. It says——"

"Shut up, I tell you!" He made a swift flank movement upon her, snatched the paper, tore it to shreds, and dashed the pieces upon the floor.

Never before had Mrs. Bisbee known him to commit an act even remotely approaching violence; for a moment she stood gazing at him, her reddish-brown eyes shining like a pair of glass marbles, then suddenly she burst into a shriek.

"You're in love with her! You're in love with her!"

"Have you lost your wits, Stella?"

"You're in love with her!" she shrieked again. "You've admitted it! You have no more decency than to come right in your home and *boast* about it in front of an innocent child like Pauline!"

"Don't you call *me* innocent, Mamma!" exclaimed Pauline indignantly.

Mrs. Bisbee's lip was trembling.

"That's right!" she howled at him accusingly. "Trying to turn my daughter against me, too! Taking the best years of my life and then running off like an old rooster after a woman that flounces around making fools out of married men!" She began to weep loudly, and holding her handkerchief to her eyes moved tragically toward the door.

Her weeping did not in itself surprise him, she had often wept when she wanted things, but she had never before charged him with philandering, and he followed her, addressing her with soothing words and declaring the charge preposterous, but she thrust him off with a savage backward gesture of the arm, crying:

"Don't you dare speak to me, you libertine!"

He stopped and gazed after her stupefied as she started up the stairs, then, turning to Pauline, he sighed and let his arms fall helplessly.

"Your mamma must be crazy. Nobody on earth's more respectable than me, and the Princess was as perfect a lady as I ever hope to meet. The very most I did was to kiss her hand when I——"

"Papa! You *did?*"

"It's the custom," he quickly explained. "They expect it. The ambassador did it, too. I don't want you to misunderstand, Pauline. I wouldn't have you think——"

"Papa," she broke in, taking hold of his lapels and looking gravely into his eyes, "I think it's the most romantic affair I ever heard of!"

She took up the bracelet and put it on.

"It's really handsome in a barbaric way," she said, "and the stones are lovely with this blue dress. Papa, I want you to know I'm glad this woman came into your life."

"Now, lookit, Pauline," he protested, "she didn't! You mustn't say such things! I won't——"

But there he was interrupted by the sound of steps and voices on the porch, and the ringing of the doorbell.

"It's the boys to take me to the party," Pauline said in a low voice.

"Lordy, the front door was open!" he whispered back, and as she went to let them in, he tiptoed to the dining room.

Finding the bedroom door locked against him when he went upstairs, Mr. Bisbee took his bags to the spare room and passed the night there, nor

did he encounter his wife and daughter in the morning, for they were not up when he left the house.

He couldn't see even yet how last night's disaster had come about. He had done nothing wrong, not once in their whole married life had he given Stella the slightest cause for jealousy; her own sister had told him he was too good—that being so good didn't pay. It was incomprehensible.

Well, it would be a relief to get back to the store and plunge into the routine of business. Charley Doelger would tell him what had been going on while he was away, and he would tell Charley about his trip. Not about her, though—the subject was no longer a pleasant one.

He was hardly seated at his desk behind the ground-glass partition at the back of the store when Charley came in.

"Glad to see you back, W. P." They shook hands. "What kind of a time did you have?"

"Fine, fine."

"I'm sorry you didn't wait over and come back on the special with the crowd," Charley said. "There wasn't any real need for you to hurry home."

"I know," said Mr. Bisbee, and became suddenly silent.

The other picked up the steel letter-opener and tapped with it abstractedly on the desk, and Mr. Bisbee felt a slight awkwardness, as if Charley was expecting something more. That couldn't be it, though; there was no way Charley could have heard anything. It must be his own self-consciousness.

"What's the news around town?" he asked.

"Mainly people are talking about this fellow Thresher that Alice Murchison's going to marry. This society paper printed a story about him, and I thought you might like to see it." He handed Mr. Bisbee a copy of *Chit-Chat*, indicating a passage.

Mr. Bisbee frowned.

"This is a rotten sheet, Charley," he declared, "a dirty, rotten sheet!"

"I don't know," said the other; "they say a lot of the stuff's true." His eyes seemed to be following a motor passing in the street outside.

"Well, I happen to know better!" Mr. Bisbee slapped his hand upon the desk. "In fact, I know a case where they printed a pack of doggone lies about somebody!"

Again there fell a silence, and when presently Charley departed, Mr. Bisbee felt a curious sense of relief. Reaching over, he closed the door; then he turned quickly to the page on which the Princess was mentioned, and with mounting indignation read the remaining paragraphs.

"Skunks!" he muttered savagely, and tearing the periodical in half, flung it into the wastebasket.

It was his habit to lunch daily with a group of his business friends at a

large round table in the men's café of the New Mervyn House, and when a little after noontime he entered the café he was warmly greeted. There was the usual lull while everyone was ordering; then as conversation was resumed, Mr. Bisbee heard the foghorn voice of Gus Markle addressing him across the table.

"Well, W. P.," he said, with a knowing grin, "tell us all about your princess."

Mr. Bisbee was stunned.

"I don't know what you're referring to, Gus, I'm sure," he managed to say.

"Yes, you do. Come on, 'fess up. You're not at home—you're among friends. Quit blushing and tell us."

"As a matter of fact, there's nothing to tell. She just——"

"She just showered you with expensive jewellery, from what I hear," Gus broke in.

"She didn't do anything of the kind. She sent a little silver bracelet to my daughter, that's all."

Gus exhibited an elaborate wink to the entire table, saying:

"That's how *you* tell it, you old sheik!"

A general laugh followed, and Mr. Bisbee was enormously relieved when, as it died down, the subject was changed.

Through the remainder of the meal he tried to talk coherently, and when luncheon was over he managed to leave the hotel at Gus Markle's side.

"Where'd you find out all that stuff?" he asked in what was intended to be an offhand tone.

"Oh," said Gus, "a little bird told me."

Mr. Bisbee had some thought of asking him not to mention the matter further, but he decided against it; if Gus found out it bothered him, he'd keep it up. And after all, he reflected, Gus joshed everybody. Nobody was likely to take him very seriously.

The little bird had apparently been active. That afternoon Miss Annie Prall, who had been a schoolmate of Stella's, called to see Mr. Bisbee.

"If I wasn't such a good friend of yours," she began when they were closeted in his office, "I wouldn't come to you about it."

"It" proved to be a distorted version of the princess story, and the declared purpose of Miss Annie's call was to announce to Mr. Bisbee that he was breaking his wife's heart.

"She's the kind that suffers in silence," she told him.

When Mr. Bisbee had recovered somewhat from the stupefaction into which this statement plunged him he assured her indignantly that the tale, as she had told it, was false.

"If you say so of course I believe you," said Miss Annie as she rose to go, but he was by no means sure she left the store convinced.

Nor was this the only occurrence to disturb him before he reached home that night. As he walked up State Street after having closed the store he caught sight of Mr. Gidding, the pastor of his church, and the latter, instead of stopping as usual to speak to him, passed rapidly on, giving him a hurried bow and—unless Mr. Bisbee's nerves caused him to imagine it—a searching look.

He was apprehensive as he entered the house, but at dinner he perceived to his relief that Stella's anger of the night before had given place to a fixed air of injured resignation. At least it would be possible to talk to her.

Dinner over, he mustered up his courage and, without rancour, told Stella and Pauline how the story had spread; whereupon they both began to talk rapidly, each declaring that it couldn't be her fault. From his unravelling of what they said, he gathered that his wife, in her anguish, had felt the need to confide in someone, and had selected Annie Prall because to Annie a confidence was sacred, and that Pauline had merely exhibited her bracelet at the party last night.

"That must be how Mr. Markle found out," she said. "I showed it to his brother."

"Really, Pauline," put in Mrs. Bisbee self-righteously, "I'm surprised at you gossiping about your papa like that."

"Well, I didn't tell 'em much, anyway. I just mentioned about his meeting her and kissing her hand, and I kind of laughed and said Papa was getting to be quite a sheik."

"Kissing her hand?" cried Mrs. Bisbee. "I didn't know about his kissing her hand."

"Oh, gosh!" He bent over, resting his forehead in his hands. "Here I've worked all this time—it'll be twenty-six years the tenth of next September—to build up a name in this city as an honest merchant and a good family man—why, a fellow said there was talk of running me for mayor—and now this kind of a story gets around! Oh, *gosh!*"

"I don't see what's the matter, Papa," said Pauline.

"Why, it's enough to ruin my business! You don't think men want their wives and daughters buying rings and wristwatches from a sheik, do you?"

"You ought to of thought of that before you took up with such a woman!" said his wife in a tone that threatened a renewal of last night's outburst.

"Listen, Stella," he said quickly, "you understand I'm not criticizing anybody—not a bit—but I wouldn't advise either of you to go around talking any more about this matter. I'm not asking you to do anything I'm not going to do myself. *I'm* not going to talk about it. No sir, I'm not going to say a *word*."

As matters turned out, he did not strictly keep his pledge. Charley Doelger's attitude during the next day or two convinced him that the story had reached his ears, and as he did not broach the subject, Mr. Bisbee decided to speak of it himself.

"Of course I've heard of it," Charley admitted when questioned; "it's all over town."

"Well, you don't believe it, do you?"

"The way I look at such things," the other replied in what seemed to Mr. Bisbee an evasive manner, "it's none of my concerns as long as it doesn't hurt business. I believe in being broad-minded. A man's private life's a matter for him to decide. As long as business is good, it isn't any of my affairs if you was to start up a harem."

"Harem?" repeated Mr. Bisbee, dazed.

"I tell you, W. P.," Charley repeated doggedly, "it's only the business I'm thinking about. A scandal can do a lot of harm that way. You take the case of that dentist that was in the papers awhile back; he had a fine practice, but it busted him flat when they found out he was a bigamist."

Mr. Bisbee felt as if he were strangling. "If anybody was to say I'm a bigamist," he exclaimed, "I'd beat his head off!"

In the ensuing days there were moments when he wished that someone would come up and face him with a definite charge. That would be better than this feeling that people were slyly inspecting him, talking him over, stopping their conversations suddenly at his approach. Everyone seemed to be thinking about it, and there was no way of knowing what it was they were thinking.

His distress was intensified by a sense of loneliness. There was no one who understood. Home, the usual refuge of a man in trouble, was the last place to which he could turn for sympathy. There, more than anywhere else, he tried to conceal his wretched state of mind. His wife, when she remembered, continued in her rôle of martyr; but he never knew when some trifling incident would set her off on a tirade. She developed, moreover, a prescience which savoured of the supernatural, the first exhibition of which occurred when Pauline, starting for a week-end at a friend's house, borrowed the fitted bag he had taken with him on the California trip.

"Papa," she remarked as she carried it downstairs, "did you know there's a bottle missing?"

"Is there?"

"Oh, don't act as if you didn't know!" snapped his wife. "You know as well as I do where that witch-hazel went!"

Nor was that her only exhibition of a ghastly power of divination.

Smoking his after-dinner panatela a few nights later Mr. Bisbee was dimly aware that details of a party planned by Pauline were under discussion.

"Out at Eleanor's," he heard his daughter say to her mother, "all the girls smoked. It makes me feel like a flat tire not to give them cigarettes when they come here."

"In regard to the conduct of others," said Mrs. Bisbee, "your papa's very particular."

"I've been thinking about your smoking," Mr. Bisbee put in, looking ruminatively at the end of his cigar. "Maybe I've been a little bit narrow-minded about it. I wouldn't want you to make a habit of it, but when you're giving a party I guess it would be all right for you to pass the cigarettes. Don't you think so, Stella?"

Instead of answering the question, his wife leaned suddenly forward and thrusting an accusatory finger under his nose, exclaimed:

"*That woman smokes!*"

Nevertheless, when three weeks had gone by, he felt somewhat encouraged, things were on the whole improving at home, and his fear that the gossip might hurt his business was apparently unfounded; sales had, upon the contrary, increased, owing to the purchase of presents for the Murchison wedding, now ten days off, and even Charley Doelger's pessimism was visibly lifting.

Then, from what appeared to be a clearing sky, there crashed a devastating bolt.

Late one afternoon, as Mr. Bisbee was putting his desk in order before going home, Charley, white-faced and nervous, appeared in his office.

"They've got you in *Chit-Chat!*" he exclaimed, and flung the paper on the desk.

Dizzily Mr. Bisbee stared at the marked passage:

". . . Her Highness's taste for bizarre associations was amusingly exampled in an intimacy she formed on her railroad journey eastward. This time the man was a jeweller hailing from a Midwestern city; gossip has it that expensive gifts changed hands, and that on reaching home he had difficulty in explaining his share in the transaction to his wife. It may be safely predicted that the Princess will encounter no such embarrassment. Always she returns with new trophies of the chase. The Prince is used to it.

"Meanwhile the little jeweller, having been carried through the heavens in the lady's flaming chariot, is said to wear above his heart a photograph bearing a tender inscription, and has become a seven-days' wonder to his fellow townsfolk."

"I thought you'd better see it before you go home," Charley said.

"That's right. Much obliged." There was a croak in Mr. Bisbee's throat as he swallowed. "Anyway," he added with an instinct to snatch at the least straw of comfort, "they don't mention me by name—or the town." He looked up into Charley's face, hoping for encouragement, but received none.

"They mention the town in the next paragraph," he said. "It's about this man Thresher. I wouldn't be surprised if she'd break off the engagement and the presents would be dumped back on our hands."

When Mr. Bisbee entered his house that evening, he found Stella waiting for him in the hall, a copy of *Chit-Chat* in her hand.

"I know, I know," he exclaimed wearily, waving her off and sinking into a chair. "You can go ahead."

She had advanced upon him aggressively, but now she paused, demanding: "What do you mean—go ahead?"

Leaning over, his elbows on his knees, he gazed at the carpet as he replied: "Go ahead with anything you like."

"Oh-h-h!" she cried shrewdly. "So *that's* your game?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Yes, you do! But you can get it right out of your head! If you think you can get me to divorce you, so you can——"

"Oh, rats!" said Mr. Bisbee. Suddenly he sat up and looked at her. "I tell you one thing, though: If there's any such thing as legal justice in this country, those *Chit-Chat* people are going to pay! Yes, sir, I'll make 'em pay if it takes my last doggone nickel!"

He heard Pauline come skipping up the steps and the slam of the screen door.

"I guess you've heard the news?" she said brightly, looking from one parent to the other. "Isn't it great!"

"What you say?" Mr. Bisbee felt as if he were going mad.

"Except the Murchisons," she said, "we're the first people in this town to be mentioned in *Chit-Chat*. Do you realize that? It isn't going to be the Murchisons and the Rathbones any more—it's going to be the Murchisons and the Bisbees." She sang a bugle-like "Ta-*ta!*" and raising her arms, swung grandly around the room, stopping in front of her amazed father.

"Say, Papa, can I borrow the Princess's photograph? The girls are dying to see it."

"My gosh!" he cried. "I should say you can't!" And observing his wife's eye fastened upon him, he hurriedly added: "Anyhow, I guess I wouldn't hardly know where to look for it."

The last statement was perhaps excusable as a defensive measure. The photograph, as he well knew, was in the pigskin pocketbook, and the pocketbook was exactly where *Chit-Chat* said it was, and it was in the same place next morning when, after having telephoned Charley Doelger of his purpose, he headed for the law offices of Rathbone, Ewing & Todd. The services of such a lawyer as Mr. Emory Rathbone would be expensive, but what did he care! He was in fighting mood.

Having told his story to Mr. Rathbone, he handed him a copy of the society paper but the lawyer laid it on his desk, remarking:

"Yes, I've seen it."

"I guess everybody has," said Mr. Bisbee grimly. "What I want now is to make that editor pay for what he's done to me."

The attorney shook his head.

"You can't get damages," he said. "They didn't mention you by name."

"Everybody knows it means me."

"Yes, but you can't touch them. They libel people right and left but keep within the letter of the law. In any case it is extremely doubtful that you could prove damage. In point of fact I shouldn't be surprised if this turned out to be rather a good thing for you."

Again Mr. Bisbee felt the proximity of madness. People were continually saying topsy-turvy things to him with an air of talking sense. Last night it was Pauline, now it was Mr. Rathbone.

"Let me illustrate," the lawyer went on. "Though Mrs. Rathbone reads *Chit-Chat*, she is not inclined to wink at lapses from the moral code. This morning at breakfast she read this item to me, then she said: 'That reminds me—I haven't yet bought Alice's wedding present. I must go down to-day and see if I can find something at Bisbee's.' "

"You don't say!" Mr. Bisbee was astounded. "Why, I don't believe Mrs. Rathbone's ever bought so much as a——"

He was interrupted by the entrance of the lawyer's secretary.

"Mr. Bisbee's office wants him on the phone," she said, and Mr. Rathbone pushed the desk instrument toward him.

"Hello?"

"You better come right over here, W. P." It was Charley Doelger speaking in a low, excited voice. "Alice Murchison and her mother are here. They're looking for presents for the bridesmaids."

"Hang on to them, Charley—I'll be right over!"

He rose and shook hands with Mr. Rathbone.

"This talk's done me a world of good," he said enthusiastically. "I wish I could stay longer, but you know what it is to be a busy man."

He sped to the store and having entered at the rear, advanced to the counter at which Charley was exhibiting diamond bar pins to the two ladies.

"I'll wait upon Mrs. and Miss Murchison myself, Mr. Doelger." Charley stepped aside. "Have you found what you desire?" As Mr. Bisbee addressed the mother, he was aware of the daughter's keen eyes, taking him in.

"I rather like this one, Alice." Mrs. Murchison, with a bar pin in her hand, answered him indirectly.

"I don't," said her daughter. "Bar pins are old stuff."

"Mr. Doelger," said Mr. Bisbee, "will you kindly step to the vaults and

get our new line of J. & G. gold mesh bags and vanity cases? Bring them to the private office please." And explaining to the ladies, "You can examine them more comfortably there," he led the way to the back of the store.

At the office door he stood aside and bowed them in, and as he followed, began:

"Unusually fine weather we're——" He stopped abruptly. There on the desk, where he had tossed it on his return from Mr. Rathbone's office, was the copy of *Chit-Chat*.

"Yes," he said, waving an arm toward the window, "just look at that sunlight out there." As he spoke, he crossed swiftly to the desk and, sitting on the edge of it, between them and the paper, reached back with one hand and tucked it under the blotting pad.

"In fact," he continued, "I don't ever remember such fine weather at this time of year."

"No cinders," remarked Alice Murchison, and it struck him as curious that she should say such a thing.

Charley came with the trays.

"You might also get those new cigarette cases, Mr. Doelger," said Mr. Bisbee, as, quickly producing his gold match case, he gave Alice a light.

To the vanity cases and mesh bags she paid little attention, but when the cigarette cases arrived, she took one of them up, saying:

"This one's perfect."

"But don't you think," Mrs. Murchison asked him, "that cigarette cases make a rather strange gift for bridesmaids?"

"In my younger days," returned Mr. Bisbee tactfully, "we might of thought so; but not any longer, madam, not any longer."

"Certainly not," said Alice. "This'll be just the thing."

"The very one I had in mind," he said. "It happens to be a novelty much in vogue at the present time in the smart resorts of Europe."

"Send me six of them." She rose. "Come along, Mother; I'm late for the hairdresser." But instead of following Mrs. Murchison from the room, she crossed, put her cigarette in the ash tray, and leaning on the desk as if in no hurry, asked: "When can you deliver them?"

"Before the end of the week," he assured her. He observed that her hand was resting idly on the edge of the blotting pad, and that her fingertips were touching the back of the magazine, which protruded slightly.

"That'll do nicely," she said. Now, in an absent-minded manner, she was plucking at the magazine as she gazed thoughtfully out of the window, but even when she turned her eyes again to Mr. Bisbee she did not seem to notice the eager gesture with which he invited her toward the door.

"You'll receive them in good time without fail, Miss Murchison."

She was actually drawing the magazine out now, and he gestured toward the door again.

"You are really satisfied that cigarette cases aren't in bad taste for a wedding?" she asked. The copy of *Chit-Chat* was now in full view.

"Absolutely." He backed toward the door, hoping she would follow.

"Well," she said, "I'm glad you feel that way. I wouldn't want to make Mother uncomfortable, you know." She stopped pulling at the magazine and with her fingers began to drum abstractedly upon the cover.

"Naturally not."

"In fact, Mr. Bisbee," she went on, looking at him brightly, "I wouldn't want to make *anybody* uncomfortable—not for the world. It makes one so uncomfortable to be uncomfortable, doesn't it?" And with that, never having once glanced at the detested journal, she passed out of the room and walked rapidly to the front of the store where her mother was waiting.

"We must hurry, Mother—I'm late, you know," he heard her say. Now the bewildering young woman was in haste again. She seemed strangely erratic, he thought. Nerves, probably. Lucky she didn't look down when she was fooling with the paper. A narrow squeak, but it had turned out all right. He knew she hadn't seen it, for she was laughing as she drove away.

It was a busy day at the store of the William P. Bisbee Company; before mid-day Mrs. Emory Rathbone came in, and under the personal attention of Mr. Bisbee himself, purchased as a wedding gift a handsome set of sterling silver table ornaments; the counters were crowded throughout the afternoon, and before closing time all previous sales-records had been surpassed.

"Gosh, but my feet are tired," Mr. Bisbee said exultantly to Charley as they closed the vault for the night.

"Mine too," said Charley. "I been looking all day for a breathing spell to ask you what the lawyers said. Are you going to sue that paper?"

"Well," replied Mr. Bisbee, "there's two ways of looking at a proposition like that, Charley." He drew a panetela from his vest pocket and lighted it. "Of course, they'd ought to be punished. A man can face things out, but they dragged the fair name of a perfect lady through the muck and mire, and I'd like to soak them for it. On the other hand, though, a lawsuit takes up lots of time, and I'm a busy man, Charley."

He was in high spirits as he headed for home; even the thought of Stella was not sufficient to depress him; after all, he reflected, she had a grievance, though it wasn't in any way his fault. No wife would want her husband's name bandied about like that. Lately she hadn't been hammering at him quite so much, and she certainly took the *Chit-Chat* story better than he expected. He ought to do something for her. If business kept on improving, he would, too. Yes, sir, she had it coming to her. He turned the matter over in his mind as he walked, and before he turned into Fairview Avenue there came to him a happy thought.

He carried his cheerfulness into the house with him—telling Stella and Pauline the good news from the store, and it was not until they were seated at supper that his wife inquired about his interview with Mr. Rathbone.

"He has the matter under advisement," he replied evasively, informed by some instinct that it would be best to let her learn gradually that the suit was abandoned. "A lawsuit's an expensive thing. It's not a thing you want to jump into without due consideration. In fact, the great reason why I'd like to sue those lying scoundrels is on your account." He put a piece of pie in his mouth, and after a moment of reflective mastication, continued:

"Yes, Stella, I been thinking a lot about the hardship all this gossip's been to you, and I certainly intend to make it up to you."

"It's about time you thought of me," she said.

"Well, that's what I been doing, all right, and I guess you and Pauline'll be suited first-rate when you know what I've got in mind. Understand, I don't say positively I'll do it, but the way things are looking at the store, I expect I can." He leaned back, beaming at them, and announced: "As a matter of fact, I'm thinking of knocking off work for a while next summer and taking you both to Europe."

"Oh, Papa!" Pauline clapped her hands ecstatically, but from Mrs. Bisbee there came no sign of pleasure.

Bending forward, she fixed him with a shrewd scrutiny, demanding:

"Do I look as if I was born yesterday?"

"Why, what's the matter, Mamma?" Pauline asked, astonished.

Her mother ignored her, and narrowing her lids as she gazed at him, went on:

"Don't imagine you fool me, William Bisbee! I know why you want to go to Europe. It's that woman again!"

It was not until the following spring that there burst upon the community a piece of news sufficiently sensational to divert from Mr. Bisbee the last remnants of his fame.

Alice Murchison Thresher, who had started with her husband on a leisurely trip around the world, suddenly left him and came home to live, and rumours concerning the reason for the separation ran riot through the town. According to one report Alice could not endure the thought of returning to a mother-in-law who had chronic hiccoughs, but the prevailing story was that her husband had stolen her pearls and sold them to a Chinaman.

In the succeeding weeks the topic was continually discussed. Would she or would she not divorce him? If she did divorce him, would the truth come out? When she had divorced him, would she take up again with poor Roger Rathbone, who, according to his friends, was not a real drunkard but drank because he loved her so?

Under the furious torrent of new gossip Mr. Bisbee found himself and his last-year's romance submerged and apparently forgotten; people no longer pointed him out or suddenly stopped talking when he approached; Pauline had put away the bracelet, and Stella, if she had not ceased to nag him, had at least ceased to nag on the old theme. Every week he looked through *Chit-Chat* surreptitiously, but he found no further mention of himself or even of the Princess Lescaboura. He wondered how she was, whether she had seen the paragraph linking him with her, whether she sometimes thought of him in far-away America. Probably she had forgotten all about him. Thus, though it was spring, his spirit was autumnal, he was lonely with a sense of something missing out of life.

The saddening consciousness he had of dropping back into dull old ways culminated one evening when he came home and found himself involved in a new argument. Stella and Pauline had decided that the sedan was inadequate to their needs and that, since the new country club would soon be opening, they ought to have a chauffeur and a limousine. They had, moreover, settled on the kind of limousine they wanted, and it was expensive.

When he mildly protested, Stella became angry.

"It's only that I don't want to throw money around," he said. "I mustn't stop laying it by."

"I should think you'd have enough pride to want your wife and daughter to make a good appearance when they drive up to a fashionable club."

"I've got enough pride," he answered gently, "to want to leave my wife and daughter well fixed."

"Do you imagine I don't know you?" Stella asked bitterly. "You've always been the same, and you always will be. Here Pauline and I are making a lot of desirable friends, getting away from the rag-tag-and-bobtail crowd we used to go with, and what help do we get from you? None! You're nothing but an old stick-in-the-mud!"

Stick-in-the-mud! She had called him that before—he who at the present rate would soon be the largest retail silverware and jewellery dealer in the entire State! He, of all people, a stick-in-the-mud!

The memory of the outrageous term lingered with him as he went downtown next morning, giving him a new sense of the futility of life.

He entered the store, and on his way back to the office took the morning mail from Miss Glick, but instead of opening the letters when he reached his desk, he fell into a fit of abstraction and sat staring at the carpet.

What was it all about? What was he struggling for? Why was he always hoping that some day Stella would understand him and treat him decently? Surely by this time he ought to know better than that.

The large clock on the wall near by struck nine, reminding him that another business day had begun. He took up his steel letter-opener and ran

through the pile of mail, swiftly slitting the successive envelopes until he came to a large oblong one of crisp, light-blue paper. Being unlike the envelopes he was accustomed to, it made him mildly curious, and he turned it over. It bore foreign stamps, and the moment he saw the bold, angular handwriting his heart leaped and he snatched the letter out and with fingers that trembled in their eagerness, unfolded the single sheet of paper.

At the upper left corner a coronet was stamped in dark blue, and at the right the name of a château.

Rapidly he read:

Dear Mr. Bisbee:

Last year when I was crossing the American continent you were so good as to give me a pair of patent eyeglasses which have been most useful. Having broken them, and being unable to find any like them over here, I was quite in despair until to-day I found your card.

Will you please send me two pair of the glasses at the above address and let me know the amount due?

Pray accept my best wishes.

Sincerely yours,
Gabriella Lescaboura

P. S. I do not forget your kindness.

G. L.

She did not forget! There, in her beautiful brave writing, over the initials that stood for her beautiful name, was the assurance! He laid the letter on the desk before him and, without removing his eyes from it, drew out his pocketbook, felt for the postcard photograph, extracted it, and put it down beside the letter. That noble signature! How inexpressible the happiness with which he looked on it again! In his eardrums he could feel the quickened beating of his heart.

"This proves it!" he murmured. "I always said truth is stranger than fiction."

Once more kind Providence vouchsafed a chance to serve her. Ah, could she but know with what tumultuous joy he welcomed the opportunity! So, ever, he would welcome it. She could ask of him nothing that he would not do—nothing! The efficiency, the resourcefulness which had made the William P. Bisbee Company practically the leading firm in the State, would be at her command so long as breath remained in his body. Always he would be ready, waiting, when from across the world should come her call!

She alone had never failed to understand him. Without her the world would be empty. A tear trickled down his cheek. Faugh! He brushed it away. Tears were not for men. He must not weaken. He stiffened his spine, sitting erect in his swivel chair, and as he did so, his spirit stiffened.

Now in his imagination great iron-studded doors swung back against stone

walls and brass-throated bugles sang. Snatching the letter-opener he leaped to his feet and raised it with a sweeping gesture.

"Your Highness!"

He was a hussar of the guards with sword at the salute—a sword which, at need, could flash in her defense. He narrowed his eyes and with one hand poised behind him, pointed the weapon grimly as if holding off the blade of a determined adversary.

"For a lady's name!"

Let them come! He was more than a match for them all.

He would meet steel with cold steel, fighting for her until life itself paid the forfeit.

1926: *from Harper's Magazine*

BUBBLES

by Wilbur Daniel Steele, whose "Bubbles" is the earlier of his two first-prize stories in this series. "Can't Cross Jordan by Myself" received the same honor in 1931. Of the thirty-four volumes already published in the O. Henry Memorial Awards, *one third of them contain stories by Wilbur Daniel Steele (two of his works being represented in 1925). In 1921 he received a special award (presented by the* O. Henry *committee) for maintaining the highest level of merit for three years among American short story writers. In any survey of the American short story his works would be outstanding for their originality, their vigor, and their splendid craftsmanship.*

After graduating from the University of Denver, Mr. Steele studied for a career in painting. He served as a naval correspondent during World War I, and after the war traveled extensively. He is the co-author of two plays and the author of several books. His books include Diamond Wedding, That Girl from Memphis, Their Town, Full Cargo: More Stories, *and others. Mr. Steele makes his home in Lyme, Connecticut.*

Carol lived in hotels, and her governess was always being mistaken for her mamma. Or it might be her trained nurse or it might be Daddy's secretary

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who was mistaken for her mamma. Most often it was governess. Miss Flower, Miss Runkle, Madame Dunaye, respectively in Nice, on the Isle of Man, and in Deauville, were governesses. But Miss Tolley, in Florida, was Daddy's secretary. And Mrs. Kenyon (with long silky legs and an amount of pale-gold hair) was Carol's trained nurse for nearly three months at Capri, though fortunately Carol was not ill a day of the time.

It was a little confusing at first, each time, for in a way they all seemed much alike. One had to remember arbitrarily, that was all, just as one had to remember that whereas two "f's" hitched together make "double-f," two "v's" hitched together make a "double-*u*." Moreover, Coddie helped her. "Do mind now, child; if anyone's to ask you, Miss Runkle is your governess. *Not* Daddy's secretary, this time, but Carol's *governess*." Coddie was severe about this, unnecessarily so, it seemed to Carol, upon whom would be lost the glitter of an ironical amusement in the nurse's sea-gray eyes.

Coddie was middle-aged, and broad, and ate with Carol and not with Daddy. No matter who was governess, Coddie did the governing; no matter who was trained nurse, Coddie did the nursing; and even if it happened to be a secretary, it was Coddie who got the letters from the concierge, the commissionaire, or the desk clerk, and arranged them on the table in Daddy's room. And beyond all, Coddie was permanent.

It had never occurred to Carol to wonder what would have happened to the world had Coddie not been permanent. Perhaps it had to Mr. Bonaparte. Perhaps that was why he was always so polite to her, poor man, walking lightly among his words with her, as a man (and a little ashamed of it) walking on tiptoe past a sleeping dog.

Mr. Bonaparte was of medium height, well set up, with fair hair and moustache waxed at the points, and blue eyes which had a way of widening abruptly sometimes, like the eyes of some people who suffer from the pangs of unadmitted maladies. At forty-one he had habitually a deep line which, springing from between his eyes, divided into dozens of creases all over his forehead, as fine as threads and as tangled as the hunting of the Wandering Jew. This wasn't always, to be sure. Sometimes his brow was as smooth as a boy's. Such were the times when Carol admired him most, and Coddie, knowing by the signs what was in the air, admired him least of all.

Coddie admired him most when she was seeing him most, that is, when there were but the three of them, and Mr. Bonaparte cleaved grimly to the apartment, and grew white of conscience and rumpled of soul and clothing, alternately tender and sharp with Carol, and (for once) defiantly spleenish with Coddie herself, till he was like a lean wolf prowling the windows by day, and by night, in his slippers, the bedroom floor.

Carol admired him most when she was seeing him least. Not for more than scattered minutes in whole days. A "good-morning" perhaps, and late in the

morning, too, after she had been brought back from her walk in Central Park or Kensington Gardens or along the Croisette or the Lido sands, and he still in bed, like all the princes charming of Coddie's tales rolled in one, with his brow smoothed out and an adventurous kindness in his big, blue, far-off eyes. And after that only in chance glimpses—Daddy in the distance in High Street helping a lady into a motor car—Daddy in a vista of the Casino gardens at tea with a lady under a striped umbrella—or after the lights were lit and Carol in her bed, a blur of Daddy in the hallway in shining black and white and tails.

Oh, how splendid he was! It was queer: Carol was proud and jealous all in one. She wished she were dying, so he couldn't go but must stay and be distracted about her. Yet just as fiercely she wanted him to go—out where the clustered lights were and the admiring throngs. "Do look: who *is* that wonderful *man?*" . . . "But don't you know? You know the girl with the red-brown curls and the green jacket and gaiters—well, *that's her father!*" Between the two wants she wept, and often she would be asleep before she could make up her mind which one she was mostly weeping for. . . . And presently, one day, "I shouldn't be surprised," she would confide to Coddie, "if Daddy were looking out for somebody for me—like a governess."

Why did Coddie make it sound so odd when she echoed, "I shouldn't be surprised."

So they weren't surprised when the trunks appeared in the rooms, and when Daddy, as if he had been on the point of forgetting to mention it, called back from the door on his way to luncheon, "By the way, might just pack things up, you know; we're leaving for the south to-morrow" (or "for Scotland" or "for America"). Nor were they surprised when, arriving at the station, they found one seat in their compartment occupied by a lady, and the lady was Carol's governess.

Or in America, of course, it would be in the Pullman. That was where Miss Tolley was, in the bright low cave of the two seats and the berth made up above, and porters and other passengers stepping on one's heels, and Daddy with his face pressed to the window as if trying to think what he might have forgotten, while he said in the back of his mouth, "This is Miss Tolley, Carol. Miss Tolley is going to do some secretarial work for Daddy down in Florida."

Miss Tolley was small and dark and quick, and she had enthusiasms. She adored things. She adored the sea. She spent lots of time at Miami on the beach in an old-rose bathing costume, but she never went into the water. Coddie had funny ways of saying things to herself aloud. Later on she said to herself that Daddy had "let the Tolley go" for just that—that she "never went into the water." . . . Miss Tolley liked perfumes.

Mrs. Kenyon did not like perfumes. She liked black coffee, black cigarettes,

black Italian shawls, which was interesting, since she was so distinctly unblack herself, but all creamy and pale gold in the hot white Capri sun.

They were all different in little ways. Madame Dunaye disliked anything flavoured with pistachio and wore a ribbon across her forehead to make it look wide and low, and she and Daddy went to the races.

Miss Flower was an English girl. Sometimes she grew red and at other times she cried. At the Manx Arms, where she was with them, she asked Coddie to let her have one of Carol's lesson books, and sometimes when people looked at her she would come and get Carol, and they would sit in the gardens and read together, much to Coddie's amusement later on. Miss Flower wouldn't go near the water (though it wasn't like Miss Tolley—it was sadder). On the steamer all the way across to New York she would hardly look at the waves, and unless she was tramping the deck with Daddy she was always hidden away somewhere inside, alone. Carol asked her why. Then she told Carol. "My father and my two brothers were fishermen. They were all lost at sea."

One night Miss Flower stole into the stateroom while Coddie was out. She got on her knees by Carol's berth and put her face in the blankets and sobbed. "Is it because you are frightened of being drowned?" Carol asked her.

Miss Flower was a slow, big, hale person, and there was a silk of down on the arms she flung around Carol suddenly, without a word.

"Or why, then?" Carol persisted, feeling puzzled and responsible.

"Nothing! Nothing! Except that I—I—*wish you were mine!*"

That's an odd kind of a governess.

Miss Flower wept too at the High Ridge House in the White Mountains. One night she wept nearly all night long. It must have been over something she and Daddy were discussing late, for she was in Daddy's room, where Carol could hear her sobbing. She could hear Daddy too. Once she heard distinctly what he said. "You've got to be quieter, I *beg* of you, Clare! Good God! this isn't the Continent, remember—this is America." And once he too sobbed.

He took Carol for a long tramp next day. When they got back home to the High Ridge House Miss Flower was gone.

Times like that—just when someone was gone, and before Daddy had begun to grow fidgety—were the times above all that Carol loved. It didn't mean just the one tramp. There were dozens. Up hill and down dale, hand in hand, woods like Persian rugs where autumn was commencing, little clouds in the clear, and blue shadow splashes; boot nails ringing on the rocks, Daddy in rough tweeds, a big brown pipe going, instead of so many cigarettes.

There was a hillside facing the sun, a field running down to a pine forest that, in its turn, ran down into a shining river. There was the ruin of a house,

and on an outer corner of the old foundation they sat and let their legs hang over. And Carol began to feel queer.

"Old Girl," Daddy was saying, "what are you going to remember about your dad? Whatever do you suppose you think you really think of him?"

Think? Oh, she couldn't *think*. Somehow, the way she loved him—the way she was thrilled by his bigness and kindness and handsome strength, so that sometimes she was almost scared to know that he was there with her, undivided, monopolized—somehow or other, it was more than she cared to tackle in words. There are times in the heart of woman when lightness is the only way out.

"I like," she said (though she was feeling queerer all the while), "the way your moustache does at the ends, like the lances knights level at dastard cravens." She squeezed his hand to make him understand this was whimsicality. "And I like the way this suit smells."

Daddy burst out laughing, twisting still tighter the moustache ends. "Ah, woman, woman!"

But then he stopped and his face grew red. After that it turned a greeny white, like the faces one sees in deck chairs. For a while he sat and hugged his knees. So he hadn't understood after all.

He said, "Old Girl, Daddy needs something. Daddy needs people. Daddy's not much good in this world without—somebody."

Oh, but couldn't he *see*? Idiot! there were tear drops in his eyes.

But now Carol was feeling queerer than ever.

"Daddy," she said before she knew it, "have we ever been here before?"

"Here?" He stared at her, blinking. "No!" Then he looked down the pasture to the woods and river, and gave a sort of start. "I see what you mean."

If he saw what she meant, certainly Carol didn't.

"Daddy, listen to me. Was I ever—did I ever have a mamma?"

Daddy kept on looking steadily at the river. "By George, I see what you mean," he repeated to himself. He slid from the wall and put his hands up. "Come, jump." But *her* face was the funny colour now. "Lord!" he said, "what's wrong? Tummy?"

That was it. Presently she was ill-and-up-with-it in a corner of the wall. They laughed over it as they tramped back across the world. "What a silly thing to do!" . . . "What a perfectly!" Yet it was a little because they felt they had to. There was a change. That was the last of their walks just then.

Daddy went under again. Anyone could see how vilely he hated to. The looks he gave Carol sometimes! It was as if he were a wolf in a forest, but the forest was enchanted, and even while he prowled and growled his horridest he was all the while trying to tell one with his dumb eyes that he wasn't really a wolf at all but a prince under the spell of an evil sorcerer.

by Wilbur Daniel Steele

It was growing late in the season and the hotel was nearly empty, and there was nothing but the hotel in miles. Carol and Coddie discussed governesses.

"He'll hardly find one *here*," Carol decided, and Coddie concurred.

Bored! How bored Daddy was! Not just yawning bored. It was a more positive thing; more like a disease he had to fight, and tried to fight, sometimes angrily and sometimes in dull despair. His trousers bagged at the knees and the ends of his moustache came undone. The hotel followed his mood; servants were laid off, the wooden corridors sounded hollower and hollower.

Then one morning Coddie, bringing up the mail, said to Carol, "Here they are." She meant the folders. Cunard, White Star, United Fruit, Royal Mail. Carol looked them over superficially, then turned to the letters, which it was her privilege to sort, Mr. Bonaparte's from Miss Eliza Codd's.

"Here's one for Daddy from someone who's a doctor and who's at home. 'Doctor Kamp's Home!' Now isn't that too silly to put on the outside?"

Coddie was surprisingly impressed. Snatching the letter from Carol's hand and hiding it behind her, she hardened her eyes at the girl as though it were a crime she had been caught in. And within two minutes after she had taken the mail into Daddy's room, here was Daddy out in his pajamas.

"Codd, I want you to get the trunks packed immediately. I've this letter from——" He hesitated, more and more distracted. "Carol, Old Girl, will you run along down and play on the veranda for a while? Dash!"

Carol played on the veranda for a while, but she had nothing to play with, and a while is rather indefinite. Returning to the rooms she heard Coddie saying, "Yes, Mr. Bonaparte, we're both right: *I* would *hardly* do."

And Daddy, at his wit's end, "Well, how to manage? I suppose my best plan would be to wire the agency to send somebody down direct to 'The Pasture.' "

Carol felt things a good deal more than she knew things. She could feel a shadow coming before she could see it. All the way to the station in the hotel car that afternoon—she didn't know why—but it was dreadful. What made her cling so hard to Coddie's hand? And why was Coddie, who hadn't a cold, forever blowing her nose on the sly?

Why was it so queer when they got into the parlour car? There was no new governess there, but that wasn't the half, nor the hundredth. It happened just before the train started to move. Coddie bent of a sudden, dabbed a kiss on Carol's temple, cried, "Be a good girl, now, always," and in another wink there she was outside on the platform, waving, and the landscape was sliding, and Daddy and Carol were awkwardly all alone. . . .

It was late at night, and it was a strange house, a strange room, and a strange bed. Strangest of all was the getting to bed. The only one there was to preside over it was Daddy (there were servants of sorts in the strange downstairs, but of course *they* wouldn't do), and Daddy was bungling and

distraught, and Carol was inept and distrait, and the whole affair was getting to be a dream which she wished she didn't have to have.

How could she ask where such a thing as her nighty was when she couldn't ask where Coddie was? In ways it was quite as hard for Daddy. With him it took the form of an embarrassment which grew with the child's numbness and dumbness, till it seemed he would have to yell and shake her if she persisted in it ten minutes more. This going on as if nothing had happened!

He did shake her presently, and gave her a fumbling kiss on top of her head, so that she couldn't see his face.

"Don't know what it's all about, do you, Old Girl? You'll be so happy, though, when you know the surprise."

"When is the surprise?" Her voice was as dead as dead.

"To-morrow."

"Is it Coddie?"

Daddy looked worse than exasperated; he looked hurt. Painstakingly, like one counting twenty before he spoke, he turned down the bed. Then he stared at the farther wall and said, "You're getting too old for simply a nurse now, Carol. To-morrow your regular governess will be here."

"Oh-h-h-h!"

Carol got in, pulled the covers to her chin, and lay quiet, studying him as he bent in circles picking up things that didn't need picking up.

"Oh-h-h-h! So-o-o-o! I see-e-e-e!"

Daddy jerked up, his face flaming.

"No, you *don't* see. And it's a *real* surprise—and can't you take Daddy's word for it—and not look like that—and—go to sleep like a good girl?"

He rushed around. "Want a drink of water on your table? No?"

He vanished, and presently he was back again in triumph bearing a kitten captured somewhere, a gray little creature with fluffy cheeks and pert eyes.

"Look! Isn't it cunning? Want to pet?"

"No, thank you."

Unfortunately the kitten had taken matters into its own paws. No sooner had Daddy put it beside the pillow than it was gone under the covers, and no sooner was it curled in a lump on Carol's chest that it began to purr.

Carol would do nothing about it. Daddy stood and scratched his head.

"Well, I don't suppose it's at all the right thing. However—just tonight——" He sighed, opened the window, put out the light, and fled.

Carol lay and stared into the dark. "So-o-o-o. I see-e-e-e."

The first sob was hard to get up, the second was easier, and then the wild tears came. The ball in her arms wriggled in protest, not liking to be hugged so joltingly. . . . There, that was better.

Not since she could remember had Carol been in one place long enough to be allowed to have a pet. Kittens were amazingly soft and warm. As, little

by little, the sobbing wore itself out, so did the purring. Neither kittens nor kids can stay awake forever.

Carol had a start when she awoke in the morning. It came back with a thump: "*Coddie isn't here.*" Then, hearing someone in the room, she turned her head, and for a wink she thought it was Coddie. The same square figure, a broad back, a head with a top-knot. But when the person turned it was a stranger.

Her name, she said, was Mrs. Lephant and, although it wasn't her fault Carol had mistaken her for Coddie, Carol hated her. It didn't help that Coddie would have cried "*A kitten in bed!*" and flung up her hands in just as holy a horror; no, somehow or other it wouldn't have been the same. Nor would her "Up you get now, Carol; don't be a lazy thing!"

The thing that was hardest to bear, as Carol went about her dressing with averted eyes and heavy hands, was that Daddy had told her a deliberate fib. "Too old for simply a nurse now." If that wasn't to say she wasn't to have a new nurse in poor Coddie's place, she didn't know what it was. Of course it never occurred to her that Mrs. Lephant might be the governess he had spoken of. Governesses don't have red wrists and grizzling hair; if Carol knew anything in the world at going-on-seven, she knew *governesses.*

When Carol looked out of her window she had another start. Last night, whirling up in the car, it had all been dark. Now the sunshine of the clear morning discovered to her eyes an oblique and rocky pastureland falling away to a pine wood, and at the foot of the wood the broad Connecticut.

"Come along to your breakfast, child; don't be lagging there."

Carol had felt queer once before. Was she going to have a "tummy" again?

Mrs. Lephant came treading back. There would need to be some discipline.

"Did you hear me, Carol, when I—— Why, what ails the child?"

"Mrs. Lephant, I've been here before."

"Been here before? Gracious! It's your home, isn't it?"

"My—home?"

"I thought your papa told me you were born here. . . . Now, whatever the game is, please leave it till after breakfast, my dear, and take my hand and come."

At breakfast, after a long time, Carol asked, "Where is my daddy?"

"He has gone out for a while. He didn't say when he would be back."

"Oh-h-h!" (It was true about the governess's coming then.) "I see-e-e."

That day of waiting was long and it was short. It was long on account of Coddie, who wasn't there, and of Mrs. Lephant, who was. It was short on account of the diverting way in which each new thing about the place was at very first glance familiar, and then, as soon as Carol had time to think about

it, strange. And also on account of the kitten, whose name, the cook said, was Bubble.

Bubble was an irresponsible creature. It's the way of the world. Impetuously loved, profoundly depended upon, she seemed to take a perverse delight in maintaining her own poise and doing as she sweetly pleased. Here one moment, rubbing an arched back, cleaving softly, purring like incipient volcanoes and brightening the sun—another moment and Bubble was no more. Run here and call there as Carol might, with panic growing in her, Bubble was gone. Gone like Coddie and, perhaps, like Coddie, never to come again.

It wasn't until after lunch (still no Daddy) that Carol discovered the wile of triumph. It might be a twig, but better it was a string with a crumple of paper tied at the end. Bubble was gone, was she? Forever? Well, then, forget Bubble! Go about your business doing as *you* sweetly please. Prowl, explore. Craning at the eaves high overhead, where, in and out of the gingerbread frettings, birds wheeled with tiny whistling sounds, wonder what it can be that makes the heart stop, trying to remember—what? Or all of a sudden, scouting along a path between high barberry walls, *know* that there is a gravelly circle and a bird path at the farther end of it, and begin to run—and plop! Tug!—there's Bubble, dropped from heaven, battling at the crumple of paper dragging quite forgotten in the rear, as if Bubble had never been away.

Once it was nearly disastrous. On the side toward the valley the garden was built up, the stone wall of the terrace falling away ten feet at least to the pasture's rocky ground. It was just here that the kitten exploded from a clump of rhododendrons, and Carol, turning her eyes at the tug, saw the gray fluff teetering after the paper along the giddy edge, at a perilous balance and apt at any breath to lose it and go tumbling away to break her neck.

Carol stopped, her heart stopped, her hand froze. Prickles climbed her spine. She was afraid to breathe, but she had to breathe to whisper:

"Mrs. Lephant—where are you?"

"I'm right here, child. Why?"

"Call Bubble a-a-way fr-from there. G-g-get another string and dr-dr-drag it—— Oh, she *will* fall off!"

Mrs. Lephant dared disaster by laughing out loud. "Why, my dear child, *cats* don't fall. They never do. And even if they did—see!"

With a swoop almost as quick as a cat's Mrs. Lephant caught Bubble by the scruff and held her at arm's length, squirming in terror of the abyss. Then leaning down and out over it, before Carol could so much as gasp, she had opened her fingers and let the kitten fall.

"There, you see? It doesn't matter how a cat is dropped, it *always* lands right side up. See, though! Why, Carol! don't look at me so!"

Carol hazarded one eye over. When she saw that Bubble wasn't dead, but

bouncing off along the foot of the wall with a tail as big as indignation, she stopped being faint. She sprang up. She towered, pink with fury.

"Mrs. Lephant, I want you to know right square now I think you're a—a——"

But she was a well-brought-up girl, and it does tell. Appalled, she wheeled and ran as fast as she could run away. Mrs. Lephant called after her, but Carol would have cut off her ears before they would have heard. Tears blinded her, she crashed into plantings, scratched her legs on thorns, and hid in a deep hedge of lilacs, cowering down in the leaf shadow, so that that woman should never find her till the world's end.

Bubble found her, though. Together they thought their thoughts of hate.

Someone was walking on the drive outside the hiding place. When Carol had decided it couldn't be the Lephant she dared one peep. It was a lady.

Something turned over with a flop in the middle of the child's insides. "But I—I *know* her!" But then, as with all the other things, "Do I?" How could she, when she couldn't remember ever having seen her till this day?

The lady's eyes were fixed on the house and she walked like a laggard, perhaps because there were others coming behind. She had slightly wavy chestnut hair, laid back as smoothly as it would go from her temples and over her ears. Her face was pale but it was handsome. By that, and by her slender, prettily clad figure and her silk stockings and high-heeled shoes, Carol knew her of a sudden for what she was. She was the new governess.

Slowly, still intent on the house before her, she passed out of the spy-gap in the leaves. Daddy moved into it, conversing with a gentleman with black whiskers and a gold-rimmed pince-nez. Coming to a halt just there, Daddy's voice dropped to almost nothing. "Doctor," he said, "I want—God knows how deeply I want to thank you. And I hope to Heaven it's going to be——"

The other coughed, like people who are embarrassed by being thanked.

"I hope so, too. And, Bonaparte, I believe so. I shouldn't have written you unless, by every test I know, I'd been convinced."

"Well?" Daddy's eyes went after the vanished governess. He now seemed the embarrassed one. "Well, Doctor—you won't stay, eh? Overnight?"

"I don't think it's best. I'll call you up first thing in the morning—or better—I'll drop around. Yes, I'll do that. Good-bye, Bonaparte. And good luck!"

There was the sound of a motor near at hand getting up its appetite. Both men blew their noses. Carol slid out the other way, quiet as an Indian, and made for the farthest corner, where was the house that held the garden tools. Governesses were always bad enough. But *this* one! And Daddy blowing his nose with strangers! And Mrs. Lephant! "Bubble!" she wailed, "where, oh, where is Coddie gone?"

But before Bubble could even begin to answer, a shadow around the toolhouse corner was followed by the hurrying Lephant in the flesh.

"Where *have* you been, child? Come along directly and see your mamma."

Carol was so flustered that she did go along, suffering tugs at her frock here and dabs at her hair there, and had got almost to the steps of the veranda before her reason came back. Then she baulked. Escaping Mrs. Lephant's hand, she stood off and looked at her from beneath wise brows, precisely as Coddie might have done it, with a nipped-in, faintly alkaline smile.

"But you see, Mrs. Lephant, it *isn't* my mamma. People are *always* making just exactly mistakes like that."

When even Daddy assured Carol that it was her mamma, and when the lady herself, waiting near the mantel in the big double-bayed living room, stretched out her arms a little stiffly, as if it hurt her, and was nothing of a sudden but hands and two huge dark eyes, it was more than Carol could deal with on such short notice. She felt like a stick and she acted like a stick.

It was an idea to be gone at slowly. It's doubtful if even Atlas could lift a new world without working up to it. Perhaps the lady didn't realize.

If only Coddie could have been there. Thank Heaven! Bubble was. . . .

It would have been easier if they could all have settled down to it quietly; simply have taken three big easy chairs there in the living room, and sat, and sat, and looked one another over, as much as to say, "Well, now, let's see." But they couldn't. None of them seemed to be able to stay still. First it was outdoors to look at the plantings; then it was upstairs, going through the chambers; then out again to look at the sunset beyond the hills.

Daddy was the worst, in a way. When he wasn't breathing very hard, he wasn't breathing at all; when he wasn't going red he was just getting over being red. It was worse than governesses had ever been—he was so anxious that everything should be precisely right for Mamma—now a footstool for her feet; now a hand to help her over an inch-high culvert in the garden walk; again a, "Sha'n't I run bring you out a scarf, Stacia?" or a "Come, dear, sit down for a moment and rest." His blue eyes, always a little helpless, seemed permanently dilated, as one's eyes will be when there's a gun that may go off any minute or a bubble that may burst. And he talked a lot.

Mamma was quite different. Her quietude (even though she was forever on the move) was extraordinary. It was almost like sleep-walking, it seemed to Carol, and so it startled her, every time Mamma took her hand, to find the fingers that closed on hers were as tight as twisted wires and trembling with a slight but very rapid pulse. Carol wished they wouldn't. She wished that the dark brown eyes, whenever they came roving after her, wouldn't turn so abruptly and so inkily black. It made her shy, and the thing she was trying most to do was to get over being shy.

Oh, if only she could act like herself, like the Carol she and Daddy and Coddie knew! If only she could charge, arms wide, engulf this mamma in a great hug, and cry passionately as the wonder rushed up from her heart, "I

love you, and you're so beautiful, and you're my mamma, and my own, forever and ever—promise me you are!"

But because she was shy she had always to hang back. She had to make believe to be interested in nothing on earth but the kitten that tumbled across the garden at the end of her string. She had to pretend it was secrets, when it was only "She's my own, my really mamma!" that she whispered over and over into Bubble's ear till the creature was nearly frantic with the tickle, and the lovely lady smiled.

It was when they were out for the sunset that Mamma smiled. She stopped dead still and flashed a look at the child, knee-deep with Bubble in a thicket of old snapdragon stalks. She started to speak, then closed her lips tight, and wound her fingers into her palms, as people do who are very nervous at hotels in Italy. Then she smiled, and it was a funny, slow, thin smile, and she said in a tone playfully wistful on top and something mysteriously else beneath, "I wish *I* had a string, little Daughter. Would you be my little kitty then, and—and—play with me?"

Carol was allowed to stay down to dinner at table that evening, and if there had been any doubts left, that would have settled it. One doesn't stay down to dine with governesses.

It was wonderful. There were candles on the table, tall ones, whose fat flames wavered softly in miniature in silver and crystal and china such as Carol had never seen in all the hotels in the world. They wavered in Daddy's eyes too, and in Mamma's: they must have been in Carol's own; the three faces and Mamma's neck and Daddy's shirt-front were bright, and all was gloom behind.

There was a pale wine in glasses. Daddy lifted his and leaned forward.

"Stacia?"

Mamma was like a lady, Carol decided, sitting in a crystal tower. He had to speak again before she heard and lifted her glass to clink on his.

Daddy's trembled a little. "Here's to—God bless all of us, Stacia."

Mamma sipped and said nothing. When one came to think of it, Mamma had said nothing all that afternoon, or nearly nothing. It was always Daddy.

"Stacia," he went on, musing at his glass, a twisty smile about his lips that was both sad and gay, "I was never built for—for going it alone. I'm not the lone wolf. I feel as if I'd been through——" He shook himself, bright tear drops starting. "Never mind! I feel as if I'd come back to life to-day!"

What Mamma felt, she didn't say. Dreaming down at the fires in her wineglass, perhaps she was thinking of nothing at all as she twirled the stem of it idly in the fingers of her left hand, somnambulist still.

Carol couldn't help bouncing (it was a mercy she didn't gasp out loud) when she felt the *other* hand coming through the darkness under the table. She would have liked to get her own two quickly in safe sight above the cloth,

but it was so weird, somehow, and she was so confused, she didn't know what to do. And then it was too late; the unseen thing that searched had come to her fingers and slid around them, swift as whips and tight as tentacles.

Carol had never been so abashed in her life. It was really more like terror. Of course it wouldn't have been anything at all if the others at table had known about it. But Daddy didn't seem to, and no more did Mamma, sitting there above the serene white damask (miles and miles away) in her tower of glass. And it wasn't just that it was clandestine, that subterranean grasp: it wasn't even a grasp, but more like a grab, a static violence, gradually tightening.

"I'm going to do lots of things now, Stacia," Daddy was musing. "I'm going to buy back into the firm, and I'm going——" From Mamma's face his eyes came abruptly to Carol's. "Why, Carol, Old Girl, what's wrong?"

Carol swallowed, and was red. "N-n-nothing. Really and tr-tr-truly."

In a panic she averted her eyes. She peered busily into the shadows in the corners. "Only I—I am a—a little worried about Bub-Bubble. I wonder where Bub-Bub-Bubble is."

There! If only she had thought of that sooner. Under the table the grab had suddenly ungrabbed and flown away, and almost in the same wink of time Mamma, come out of her tower, was smoothing with her right hand a wisp of her lovely chestnut hair. She appeared to have rediscovered Carol.

"Bubble is the kitten?" she asked, smiling the same funny, slow, thin smile she had used once before.

Daddy laughed. "Yes, and kittens aren't allowed in dining rooms, Old Girl."

In the living room, after dinner, with Mrs. Lephant waiting rather sniffily in the doorway (for, after all, she was a governess, not a nurse), Carol was allowed to bid her parents good-night. For the first time in her career and for no known reason, she shook hands gravely with her father. Then she turned with a kind of shiver of stage fright to deal with the other one.

On the flare-backed couch before the new fire in the chimney Mamma half reclined, obliquely, one knee over the other, one elbow up and a hand supporting her head, which was tilted a little so, like a bird's in half-preoccupied interrogation. There was a perfume about her that Carol had never known or dreamed of—as if it weren't of earthly flowers—exquisitely faint. Scent and sight worked backward with Carol. A lovely fragrance made her eyes film; to make her nostrils dilate, it took an entrancing vision, like the soft flames running and playing in Mamma's hair.

The eyes in the face that was more beautiful in its set pallor than all the roses in the world were turning blacker and blacker as the seconds ticked. Carol felt herself being intoxicated. In the "V" of Mamma's gown she saw

the hollow of the white bosom beginning, and it came to her that what she wanted fiercely was to lay her head there, her cheek and temple, and press tight. On the hidden side of her, lying on the couch in the shadow her crossed knees threw, Mamma's other hand was moving. Carol saw it in a corner of her eye, the long fingers coiling and uncoiling restlessly.

"I hope you sleep very well indeed, Mamma," she heard herself saying. "Good-night, Mamma."

But then her feet were glued, not knowing how to go. Bubble saved her. When she saw the kitten cleaving to a table leg and making her eyes green she managed a gasp of joy and skipped.

"Now, child!" Mrs. Lephant called from the doorway.

But Carol had to catch that kitten first. She had to fall on her knees and hug her, kiss her on the whiskers and blow into her ear a "Don't you think she is beautiful, Bubble; don't you think she's darling; don't we love her almost to *death*?" Otherwise she would have had to burst with a rubbery shriek, like an overblown balloon.

In the hall Mrs. Lephant said, "Now drop your kitty, that's a good girl."

"Mightn't I have her just a little—just a weency-weency while?"

"Upstairs! What an idea! Bedrooms are no place for animals, not at night. Neither are houses. They're much better off outdoors."

"Oh, but, Mrs. Lephant—you—wouldn't! You couldn't! She'd *freeze!*"

"Cats? What do you suppose they've fur for? Let her down; that's right. Scat, kitty; I'll tend to you later. Take Mrs. Lephant's hand now, my dear."

Carol couldn't go to sleep. The tighter she closed her eyes the wider she was awake. A procession of "she's" ramped through her mind. With venomous sarcasm: "She seems to know a great deal about cats!" With a surge of the heart: "She *wanted* me to put my head there in her neck; I *know* she did! She loves me. To-morrow—oh, to-morrow!" With a guilty, almost forgotten hollow feeling: "I wonder if she has gone to be some other girl's nurse, now I've a mamma and she can't be mine." And with a sudden eye on the window, wide open and blue-green-black and chill: "She *hasn't* enough fur; I don't care! If she *doesn't* freeze, she'll catch her death. Oh, dear!"

It was at the same time ironic and tragic. For the first time with so many responsibilities, for the first time there was no one in reach to share them with. The room grew as big as the house, the house grew as empty as the whole black outdoors; the time grew hours.

Then came temptation and the fall.

At first it was creepy, like burglars. No door had been opened, but someone or something was in that room. Whether she heard it or simply felt it, she didn't know: she only knew she mustn't stir and mustn't open her eyes.

When she flopped over and popped open her eyes, Bubble said "Prrraouw" from the window sill, where she was busy tidying herself after her trouble

with the woodbine by which she had come. Presently, vanishing in lower darkness she arrived on the bed with a thump.

Carol was firm. "You wicked! You heard what Mrs. Lephant said as well as I did." Bubble rubbed, filling the lecturer's face with fluff. Carol sat bolt up for authority. As she did so, Bubble took advantage of the lifted coverlet, dived beneath, whipped into a fat knot, and began to purr.

Carol sat and thought.

"Mrs. Lephant thinks she knows everything, but she doesn't know as much as Daddy. She says Bubble shouldn't be here, but last night Daddy said——"

She curled back into the warm place under the covers and got hold of the kitten. Thinking of that window (it's much more dangerous to go down vines than up them—and no matter what Mrs. Lephant thought she knew about cats), she got still better hold, her arms double all the way around.

It was the light that awakened her, falling through an open door. She would have said it must be nearly morning, but it wasn't, for Daddy and Mamma were just coming up to bed. Daddy was in the doorway and Mamma was near the bed.

"Is she sleeping?" Daddy asked in a low voice.

"I don't know." It was hardly above a whisper in case. "Carol, dear?"

Carol, peering through sleepy lashes at her there, felt all the things she had felt in the whole of the day in one lump now, and the lump was in her throat. There was something that ravished her in that silhouette of a mother, the shoulders bent a little and the head held still, like hovering. Carol needn't wait till to-morrow after all to fling up and cry, "Mamma! I love you, and I'm glad."

She would have done it that moment, had something dreadful not occurred. She wasn't the only one awakened. Bubble stretched under the bedclothes and began automatically to purr. It rumbled, nothing less.

There was no time to plan. Carol opened her mouth and snored. She never snored; she didn't even know how to snore; but she snored.

Mamma hadn't moved. Or if she had, it was only her neck and head, by a fraction of an inch, and so swiftly that nobody would have known. Like an Indian in the dark when his brother touches him for "Did you hear?"

Had she heard? Carol snored in despair. Oh, *had* she heard?

Daddy reiterated his question from the door, but with another emphasis, of mirth, "*Is* she *sleeping*?"

"One would think so, wouldn't one?"

Mamma turned like a shadow, stiffly but without a sound, and moved away toward the bright rectangle where Daddy was waiting, one arm crooked out and a smile trembling about his lips and eyes.

The door was closed and it was dark again. Thank Heaven, Bubble Bona-

parte! They were both young in crime yet, and it had been a pretty narrow squeak.

It was late when Carol awoke in the morning; it wasn't, indeed, until Mrs. Lephant came; and it was a clear warm day full of sun. Still blinking, Carol pawed about under the covers. Then she lay suddenly as still as scared mice and studied Mrs. Lephant out of the corners of her eyes.

"Mrs. Lephant," she began in a small voice, when the woman wouldn't stop her bustling and wouldn't end the suspense by opening her mouth (providing, of course, that she *knew*).

"Yes, child, what is it? Why don't you get up as I told you?"

"Mrs. Le-Lephant, you—you didn't—you haven't seen anything of my—of Bubble—this morning?"

"If you're still talking about that cat, no, I haven't. And now if I have to speak again——"

But Carol had to lie one more moment, staring at that open window. "The little monkey!" she thought to herself with what tried to be amusement.

She was wild to get out of doors. Tugging at the monitor's hand on the way down to breakfast she attempted stratagems. "I don't seem to be very hungry this morning, Mrs. Lephant. Must I eat breakfast, please?"

She wouldn't take even the Lephant's look for answer, but appealed from it to Daddy, who was just getting up from his coffee and eggs. Daddy laughed. "You sit down there and cram!"

"Where's Mamma?" Carol inquired in a smaller tone.

"Not up yet, the lazy. I'm sending her a tray; imagine that!" He was full of animation. All his motions were big, even the way he filled his pipe. "This is the life! eh, Old Girl? Now, gobble. It's no day to be inside."

Carol got a piece of string from the maid and a piece of paper from a basket and set forth. She tried the east side of the grounds. "Kittikittikitti ——" She combed the cover as far as the toolhouse there and cast back along the front hedge toward the drive, bareheaded in the sunshine. Daddy stood talking with the doctor of yesterday.

"A bit nervous and quiet last evening—but she slept like an angel, Doctor, and this morning she looks like one. Doctor—I think it's a go."

Failing in the east, Carol trailed her bait into the south, the back-yard region, where the land began to slope and the outbuildings were. She didn't go to the valley side till the last. She wouldn't, that was all.

She didn't make a sound for a full half-minute after her eyes had found Bubble in the long grass. But when she did, it brought Daddy around the corner at the double, and the doctor behind.

"What is it, Carol? Oh, I see. Oh, poor kitty! *Isn't* that a *shame!*"

"The old *fool!*"

It rasped Carol's throat. It was rage. Grief hadn't had time as yet.

Daddy stared at her. "Who's a fool?"

"Mrs. Lephant. She is! She t-t-told me a k-k-kitten couldn't hurt itself f-f-falling."

"Where'd Bubble fall from?" Daddy craned up. "That your window there?"

Now the sobs began to rack and the tears to roll.

"It wasn't Bu-Bu-Bubble's fault. She came to bed with me—but—bu-but *I* let her st-stay. And of course she wanted to g-g-get up early—and the doors were sh-shut—and she sl-slipped on the v-v-vine and—oh, Daddy!"

Daddy caught her up in his arms. His attention, though, was curiously divided, more than half of it still fixed on the gray little body in the grass.

"It's odd," he mused, "but I didn't suppose, myself——" He spoke aloud to the doctor, who had bent to prod with a professional finger. "Neck broken, is it?"

"Broken, yes." The doctor snapped his own neck back of a sudden to look up at Carol's window, but nothing was there. "Broken, yes." His lips moved in a funny way. "I'm afraid a little worse than broken, Bonaparte. W*rung*."

Somewhere aloft someone was laughing. It was low but unmuffled and pure, wandering, softly jubilating, soliloquizing, a little sarabande of mirth.

Carol couldn't help it, she shook her hands at the high windows. "Mamma, no! . . . Oh, Daddy, but poor Mamma, she won't laugh when we—when we t-t-tell her—that."

Daddy, getting his face in another direction, carried Carol away, while the doctor lingered a moment to break a bit of brush down over the place where Bubble lay. . . .

If yesterday had been upsetting, it was as nothing to to-day. Carol was too prostrate with woe even to try to make it all out. Trunks, bags, boys on bicycles arriving and departing with yellow telegrams, everybody in a hurry, everything in a mess. Mrs. Lephant going about with a flounce and a sniffle, Mamma still invisible, still a lazy, Carol guessed.

It wasn't till Carol and Daddy were in the station taxi that afternoon that a suspicion of the possible truth came into the child's head.

"Daddy, it wasn't so, after all. I mean, it was all a—a kind of a joke—or I mean a kind of fooling. She *was* a governess, after all?"

Daddy sat and stared at the driver's back. Something distressing had happened to his shoulders between the morning and now. To his colour too. It couldn't have been worse if he had been suffering one of his conscientious bored spells for weeks and months; no, it couldn't have been so bad. It made Carol uneasy. She got hold of his hand.

"She *was* a governness, Daddy, *wasn't* she?"

Daddy's gray-looking mouth moved with difficulty. "I suppose we might

as well call it—why, yes, Carol, yes. And now—it wasn't long—we'll just forget."

On the platform at the little station, where the train was coming at them with a rush and roar, Carol got hold of his fingers again and tugged.

"Where are we going—this time?"

Daddy stared at the engine. He seemed distraught. He got the question mixed up with the answer he must have meant to give.

"Where are we going," he echoed, "this time?"

A wild wish was trying to dare to spring in Carol's heart. She quit tugging and began to stroke the wooden fingers she held.

"Daddy, couldn't we—Daddy, mightn't we, don't you suppose——"

But she didn't need to finish. As the coaches rocked by to a grinding halt, her eyes had caught a flicker of a face.

Carol shrieked.

"Daddy! Coddie is on this train!"

1927: *from Harper's Magazine*

CHILD OF GOD

by Roark Bradford, who was born in 1896 in Lauderdale County, Tennessee. After serving with the Army in World War I, he went to work on the Atlanta Georgian. *In 1922 he moved to the New Orleans* Times-Picayune, *where he was night city editor and later Sunday editor. His first published work was a series of stories about Negroes for the New York* World; *this series eventually became his first book,* Ol' Man Adam an' His Chillun. *In 1930* Ol' Man Adam an' His Chillun *furnished the theme of the Pulitzer Prize play* The Green Pastures. *It was thus that Mr. Bradford began writing on Negroes—the subject that remained his chief interest throughout his literary career. The story that appears here was the second story he ever sold. Mr. Bradford is represented in the 1928 volume of this series with "Careless Love," and again in 1930 with "River Witch." He died in 1948.*

When Willie told the preacher that morning that "ev'ything is all O.K., Revund," he meant it from the bottom of his heart. The hawking of the rain

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crow from the limb of the dead cottonwood sounded like the song of a mocking bird. The monotonous patter of rain on the tin roof lulled him into gentle restfulness. The damp, dirty stench that floated up from the dark closeness of the cells below him was like a sedative. Even the lyelike coffee served to remind him that the jailer was his friend.

"Cap'm Archie tole me I could have ev'ything I wanted fer brekfus," he explained as he caught the minister sniffing and eyeing the scant remains of the meal. "An' I tole him I b'lieve I'd take some po'k chops an' cawfee, ef'n hit wuz all right. An' hyar it is."

"You mean dar hit wuz," admonished the preacher. "Now yo' flesh is fed, Willie, whut 'bout yo' soul?"

Willie beamed a broad, knowing smile. "My soul," he said tolerantly, "is all O.K. An' Revund," he continued jubilantly, "Cap'm Archie say he gonter bring me a ten-cent cigar to go walkin' up de gallows wid in my mouf." The minister's face was a study in expression. "An' I makes me a speech up yonder"—jerking his arm toward the gallows high in the roof of the jail—"an' den——"

"Den which, son?" Preacher Moore was eager to find a point of contact at which he could begin his prepared message of consolation.

"I'se Glory bound!" Willie declared with enthusiasm.

While the condemned man talked and the preacher listened, the Great State of Louisiana prepared to exact its penalty in the form of the life of Willie Malone because "he did feloniously, wilfully, and of his deliberately premeditated malice aforethought, make an assault on one Thurston Gibbs, and a certain gun which then and there was loaded with gunpowder and buckshot and was by him, the said Willie Malone, had and held in both hands, he, the said Willie Malone, did then and there feloniously and of malice aforethought shoot off and discharge at and upon the said Thurston Gibbs thereby, and by thus striking the said Thurston Gibbs with the buckshots inflicting on and in the body one mortal wound of which said mortal wound the said Thurston Gibbs then and there instantly died. And so the said Willie Malone did in the manner and form aforesaid, feloniously and of deliberately premeditated malice aforethought, kill and murder the said Thurston Gibbs in the Parish of Wilton aforesaid, against the peace and dignity of the Great State of Louisiana."

It all came out at the trial. Hogs had been running in Willie's cornfield. The hogs belonged to Mr. Gibbs. And when Willie asked him to keep them home Mr. Gibbs had cursed him. Willie then bought a shotgun and some buckshot. Everybody agreed upon that much of it. Willie said he aimed to shoot the hogs and that when he heard something rustling the long blades he fired, thinking it was a hog. The district attorney pointed out that it was impossible to get a witness who could say what was in a man's mind and,

therefore, he'd leave it to the jury as to whether Willie was hog hunting or man hunting.

The jury was divided upon the point, but all agreed that no nigger had any right to shoot a white man's hogs, anyway, much less shoot a white man. So they found him guilty as charged.

Willie had rather enjoyed his stay in jail. Two or three times his lawyer came and talked to him in a low voice and had him make his cross mark on many important-looking pieces of paper. It all gave him a feeling of importance hitherto not experienced.

He liked "Cap'm Archie," too—Cap'm Archie was always making jokes, and didn't make him do any work around the jail except a little sweeping. And during the long cool spring evenings, when the stars twinkled in the sky and the fiddling of the katydids out in the weed patch back of the jail floated in between the long iron-barred windows, Cap'm Archie would have one of the short-time prisoners drag his chair back to Willie's own private cage and Willie would sing for him.

Willie did like to sing—church songs, mostly. But sometimes when he felt sad and lonesome he'd sing the one that began:

"Thirty days in jail,
Baby, don't soun' so long,
But de las' frien' I got in dis worl',
Done shuck her laig an' gone."

There were many verses, and to these Willie had added a hundred others. He was good at that. When they locked up that Caldonie for cutting her husband because he stole one of her hens and a chicken brood and gave it to another woman, Willie celebrated the occasion by adding:

"He might er stole yo' chickens,
He might er stole yo' cow,
Hit don't make no diffunce what he stole,
You's in de jail-house now."

Cap'm Archie had laughed at that one and it made Willie happy.

Not long after that Cap'm Archie sent for him to come to the office. Cap'm Archie looked sad that day, and it made Willie feel sad. So when Cap'm Archie told him the Supreme Court had turned him down and that he would have to hang Willie was much relieved.

"Shuh! Cap'm Archie," Willie consoled, "dat ain' nothin' to go worryin' 'bout. I thought hit mought er been somethin' wrong, de way you had yo' face strung out. Shuh! Ain' dat de same as de jedge done tole me?"

That afternoon Reverend Moore, Negro preacher, was ushered into Willie's cell, and under his exhortations Willie was converted. He had been

converted annually ever since he could remember but he always had been too busy to follow it up. This time he had ample leisure in which to contemplate Christianity and draw mental pictures of it. Willie was keenly interested.

The preacher had spared no detail his imagination could supply as to the glories of heaven, and these Willie supplemented with the colourful pigments of his own imagination. Heaven was a wonderful place. Willie wanted to go there.

"Hyar dey comes, son," the preacher said kindly. "Git up off'n yo' knees."

Cap'm Archie unlocked the cage door with keys that rattled nervously in his hand. Behind the jailer were half a dozen others—the doctor, two brothers of the man he had killed, the editor of the *Wilton Parish Gazette*, and a short, stubby, mean-looking man that Willie disliked instinctively. He had never seen him before, and the pale-green, watery eyes that squinted out at him through shaggy eyelashes made Willie feel bad. "I loves him too," Willie insisted under his breath. "Got ter love him. 'Makes me love ev'ybody—hit's good ernuff fer me' "—Willie recalled the words from the old song. "An' I guess he is somebody. But I be dog ef'n he looks like much, Ole Green Eyes."

"Ready to go, Willie?" It was Cap'm Archie. His voice was kind and filled with sorrow. Willie hated to see Cap'm Archie like that. But when the jailer's teeth clicked together and he said briskly, "Here, slip your hands into these," it did not sound so sad, and Willie obeyed with alacrity.

"I bet you fergits my cigar, Cap'm Archie," Willie countered as his arms were being pinioned behind him.

"Cut out that damned foolishness! Come on here, nigger. I ain't got all day to fool." It was the stubby little man who assumed charge.

"Makes me love ev'ybody," Willie hummed desperately under his breath. "Hit's good ernuff fer me."

"Good ernuff fer anybody," seconded the preacher loudly, happy that he had found some place to enter into the ceremony with the dignity of his calling. "Hit's de ole time religion, and hit's good ernuff fer me!"

As the party marched up the narrow steps to the gallows, the Negro prisoners on the lower tier of cells caught up the refrain and the brick walls of the little jail reverberated with:

"Gimme dat ole time religion,
Gimme dat ole time religion,
Gimme dat ole time religion, Lawd,
Hit's good ernuff fer me.

"Hit will take you home to Glory,
Hit will take you home to Glory,
Hit will take you home to Glory, Lawd,
Hit's good ernuff fer me."

The climb to the gallows took a remarkably short time and Willie noticed that as soon as they arrived there "Ole Green Eyes" rushed to the rope that was lying handy and began making a loop in the end of it.

"Makes me love ev'ybody," Willie insisted.

Everybody seemed nervous. Cap'm Archie couldn't look at him. The editor was talking with big words to the elder of the Gibbses and said something about "dancing on the air." Willie didn't understand it but he knew he wasn't going to dance on anything. Dancing would send him straight to hell. He had the preacher's word for it.

He edged over toward Cap'm Archie.

"When does I make my speech, Cap'm Archie?" he asked.

The jailer did not look up. "In a minute," he replied. "When you are ready to—when they stand you over there." He pointed to the trapdoor with his foot.

"Come over here, nigger." It was "Ole Green Eyes" again. Willie stood on the trapdoor.

"Makes me love ev'ybody," he kept repeating as the knot was being drawn close to his ear. "Makes me love ev'ybody."

When the knot was finished the little stubby man slipped a black hood over Willie's head and stepped back. A jay-bird on a dead limb of the cottonwood broke out in a scathing chatter of malediction at the crow. A dog howled mournfully in the jail yard below. The katydids in the weed patch opened with a wild symphony of fiddling. "Somethin' 'bout to happen," Willie concluded. "I guess I better make my speech."

He threw back his shoulders and raised his chin as though about to address a large congregation.

"Folkses," he began in a clear, strong voice, "I has a few words I wants to say to y'all——"

"Too late now, nigger." It was that stubby little man. And even as the trap gave way under his feet Willie began:

"Makes me love ev'ybody."

Willie did not finish that line, however. He was interrupted in the midst of it by a long blast on a horn. It was a loud, thundering blast and it startled him. He looked into the direction from which it came and there, charging down the road, he saw four prancing horses drawing a snow-white chariot. It was a beautiful sight. He had seen some such rig the time when he went to the circus at Baton Rouge. But this rig was even prettier than the circus carriages. Big white plumes bobbed from the crown-pieces of the bridles, and the horses pranced and danced along, raising a terrible dust.

"Great day!" he exclaimed. "Class sho' is comin' down de road to-day."

In a minute the carriage was in front of him, and with much suddenness

it came to a halt, the horses falling back on their haunches to check the momentum.

"Git up hyar, boy, an' le's git goin'," the driver called down. "Us is late, as it is or—else you is early."

Willie scrambled to the seat beside the driver. As the horses raced onward he enjoyed the thrill of the speedy ride, the wind rushing by his ears, the sparkle of the gold and silver harness, the dexterity with which the driver held the horses in the road with one hand and cracked the whip over their heads with the other.

"You drives right well, boy," he observed. "What's yo' name?"

"Jehu," replied the driver.

"Jehu-which?"

"Jest Jehu," replied the driver.

"Who dat boy wid de hawn in his han'?"

"Gab'l."

The monosyllabic replies of his companion irritated Willie. He wanted conversation and he intended to have it.

"How long you been——" he began, but suddenly Gabriel raised his trumpet to his lips and blew a deafening blast which almost lifted Willie from his seat.

"Hol' tight," cautioned Jehu, and the chariot stopped suddenly.

Willie saw an old man in a black slouch hat and cutaway coat, walking very alertly toward the carriage. His face was cleanly shaven except for a moustache and goatee which gave him a distinguished appearance. Willie instinctively knew that this quality-gentleman was going to ride on the plush seats inside, so he leaped down and opened the door of the carriage. The old man halted a few paces from him and cast a surveying glance at the horses.

"That checkrein is too tight on that off-lead horse," he said. "It is a pity that I have to 'tend to these trifles, but damn it all, I can't stand to see fine horseflesh suffer on account of triflin' niggers."

Willie quickly ran and lowered the checkrein and climbed back to his seat.

"You oughter know better'n to check up dat hoss so high," he admonished Jehu with a proprietary air. "Us likes our hosses to have a heap er room."

Jehu did not reply. He held steadily to the reins, and the carriage fairly flew through the misty haze. Willie wanted to ask for the reins himself. He felt he could drive much more to his own satisfaction but, withal, he admitted, Jehu was doing very well. A minute later, however, when the lead horse bolted just as they approached a long bridge, and Jehu prevented a crash by expert manœuvring of the reins, Willie was glad he was not driving.

"Does dat ev'y time at the bridge," Jehu volunteered as the team settled

down to a long gallop across the structure. "Lots er times us misses an' de folks in de chariot gits drownded tryin' to cross Jurdan."

"Dat de Jurdan, huh?" asked Willie. "I be dog," and he gripped tightly to the seat.

The chariot rolled off the bridge and up to the front of a white pearly gate where it stopped. Willie dropped confidently to the ground, opened the chariot door, and assisted the distinguished old passenger to alight. St. Peter swung the big gate open.

"Welcome, Colonel," he said. "It gives me great pleasure to greet you personally after having known you indirectly for these many years. She's waiting for you under the crêpe myrtles. Cherub, escort the Colonel to Miss Julia."

Willie thought that was great, and he was thrilled almost to ecstasy when the old gentleman gave him a curt nod in recognition of his service.

As soon as the old man had disappeared behind the cherub, St. Peter dropped his air of formality.

"Well, well," he said, "if it ain't that worthless Willie Malone. Willie, how'd you git here, son?"

That was language Willie could understand and appreciate.

"St. Peter," he replied, "I jes' got on de chariot an' rid up hyar."

"Well," said St. Peter, "I guess you better try on a pair of wings, then. Here, Cherub. Bring out a pair of wings for old Willie Malone."

St. Peter helped the cherub adjust the wings.

"Now you're fixed, son," he announced. "Fly away!"

And Willie flew. He flew among the golden clouds and down long narrow golden streets. He flew over mansions of gold and sparkling rivers. High into the air and close to the ground he flew. He tried a few fancy turns, such as he had seen birds perform among the chinaberry trees. He dived at the surface of the water and grabbed at the golden fish and then climbed again by lusty flaps of his wings, as pelicans do. And he did it perfectly.

"Doggone my hide," he exclaimed, "dis is somethin' like!"

After a few hours the novelty began to wear off. He was high in the air, maybe a mile high, he estimated. So he pointed one wing at an angle and began gliding down, making a huge spiral as he descended. Halfway down, he reversed the cant of his wings and came down the rest of the way, flying backwards.

He landed right in the midst of a group of other angels who were seated around the Great Throne. Upon the throne sat the Great Lord God. Willie recognized him instantly because of the distinction with which he sat upon his throne and by the carefree tilt of his huge, bejewelled crown almost hiding one eye and by the angle at which the ten-cent cigar was cocked. Willie was a little frightened, and dazzled by the regal splendour of it all, but he

settled down noiselessly to the ground, and was made to feel perfectly at home, by the informal greeting he received.

"I bet you want to hear some music, don't you, Willie?" asked the Great Lord God and, without waiting for Willie's reply, he continued, "Little David, play on your harp."

"What shall I play, Great Lord God?" asked Little David.

"Play something calm and low, Little David," said the Great Lord God. "Do not alarm my people."

David struck a chord or two on his harp. It was beautiful. The mellow music floated straight to Willie's heart. One or two of the other angels started humming with the music and, almost unconscious of where he was, Willie added his low, rich bass to the chorus:

"When dat big *Titanic* sunk down in de sea,
All de brass bands played 'Nearer My God to Thee.'
Out on de deep blue ocean de people sleep
In a cold wet cradle, three miles deep.
It's yo' las' trip, *Titanic*."

After several verses Willie began to feel a personal sorrow for the passengers of the *Titanic*. The music stopped suddenly, and the Great Lord God commanded, "Little David, play something quick and lively. Let the skies rock with mirth. Let the heavens open wide. Let the stars and the moon shine out. Let my people shout with joy."

And as soon as the command was issued all the angels began dancing and singing as Little David played:

"Two little babies a-layin' in de bed,
One of'm sick an' de yuther mos' dead
Sont fer de doctor an' de doctor said,
'Give dem babies some shortnin' bread.'
So put on de skillet an' thow way de led,
Cause mammy gonter make a little shortnin' bread."

Several more songs followed and finally Willie began to tire of singing. The party broke up, the angels flying away in groups of twos and threes. Soon no one was left before the throne except Willie.

Willie felt slightly embarrassed there, with no one around except the Great Lord God. He figured he might be intruding or something, or that perhaps he'd better go out and fly some more. But as he was turning over the idea a tall, kindly looking angel, more strikingly handsome than any he had ever seen, strolled up and sat down familiarly by the side of the Great Lord God. At first Willie thought it was Cap'm Archie. There was kindness and understanding in his face, just like Cap'm Archie's face. But it wasn't Cap'm

Archie. Cap'm Archie had no scars on his hands and feet as had this angel.

As he puzzled over the matter he faintly remembered a story his old mammy had told him about a man with scars on his hands and feet, and he recalled the lines of a song that Cap'm Archie used to make him sing:

"They nailed His hands and they rivet His feet,
An' de hammers wuz heard in Jerusalem street."

Some way, Willie could not place him. But he felt much more at ease for his presence.

"What you thinking about, Willie?" the kindly angel asked. "You don't seem to be enjoying yourself so much."

Willie did not know exactly what to reply. He rummaged through his mind hastily. He had been entirely happy for ever so long, not a thing had gone wrong. Everybody had been so nice to him. The music had been beautiful and just the songs he liked to sing. His wings fitted perfectly and St. Peter had been wonderful. So had Jehu. And Cap'm Archie—he had given him everything he could think of and a heap he did not think of. Of course there was the matter of the cigar. He wanted to go to the gallows with a cigar in his mouth. But that wasn't Cap'm Archie's fault . . . and, too, maybe Cap'm Archie had forgotten the cigar. He had so many things to think about. Willie concluded that if it were the cigar he would say nothing about it to the kind angel because he did not want to embarrass Cap'm Archie. He did not really want to go to the gallows with a cigar, anyway, he decided.

"But I did want ter make dat speech," he concluded.

"What speech is that?" asked the kindly faced angel.

Willie explained in great detail, and the angel and the Great Lord God listened intently.

"But hit wa'n't Cap'm Archie's fault," he declared.

"Whose fault was it, then?" demanded the Great Lord God.

"Hit mought er been—onderstan', I ain' s'cusin' nobody," Willie faltered, "but hit mought er been Ole Green Eyes. But I loves ev'ybody—him, too," he added hastily.

"I know the scoundrel," declared the Great Lord God. "He's been plaguing me for years and years. But this is too much." The brow of the Great Lord God clouded in anger and he shouted with a terrible roar, like seven peals of thunder, "Cherub, bring me a bolt of forked lightning that I may strike that man from the face of the earth."

The cherub brought the lightning, and the Great Lord God was about to hurl it. But the kind angel touched his arm gently.

"I wouldn't, Father," said the angel. "He might not have understood that the speech was to have been the biggest thing in Willie's life."

The Great Lord God stayed his hand and turned upon the kind angel. "Of

course he understood. That's why he didn't let him make it. He's just low-down mean. I've put up with enough of it."

"But," insisted the kind angel, "it will do no good to strike him down with lightning. It would frighten many people. And it would start new arguments over religion and that would lead to controversies and they would lead to hatreds and hatreds lead to——"

"I've heard that speech a million times, Son," said the Great Lord God, "and you needn't go into details. I admit you are right," and he handed the lightning bolt back to the cherub. "But," continued the Great Lord God, "I will not let this thing pass." His brow clouded in anger again. "I am the Great I am," he roared, "and my commands shall be obeyed." The kind angel sat meekly and argued no further.

"Willie Malone," commanded the Great Lord God in a tone of thunder.

"Yassuh, Great Lord God," replied Willie, jumping to his feet.

"You go right back down yonder and make that speech. He's sitting in the jail office right now with Captain Archie. Now go and do my commands."

Willie lost no time in getting to the jail. As he approached, he noticed a half-dozen Negroes—friends of his—standing in the rain about the big steel door entry to the lower cells. But he hurried by them with only a curt "hy-dy, boys." The fact that they ignored him stung a little but he had no time to lose. He went straight to the office entrance.

The green-eyed man was seated at a table fingering five new ten-dollar bills. The coroner was scratching away with a pen on a big official-looking document. The editor and the two Gibbses were talking in low tones. Cap'm Archie was hunched down in his chair at his desk, looking at the floor. Willie stood a minute respectfully, hoping Cap'm Archie would notice him and inquire what he wanted.

But Cap'm Archie did not look toward him and Willie tried a scheme that had worked many times for him.

"Cap'm, suh," he said, "don' you want dis ole dirty flo' swep' up er somethin'?"

But Cap'm Archie acted as though he did not hear.

Willie cogitated. Maybe he was worrying about forgetting the cigar.

But as the thought came to Willie Cap'm Archie slowly reached to his vest pocket and drew out a single long black cigar and studied it intently.

"You got the mate to that'n, Sheriff?" Ole Green Eyes quit shuffling the new bills and directed his attention toward the cigar.

"Nope," replied Cap'm Archie, "I ain't got the mate to this'n." And he tightened his grip on the cigar until he had broken and crushed it. "And if I did have it," he added, "I'd damn well keep it."

"No hard feelings, Sheriff," offered Green Eyes. "I see you ain't used to it. Cheer up. It's just another nigger less."

by Roark Bradford

A scraping of feet in the jail hall at the side of the office attracted the attention of both Cap'm Archie and Green Eyes. Willie followed their gaze through the barred hall door and saw six Negroes carrying a long black box toward the big jail door. Behind the box marched Preacher Moore, directing and exhorting as he went.

"There he goes now—out of yer jail and out of yer life. It's all over and yer duty's done."

Cap'm Archie squeezed the cigar tightly, crumbling it into tiny bits.

The green-eyed man essayed a cackling laugh. "And so's mine," he continued, picking up the five bills, "so I guess I'll be going."

Willie had been standing by in respectful silence since the white folks had indicated by ignoring him that they were too busy to talk to him. White people are that way, Willie had learned. Sometimes they will talk with you and laugh with you. And sometimes when they are busy they won't pay any attention to you unless you get in their way or something. Then they will curse you. Willie knew how to get along with white folks.

But things were different now. He had business with Mister Green Eyes.

"Wait a minute, Cap'm, suh," he addressed the green-eyed man.

Green Eyes stiffened, blinked his eyes, passed his hand across his forehead, and frowned. He stuck the money into his pocket quickly and grabbed for his hat.

"Wait a minute, Cap'm," Willie pleaded. "I got ter make my speech."

The green-eyed man turned pale and shut his eyes tightly, gritting his teeth and shaking his head as if in an effort to clear his brain.

"Sheriff," he said with a great struggle for calmness in his voice, "I need a drink. I—I—I'm sort of nervous, I reckon."

"There's the doctor," Cap'm Archie replied calmly, nodding toward the coroner.

"But, Cap'm, suh, wait," interjected Willie, "lemme make my speech——"

The green-eyed man yelled and ran to the doctor.

"Get me a drink, Doctor!" he begged. "A drink! For God's sake. I'm all shot to hell, Doctor. Get me a drink, quick."

"What's the matter, man?" demanded the doctor. "What is it?"

"That damned nigger, Doctor. I'm seein' things. So help me. He wants to make a speech, Doctor——"

"Dat's all right, Cap'm," Willie insisted. "Hit ain't no mean speech."

"O-ww-w-w—Doctor," screamed the green-eyed man. "There he is again."

The coroner and Cap'm Archie caught the hangman and led him to a chair.

"Calm down, man," said the doctor. "Your nerves are upset."

"But that nigger, that damned nigger! I see him."

"Well, he isn't going to hurt you, man. He's——"

"Nawsuh, I wa'n't gonter hurt nobody," Willie assured him. "I jes' was gonter say a few words."

The man struggled wildly, and it was only with the added strength of the two Gibbses and the editor that they succeeded in holding him in his chair. He was alternately crying and cursing, trembling weakly and fighting wildly.

"That damned nigger! I see him! I see him!" he kept shouting. "He wants to make a speech!"

"Hold him until I can fix a hypodermic," ordered the doctor.

"I jes' gonter make my speech," Willie pleaded again in an effort to calm the green-eyed man. "I ain' gonter do nothin' but jes' tawk."

But instead of being soothed, the man became more violent and but for the utmost strength of four men, he would have escaped. They held him though. Held him in the chair while his eyes glared in wild frenzy, his huge neck swelled even bigger, his face turned purple, and his breath came in short rasping gasps. "Git away, damned nigger. I see you. Ow-ww-ww!"

"I jes' on'y got a few words I wanner say," Willie began again. And after one lunge at the sound of Willie's voice the man quieted down, and his eyes stared glassily at nothing, although his neck still bulged. The colour of his face changed to an ugly blue and his mouth dropped open and dripped frothy saliva. And while the green-eyed man sat limp in the chair Willie Malone completed his speech:

"I jes' wanner say I ain't got no hard feelin's agin nobody an' I don' want nobody to has no hard feelin's agin me. An' I wants to meet you all in heaven."

1928: *from Red Book*

THE PARROT

by Walter Duranty, writer, foreign correspondent, lecturer. He is perhaps best known for his efforts as a foreign correspondent of the New York Times. *Born in Liverpool, Mr. Duranty attended Harrow and graduated from Cambridge, Class of 1906. During World War I he was attached as a correspondent to the French Army. In 1921 the* Times *sent him to Moscow, where he remained most of the time till World War II. Mr. Duranty is considered*

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by Walter Duranty

one of the best authorities on Russia and the Russian people, and much of his literary effort has been devoted to this subject. His books include The Kremlin and the People, Search for a Key, USSR, *and* Stalin and Co. *In 1932 he won the Pulitzer Prize for reporting.*

The box car rattled and swayed as the train jerked slowly out of the station, but the big sergeant standing at the open door balanced himself easily in his thick felt boots.

He held Sergey McTavish by the collar of his astrakhan tunic and the seat of his breeches, kicking and wriggling like a retriever pup. Then he swung the boy up level with his shoulder and threw him sprawling on a snowdrift.

"There," he said, "you young devil, that will teach you to steal potatoes from the army and sell them to dirty food speculators. You have the red head of an imp from hell and the black heart of a capitalist. We have done with you."

So ended the six month's career of Sergey McTavish as mascot of the Seventh Battalion of Red Army Riflemen.

During those months he had tasted victory—in the swift advance to the gates of Warsaw—and defeat—in the hungry flight back across the frontier; he had come to swear like a Russian soldier—who swears with strength and zest; and he had looted gloriously—the astrakhan cloak on which the battalion tailor had worked all night, jolting cross-legged in a mule cart, to make round cap, tunic, and breeches. But he had not learned discipline or honesty, neither overcurrent in the Red Army of those days; and so here he was, gasping for breath on a snowdrift in the outskirts of a little town in the Ural foothills, while his late comrades jogged heedlessly on to their garrison at Ekaterinburg.

When he got his breath back, Sergey scrambled to his feet and turned to curse the big sergeant as worst he knew how. But the tail of the train was blank and black in the December twilight, growing smaller every second, too small to be worth cursing. In the jargon of the Red Army, the episode was "liquidated."

Sergey Sergeyitch McTavish, twelve-year-old orphan, son of a Scottish soldier of fortune and a German farmer's daughter from the old Volga "colonies," was alone, friendless, penniless, and hungry in a wind-swept freight yard, with nothing in sight but the meagre huts of the station and rows of roofless cars whose broken sides stuck out like jagged teeth. Sergey regretted now that he had been so smart and witty a few hours before at the expense of the station commandant, a thick-headed Lett. His comrades on the train had roared with laughter and kept off the angry Lett when

Sergey dived among them for refuge. The light in the station hut meant warmth and food now, but Letts are a stubborn and unforgiving people. No, there was nothing for it but to tramp the three miles back to that dismal town.

Damn potatoes anyway, and speculators! If they had only left him the money! That brute of a sergeant had grabbed every kopeck. Still, he was lucky, at that; they might have beaten him or marooned him naked on the open steppe.

But a veteran of the Polish war knows worse things than hunger or cold or darkness. The boy dragged his cap down over his ears and set off across the rusty tracks toward the town.

As he crept under the second of three lines of dismantled freight cars, his nose caught full blast the smell of cooking food. Right before him in the third row one car was intact, light shining behind the little window in the door, and smoke pouring from the stovepipe at the roof corner.

Without hesitation Sergey banged his fist upon the door. It slid open immediately, and a girl looked down at him.

"Come in, stranger," she cried. "We were expecting you. But tell me quickly, is it to heaven or to hell that we owe the pleasure of your visit?"

"He who sent me here said I had the red head of an imp from hell," replied Sergey, swinging up by her outstretched hand and slamming the door behind him. "So you can understand I find it cold here, and am hungry after my journey."

The girl brushed off his cap and pulled him forward under the kerosene lamp which hung from the middle of the roof.

"Red as hell's flames," she muttered admiringly. "That should keep you warm, and we will fill your belly. My father, here, just said it would take a saint or a devil to conquer my problem, and I told him as you knocked, that even St. Nicholas the Wonder-worker would never dare risk his wings in Russia to-day."

A roar of laughter from a heap of straw in the corner near the stove: " 'Tis but a little imp for so great a task, Marfoosha, and I doubt if the Prince of Devils himself is a match for the Baba Papagai, who beyond doubt is his own grandmother." The voice shook a trifle over the last words, and Sergey glimpsed fingers gesturing quickly over a broad khaki chest.

There were three people in the car, the girl, comely and slim with a tangle of blonde hair, red shirt tucked into short blue kilt, and high black leather boots; the man, in khaki uniform, lying on the straw, fat brown cheeks, quick little black eyes in a bush of iron-gray hair and whiskers; and a small bent figure by the stove, so wrapped in a service overcoat of the old Imperial army that nothing was visible but a white wisp of beard, a bald shining pate, and two pink pointed ears.

"Comrade imp," said the girl, "I present my grandfather, who lives alone in this car, being wise and having money, but not wise enough to help me in my trouble; and my father, who is commandant of the prison but unable to save my lover, his prisoner, from——"

"Don't forget to present Comrade Soup also," broke in the old man with a chuckle, "and little Comrade Vodka in his bottle, who is best of all." And, plunging an iron ladle into the steaming pot, he filled an earthen bowl and passed it to the hungry boy.

Twice Sergey emptied the bowl, breaking chunks of black bread into the hot liquid. Then he gulped a stinging mouthful of spirit from the bottle, and taking a palmful of green flake *mahorka*, and a scrap of newspaper from the old man, twisted the cone-shaped cigarette of the Russian soldier, lighted the upturned flap with a sulphur match, and putting the small end of the cone between his lips, puffed out a cloud of evil-smelling smoke.

"What is this trouble you speak of," he asked, "and who is the Parrot Woman, the Baba Papagai?"

All three of his hosts spoke at once, in noisy excitement. There was a young man, a foreigner, a prisoner, an American, a soldier, who had come somehow from somewhere eastward on a train, young and cheerful and clever with his hands beyond belief; and the girl Marfoosha loved him, and he had mended the electric light for the prison and later for the whole town, and at first he was quite dumb like a beast, but now he spoke humanly enough after several months; and two weeks ago the Soviet had agreed to let Marfoosha marry him, because they wanted to keep him in the town to start again the nail factory, as he had promised, and because he was cheerful and had blue eyes and brown curly hair, and Marfoosha loved him and wanted to marry him terribly, and would die too if he were killed.

This Sergey learned first, because the girl talked fastest and loudest, but through it all beat like the drum in a regimental band the name of the Parrot Woman, Baba Papagai, who was a witch and a demon and the grandmother of all the devils. Bit by bit the boy got clear about her also and linked her up with Marfoosha and the American prisoner.

She had a familiar spirit; this terrible woman, a parrot, red and gray, in a wire cage; and when it bit you, you were guilty; and when it didn't, you were innocent; but it always bit you, and so you were always shot.

Nobody knew where she came from, but it was said she was the widow of a famous revolutionary who had worked in a factory at Ekaterinburg and had been shot by the Czar's army in 1906. And now she was president of a "Flying Tribunal," that moved about the whole province judging counter revolutionaries; and always she made them put a finger in the parrot's cage, and always it bit them, and then they were shot. And it was reported that she lived on the smell of blood and must kill a man every day or she would die,

and the devil, her grandson, would fly off with her. And when the Soviet knew she was coming to hold court in the town they were all very frightened, because there was only one victim, the ex-manager of the factory, who twice had tried to escape from the town and had been prevented. That one man would never be enough for the Baba Papagai. She would suspect the Soviet of being lukewarm in the cause of revolution and perhaps put some of them to the trial of that horrid parrot, as had happened before elsewhere, always with fatal results.

So four days ago the Soviet had held a meeting hastily and in secret, and had decided to sacrifice their American. They were sorry, but it was his head or theirs, so no argument was possible. They'd put high hopes on his re-opening the factory; but after all, he *was* a stranger, and a prisoner, and it was said the Americans were fighting to help the counter revolution, and it was he or they, and finally there was just a chance that the parrot wouldn't like the taste of foreigners and fail to bite him.

Marfoosha and her father, who, as prison commandant, felt most uneasy about the whole affair, had come to ask the advice of the hermit in the box car. But he had been of no help to them, and the father had said it would take an angel or a devil to find the way out of the mess, and just at that second Sergey had knocked and said at once he was an imp from hell, so what would he suggest?

Sergey's Scotch blood whispered caution. He puffed his *mahorka* cigarette and declared profoundly that there was a solution for every problem, but this case being extremely difficult he had better set eyes first on the woman and her parrot, to say nothing of the American and the ex-manager of the factory, before deciding what should be done. There was a twinkle in Marfoosha's eye as she received his verdict, and the boy was reassured as to the reality of her belief in his diabolic origin; but the prison commandant and his elderly parent were ready in approval.

"Never drive pigs too swiftly," said the ancient, banging the cork of his vodka bottle hard against the side of the car and burying it in the recesses of his greatcoat. "Let our Comrade Imp view the situation for himself, and maybe he will be able to make a plan. For me, I am at a loss—I admit it freely; the young man must die: there is no doubt of it."

"Everyone must die some day," replied his son, "and I, as commandant of a prison, know that some die quicker than others. But this American is a friendly youth, and clever with his hands, and Marfoosha loves him dearly; so I want his life saved and no trouble with this infernal old woman. If the flame-headed Imp can help us, I, Alexei Petrovich, promise that he shall have all the food he needs in this cold country, and a warm corner by my fire to toast his toes till they are red as his hair."

All of which sounded good to Sergey McTavish as he said good-bye to

the old man and accompanied Marfoosha and her father across the cold white plain to the little town.

Far off, beneath the low roofs, windows poured a flood of light upon the snow.

"What makes your town so bright?" asked Sergey, tramping a little ahead of Marfoosha, step for step with the long strides of her father.

"I told you the American fixed our electric machines for us," said the prison warden. "I guess you are surprised to see one of our towns using electricity these days."

He emphasized the word "our" with a faintly sneering accent. It is a habit the Russians have, to deprecate everything Russian.

"And now," he went on mournfully, "even this town won't have any electricity any more. When he's gone, the whole works will be *kaput* in no time. Oh, that Baba Papagai and her parrot! To think that a miserable bird could bring such trouble upon us!"

"You say it's a bird?" asked Sergey, who had never seen a parrot and had not the least idea whether it was bird or beast or perhaps a new kind of Soviet commissar. "Well, if it's only a bird that's worrying you, why don't you kill it?"

"Kill it!" almost shouted Marfoosha. "Why, you might as well talk of killing Lenin!"

"*Shh!*" cried her father sharply. "You mustn't talk like that!" He caught Sergey by the shoulder. "See here, little comrade, you don't understand. It's not a bird, really; it only *looks* like a bird. But it talks like a man, and it tells her, the Baba, what she must do. Who shall say which is the master, the parrot or the parrot woman? Everyone knows there are things like that which come out of the dark and serve those who sell their souls to Darkness. You can't kill them, ever, the dark spirits, but in the old days a priest could drive them away with the name of God and holy water. And now the priests are spat upon and hide in holes, and God has turned His face from our Russia, which is become a plaything for the evil ones." His voice sank into a whimper and he crossed himself with bowed head. The girl stood motionless, but her breath came in short gasps as if she had been running.

Sergey McTavish shivered. This was ill talk, of spirits from the dark, and the man's fear was infectious. But he bit tight on the life rule which had steeled him and his father and his father's father who died to check Osman Digna's last sortie from Plevna—"No Scot can show fear before a Russian."

"That is stuff for women and children," he said stoutly; "but we men of the Red Army care neither for gods nor devils; and besides, why worry about the ford till you come to the river?"

His companions made no answer, and all three trudged on in silence through the snow.

The prison was a large house set back among tall trees whose branches hung glittering inch thick with frost in the light of an electric arc lamp. A sentry bundled to the ears in bearskin coat peered at them through the rime of his collar, then stood aside with a thump of his bayonetted gun upon the doorstep.

In the high, square entrance hall two men were sitting before a huge fireplace, ablaze with round birch logs thick as a man's body. The younger leaped up as they entered, tall and loose limbed, in a uniform of dark mustard colour such as Sergey had never seen. In two strides, so it seemed, he was across the room, lifting Marfoosha right off her feet into his arms.

There was more delight than anger in her squeal of protest. Sergey stood watching, round-eyed, while the girl's father walked forward to join the other man, beside the fire.

"Enough, Mahlinkie, enough," cried Marfoosha in a stifled voice. "Put me down—we have a visitor, bad-mannered one!"

Regaining her feet, she flung her arm round Sergey's shoulder. "This is my American, little comrade; his name is Djim, but that is a dog's name, not a man's, so I call him Mahlinkie, the little one, because he is so tall." She laughed gaily and pushed the boy forward, pulling off his hat with her other hand. "Look, Mahlinkie, it's fire, but it doesn't burn." And she ran her fingers through Sergey's flaming hair.

"Fortheluvamike!"

Sergey McTavish did not understand this American greeting, but something within him called forth two half-forgotten words in reply. "Scottish, gorrd-*am*-you-*sirr*."

The effect was startling. High in the air went Sergey in those strong young arms, while a torrent of unfamiliar words beat upon his ears. What a din they made! Sergey, six feet from the ground, beside himself with excitement, yelling his new-found slogan; the American shouting strange noises, and Marfoosha dancing around them, half in laughter, half in tears.

The prison warden and his friend by the fire rushed forward in panic. "Are you mad?" cried the former, catching his daughter around the waist. "Stop this uproar. You don't know what's happened. She is here already, staying in Petrushka's house."

Marfoosha halted as if struck by lightning, and the American stiffened, holding Sergey in midair.

Slowly he lowered the boy to the ground, still grasping him firmly under the arms. An instant's silence; then the warden continued: "She came to-night, with her parrot—saints defend us—and holds court to-morrow. Very angry when she heard there were only two cases. She will judge the factory manager in the morning; and the next day"—he jerked his thumb toward the American—"it's his turn. They say we are lucky. He's a foreigner—she

was quite interested and said no more about our scarcity of prisoners."

There was no answer to these words save a low sound from Marfoosha. She had fainted.

Sergey McTavish awoke next morning from a tormenting dream of gray devil birds with red tails pecking at his breast, to find Marfoosha and her American standing beside the bench on which he had passed the night before the fire.

The girl's face was red and swollen with weeping, but her lover wore a friendly grin.

"Wake up, little comrade, wake up and eat your breakfast, for there's work for you to do." She had tried to speak cheerfully, but as Sergey rubbed his eyes she sank down in a heap beside the bench, sobbing desperately.

The tall American tried vainly to comfort her: "Marfoosha, my darling, my baby girl, don't worry."

Sergey McTavish sat upright. How stupid girls were not to understand that death was part of a soldier's job! He pulled Marfoosha's hair sharply. "Stop crying," he said, "and tell me what's the matter."

Marfoosha shook herself free. "All right," she said to her lover, "but you go and let me talk to him alone."

And then to Sergey: "The Baba Papagai is in a frightful humour. We know it from Petrushka. She had her parrot at breakfast with her, early, two hours ago, before it was light, and sat there talking, talking. She said to him, *'Belogvardeyetz'* " (White Guard) "and the parrot answered *'Belogvardeyetz,'* and then the Baba Papagai laughed and the parrot said over and over again, *'Belogvardeyetz,'* and the Baba Papagai laughed some more.

"You, Sergey Sergeyitch, do you know what that means?" Marfoosha leaned across the bench and laid her clenched fists close to Sergey's heart.

"No," said Sergey uneasily, with a spoonful of *kasha* poised halfway to his lips.

"Death! That's all! Just death for my American!" Marfoosha laid her head on her arms, then straightened up and rattled on breathlessly:

"The court opens at ten o'clock. You go there. It will be just a general rehearsal. The Baba Papagai is having her rehearsal this morning. The real show is when my American comes before her." Marfoosha's voice altered. Sergey again stopped eating.

"She knows it. She told Petrushka she had heard of this American in town. She said she had never before had the chance to try her *papagai* on an American. She cursed America. She said it was the sink of all iniquity, a den of wolves, the castle of capitalism. She said that all Americans were White Guards, and when she read 'American' to her parrot this morning, it just answered, *'Belogvardeyetz.'*

"Sergey, go see for yourself."

Sergey put the half-empty *kasha* bowl on the floor. He had lost his appetite. It was clear to him that Marfoosha was all wrought up about this business, but, hoping against despair, somehow looked to him to help her.

"What time is it?" he asked.

"Near ten," answered Marfoosha. "Come with me—I'll show you the way."

Outside, the sun was rising red through the mist over the blank white steppe.

Ten minutes from her home Marfoosha stopped, took Sergey by the arm, and pointed straight ahead.

"There it is," she said.

"What, the church?" asked Sergey.

"It used to be the church. Don't you see the guard in front? Now go, please, and come to us as soon as it is over." Marfoosha took Sergey's head in her arms, pressed it to her heart until he struggled to get free, then released him with a push and, turning swiftly, ran back the way they had come.

Sergey McTavish recovered his balance, frowned a moment at the retreating figure, then proceeded warily toward the church. There was nothing strange to him about a Cheka trial taking place there. Even when other buildings were available, the "Flying Tribunals of the All-Russian Extraordinary Commission for Combatting Counter Revolutions" had found that their sessions made a far greater impression on their White Guard enemies if they were held in the church. It appealed, too, to the Red sense of humour.

In front of the building, beneath an ikon of the Virgin Mary, a Red Guard paced up and down, his conical cap pulled tight over his ears to meet the threadbare collar of an old gray overcoat. The buttons, cut off because they had borne the insignia of the Czar, were replaced with string. When Sergey approached, the Red Guard dropped the butt of his rifle nonchalantly in the snow, crying:

"What do you want, little princeling?" with an ironic wink at the boy's astrakhan suit.

"Don't call me names, comrade," grinned back Sergey. "I'm Red Army too. This is loot from the Polaks, issued me by the regimental tailor, Seventh Battalion Rifles. Just lost touch with headquarters. Now be a good comrade and give me a cigarette and let me go inside and get warm a bit."

The sentry laughed, said he'd no tobacco, but obligingly turned his back while Sergey slipped past into the church.

For a moment he could see nothing in the dim interior save two tall candles on the altar, above which an ikon glittered with gold and jewels.

Very quietly he groped his way forward to the last of a number of rough wooden benches which had been placed in the nave, and sat down behind rows of people bent forward in eager attention. At the other end of the

church a man was speaking in a high-pitched voice, trailing off at times into falsetto. The words came rapidly, tumbling over one another, hardly intelligible. Sergey could only catch a phrase now and then—"never . . . Czar's government . . . always tried to work for the people . . . worker myself . . . not my fault . . . education . . . no counter revolutionary, believe me, believe me."

Cutting this babble like a saw, another voice, metallic, harsh, rasped a single word: "*Belogvardeyetz!*" ("White Guard!")

Then a loud laugh. Then silence.

Sergey's eyes, by now accustomed to the semidarkness, sought the source of the inhuman voice. With a shiver of interest he realized the word "*Belogvardeyetz!*" had come from a cage swinging beneath a stiff gold embroidery attached like a banner to a pole, which stood at the left of the altar. Within the cage, a gray-red bird moved listlessly on its perch. That was the bird that talked like a man, but who had laughed?

Near the altar a woman was rising to her feet behind a table draped with red cloth. Erect, she loomed enormous, six feet or more in height. Traces of mocking laughter were still about her lips, but her eyes bore no sign of it. The flickering light gleamed on abnormally protruding eyeballs, threw into relief a network of swollen veins on either temple, and showed her thickened throat bursting from the collar of a soldier's tunic.

Sergey felt his hands shake as they fumbled for his pockets. He needed no one to tell him this was the Baba Papagai.

With a gesture of impatience she pulled off the cap, revealing a thin growth of gray hair. The woman was nearly bald.

She turned to the left where a man was standing, thin and crumpled, between two soldiers with fixed bayonets.

"Counter revolutionary!" she bellowed suddenly. The man staggered. He moistened his lips with the end of his tongue and seemed to be trying to speak, but before the words came the Baba Papagai continued more quietly:

"I know what you want to say, citizen. You never carried on counter revolution. You never harmed or oppressed anyone, never resisted the proletariat; in fact, you admire the revolution intensely and think Lenin and Trotsky the greatest men in history. Yes, I know all that; I've heard the same story before, often." Her voice deepened and again became harsh. She wiped her mouth with the back of her hand and resumed: "Fortunately, fortunately, we have here with us the means of seeing beneath these fine words, right to the inner secrets of your heart. You are surprised, perhaps, that an ignorant old woman like me should see, should be able to know the secret heart of an 'intelligenter' like you; but I don't pretend so much. It is this wise bird here, who is older than I, older, it may be, than anyone in this town, who by long experience can recognize a counter revolutionary at first glance, can smell the black soul of him in one sniff."

Her voice had become monotonous, rising and falling like that of a priest reciting some familiar ritual.

"Walk forward, my friend of the people, walk forward, and put your finger into the cage of my little comrade, that he may take a sniff at it. Perhaps you are innocent, as you would have us believe. The little comrade will know, because he never makes a mistake. If you are innocent he will do you no harm, will not touch your finger; but if your hand has offended against the People"—again that inhuman roar—"he will bite it to the bone, and after my judgment you shall receive your punishment."

She made a sign to the soldiers, who took the cringing man by the arms and dragged him toward the parrot's cage. The man shrank within his coat as if wishing to wither up and slip out of his clothes, leaving them in the hands of his guards. They grasped him more firmly and urged him forward. The candlelight glanced from their bayonets and played across the bulging eyes of the Baba Papagai as she mockingly reassured the terror-stricken figure in their hands.

"Have no fear, little servant of dogs. That bird is a proletarian. You said you loved the workers. If it's true, the *papagai* will never touch you. Nor will I."

There was no sound save the prisoner's feet dragging across the floor as the soldiers carried him to the last instance of justice. He had slumped down in their arms so that when they reached the foot of the golden banner, his head fell in the shadow cast by the bottom of the cage. In the attempt to raise him upright, the guards brought his forehead heavily against it. The impact shook the parrot. It ruffled its feathers, stretched its wings, brought them tightly back against its body and hopped expectantly forward on its perch. Its indifference was gone; its beady eyes were watchful.

A murmur of awe, or wonderment, or horror, floated from the shadowy figures which filled the benches. It was cut short by the voice of the Baba Papagai.

"Carry out the procedure, Soldiers of the Revolution. If the servant of dogs cannot lift his hand, lift it for him."

The prisoner struggled. One of the soldiers deftly twisted the left arm of the writhing man behind his back and pushed it upward until he gasped: "I'll do it." The soldier released the pressure on the twisted arm and the prisoner stood upright. He lifted his right hand with extended forefinger and thrust it forward by short jerks. Twice he dropped his hand, and twice the soldier pressed the hammer lock until he gasped again: "I'll do it."

The third time, his finger reached the cage. It trembled so that he was unable to poke it through the bars. The other guard grasped it firmly and pushed it into the cage. For a moment there was utter stillness in the church. The prisoner had raised his head and was staring with fascinated eyes at the

parrot. He watched the bird as though the finger in the cage were another man's.

The parrot eyed the prisoner's hand. Cocking its head on one side, it cast its beady gaze appraisingly at the forefinger that shook as though playfully just below its beak. Its claws against the perch made a faint scratching sound which seemed to reverberate in the silence. A peasant seated on the front bench crossed himself mechanically.

The parrot bent its neck, and—rubbed its beak on the perch. Sergey almost laughed. Then he caught the first expulsion of breath, half choked and gasped, as he saw the parrot lunge swiftly, take the finger with a snapping motion in its beak, and bite downward.

More shocking than any scream was the silence of the prisoner. The parrot had bitten him to the bone. He behaved as though he had not felt it. Such a relief, this stab of pain, from the slow torture of suspense, so welcome the knowledge of his doom after its uncertainty, that the bird's bite, though meaning death, was like a douche of cold water, reviving his manhood.

"*Belogvardeyetz!*" croaked the parrot, back on its perch with one strong wing beat.

"He never makes a mistake," exclaimed the Baba Papagai, and gabbled formally: "Citizen Nikitin, this court finds you guilty of counter revolution.

"Take him out!" she shouted. "To the cellar with the White Guard servant of dogs!"

The prisoner was the calmest man in the church. Erect, his head back, with a firm step he allowed his guards to lead him across the front of the altar toward the rear entrance. As he passed the table of the Baba Papagai, she leaned forward and feasted her bulging eyes on his drawn white face. The prisoner looked her back squarely, sneering as though in sympathy with the snarl on her face, and with a contemptuous cry, "Parrot justice!" yielded to the urging of his guards as they dragged him through the door.

The Baba Papagai put on the cloth cap. Her upper lip clamped down in savage determination. "To-night, at eleven o'clock, we'll hear the next case on the docket." She gathered up her papers, shoved the table aside, and strode down the aisle.

Court was adjourned.

Sergey had intended to slip out before the others, but he had not reckoned with this abrupt ending of the session. Before he could move, the Baba Papagai was in the aisle, scrutinizing the faces as she passed. With every step she took, his courage waned. By the time she reached his bench, he was huddled cowering in his seat. He felt numb, in the clutch of a nightmare. Those eyes were the eyes of a Kelpie, that monster from the stories of Scotland his father had told him long ago, half bull, half demon, but shaped like a man, which dwelt at the bottom of the deep lochs of the Highlands and on nights

when the full moon shone, appeared beside the skiffs of unwary boatmen and dragged them down to death. The Kelpie, he recollected shudderingly, had just such bulging eyes, such shaggy eyebrows, such lineaments of hate.

Never before had Sergey known such anguish as when the Baba Papagai stopped beside him, turned and surveyed the church to satisfy herself no one had moved since she left her table, then, quite accidentally, let fall her gaze on his small red head.

The Baba Papagai apparently felt the need to emphasize her exit.

"Well, who are you, with your head of an imp from hell?" boomed the cruel voice.

This repetition of the phrase so fresh in his memory broke the spell sufficiently for him to stammer out: "I'm only a little boy."

"Whelp!" spat the Baba Papagai, and passed on through the door.

Sergey waited motionless until nearly everyone had left the building.

Running back to the prison as fast as he could, Sergey felt the movement of his legs in the sharp air send the blood tingling through his veins, and by the time he reached the house and paused to scrape the snow from his boots, he had shaken off his fears. He felt big with importance as he entered the hall and knew that he had news to tell. Marfoosha's face brought back the unaccustomed sense of depression. She was sitting at the table between her father and the American soldier, her head sunk on her breast.

The two men looked up eagerly when Sergey appeared, but Marfoosha never stirred.

"Well, what happened?" cried the commandant.

"It bit, all right," announced Sergey in a matter-of-fact tone.

The prison warden shoved his glass away from him, banged his fist on the table: "I knew it."

Marfoosha lifted her head as if just awakened. Catching Sergey by the arm, she drew him to her and whispered: "Tell us about it. All about it."

Sergey began. They listened as though their lives depended upon every word.

"And then," he went on, "she said she would hold court again to-night."

"To-night?" all three broke out. "To-night? It was to be to-morrow."

"You mean," gasped Marfoosha, "that—that—he is to be tried to-night?"

"That's what she said," responded Sergey.

Marfoosha threw herself on the floor, clasping her lover round the knees. "They shan't. They shan't!" she screamed.

His face was white and his lip trembled a little as he patted her head, repeating tenderly: "*Nichevo, nichevo, nichevo.*" It was the only Russian word he could pronounce without a trace of accent, the universal "Never mind" or "What's the use?" of Slavic fatalism.

But his caressing hand froze when the commandant mumbled thickly: "They shoot you through the back of the head."

Marfoosha sobbed aloud.

"Yes, that's how they do it," insisted her father, tipsy with indignation. "They take you down to the cellar of the church and just as you pass the threshold they shoot you in the back of the head. They think you won't expect it and won't turn around, and that it's the easiest way to get it over. But lots do know. The dirty swine!"

A moan from his daughter checked him suddenly, diverting his anger: "And you! You damned imp!" he yelled at Sergey. "What are you going to do? I thought you could find something?"

Marfoosha's weary, "Let him alone," roused her father to a higher pitch. "No, I won't let him alone. What good has he done? You damned imp! It was Dédushka who swore you amounted to something. The old man is getting crazier every day. Suppose you get along over there and let him know how worthless you are. Get on. Get out of here." Unable to vent his feelings otherwise, the commandant staggered to his feet and advanced with threatening fist toward the boy.

Sergey retreated sullenly. He was halfway down the steps when the commandant rushed out and yelled at him: "What time will it be?"

"Eleven o'clock to-night," shouted the boy without pausing.

It was already past five o'clock and pitch dark. He found his way through the town by the glow from the windows and afterward by instinct, like a young wild animal, accurately retraced the path of the evening before. His thoughts were whirling about the awful eyes of the Baba Papagai. The longer he thought, the more convinced he became that she was a Kelpie. His father's stories came back more vividly. Surely there was some detail he had forgotten. Yes, something about a charm or talisman against the monster. His father certainly had spoken of a charm. But that was all so long ago. To Sergey a whole lifetime seemed passed since then, and he groped back in his memory as an old man strives to recall his youth. He tried to concentrate his mind on the talisman, but each time it slipped away from him. "Like a watermelon seed slipping through your fingers," thought Sergey.

The simile struck a vein of association. The talisman was some kind of seed. His boots brushed against the branches of a fir tree growing beside the railroad track. Sergey felt as though a door in his mind had opened halfway.

"Tree berries! The berries of the mountain ash! That's what Father said was good for Kelpies. Woven in a cross."

But something else, too, when there were no ash berries. Something still better, he reflected. The feeling that the door was only halfway open persisted. He was walking head down, so absorbed in the effort to remember

that he went past the old man's box car without noticing it. Suddenly he stopped, sniffed the air like a hound on the trail, turned, saw the box car, and ran toward it. He continued to sniff as he banged on the door, stamping impatiently until it opened with a puff of savoury steam.

"I've found it!" shouted Sergey, leaping up and seizing the astonished old man by the hand. "I've found it!" he repeated, dancing in excitement. "We can save him now."

"In the name of the holy saints Boris and Gleb!" ejaculated the grandfather. "What is it you've found to make you jump like a flea on a frog's back?"

Sergey hardly heard him. His eyes were roving round the cabin.

"Ha! There, in the corner!" He heaved a deep sigh of relief. "The charm!" he exclaimed. "The charm, little grandfather, the charm to defeat the Kelpie."

"And now perhaps you'll tell me what a Kelpie is and why you're behaving like an idiot," grunted the old man sarcastically as he dipped a bowl of stew and placed it smoking hot before the boy. How good it smelled! Sergey recollected his stomach so keenly that he forgot his excitement. Over the stew he related the day's events, dwelling on his conviction that the Baba Papagai was a Kelpie.

"Very probable. Very probable." The old man nodded affirmatively and looked with as much wonder as old age can feel at the red head of his small visitor bobbing up and down over the bowl.

"Whew, I'm late, terribly late. Maybe he's already gone. Must run like the devil."

Sergey jumped for the door, pulling his fur cap over his ears, and with a shrill "Good-bye!" bolted into the night.

He took the steps at the prison door in one jump, landed on his heels, skidded, and fell in a heap at the feet of the surprised sentry.

"Gangway!" he gasped. "Lemme in."

"Who, then, is holding you?" said the sentry as Sergey jerked open the door and rushed into the hall.

It was empty.

Sergey stopped, frozen with the fear that he had come too late to give his talisman to the American. His feet lagged as he crossed the hall, but voices in a room beyond quickened his step. He pushed his head cautiously through the door, entered quickly, closed it with a bang, and jumped forward. Marfoosha and the American were sitting on the floor, talking so earnestly that they scarcely heeded Sergey's presence. On the bed lay the prison commandant, groaning and panting. He was drunk.

Sergey brought his two hands down thwack on the backs of Marfoosha and her lover.

by Walter Duranty

"Come! Quick! I've found it—the charm—to save you. Where's the kitchen? Come with me." His words brought the two instantly to their feet, and the commandant rolled his eyes, trying to get up.

"Quick, here!" Sergey grabbed the American with his right hand and was digging in his pocket with the other when the Red Guard brusquely shoved him aside with: "Out of the way now and enough of this monkey business. Can't help it. Orders is orders. Come along."

Marfoosha threw her arms around her lover's neck. The Red Guard frowned with embarrassment but paused. Sergey turned his back as though in sympathy with the feelings of the lovers, but in the moment of their embrace, he pulled from his pocket a little white object, and clenching it tightly in his fist whirled and cried:

"Well, comrade, shake hands. Come on, be a man—don't stand there and beller."

The American looked down at him, smiled, released Marfoosha and took Sergey's small paw.

"Good-bye," he said.

"A talisman. Keep it in your hand until the last minute," whispered Sergey. "It's magic. Hold it tight, dig your nails into it, and you can't lose." Then loud: "Good-bye, comrade."

The heavy door of the house clanged shut, but Marfoosha stood where they had left her. Then she sank to her knees.

"Holy St. Martha, thou who hast suffered greatly——"

The Baba Papagai believed in ceremony of a kind.

As eleven boomed from the tower the Baba Papagai's huge bulk moved down the aisle toward the altar. Behind her two soldiers, each carrying a lighted candle a yard long and thick as a man's arm. Behind them a third, holding aloft the golden banner, with the parrot's cage, wrapped in a white napkin, swinging beneath it like a censer. Then the clerk of the court with measured step. Then two guards with fixed bayonets. Then the prisoner, head high, shoulders squared, marching slow as a funeral parade. Finally, two more guards, stolid, ponderous.

The Baba Papagai strode to the table before the altar, turned, surveyed the audience, seated herself, and folded her arms. The man with the ecclesiastical banner placed it neatly in its socket and with a nervous gesture flicked off the cover from the cage. The light of the two candles fell on the parrot. It blinked, ruffled its feathers, stretched its neck and croaked: "*Gotova!*" ("Ready!")

The Baba Papagai bared her yellow fangs.

"*Gotova!* Yes, we are ready, my little dove!"

"Comrades," said the Baba Papagai, pushing back her chair, crossing her

legs and shoving her cap to the back of her head, "Comrades, we are here to-night to try a foreign dog who was sent to impose the might of his capitalist masters upon the workers and peasants of the Russian Socialist Federation of Soviet Republics. He comes from the country which above all would like to see the first Workers and Peasants Government once more enslaved by tyrants. An American! It means a dog."

The word "*dog*" aroused the parrot. It squawked: "*Belogvardeyetz!*"

The woman's maniac laugh shocked the echoes of the church.

"Never wrong! Never wrong! My little dove never mistakes them," she cried. "Now, you dog of a White Guard, speak now for yourself. Say why you, a foreigner, dared invade our country."

The American answered boldly in his childish Russian:

"*Yah gavaryou ochen malo po Russky. No yah ne vinovat.*"

"Oh, you speak very little Russian, but you're not guilty. You know enough to say that. And you've nothing more to say?" The Baba Papagai rose to her feet, placed her cap before her on the table, and leaned forward. "Nothing more? Or have you some excuse?"

"*Nichevo,*" retorted the prisoner coolly. It was the one word he pronounced perfectly in Russian.

Her face darkened with fury.

"Dog!" The word echoed to the farthest corners of the building.

Immediately the parrot responded: "*Belogvardeyetz!*"

"The little comrade has spoken. Let him judge the case."

The two guards beside the American grasped him by the arms. He needed no urging. "*Nichevo,*" he said again, to tell them he was not afraid to play his part without coercion.

He walked straight up to the cage. Sergey held his breath. The boy's glance shifted rapidly from the parrot's cage to the Baba Papagai, still leaning forward on the table, her Kelpie's eyes a-goggle at her victim.

"Hell!" said the American aloud. The foreign word rang out defiantly. "Hell!" he repeated again, and stuck his forefinger into the cage.

The parrot lifted its wings. Every spectator—save perhaps one, for Sergey's Scotch heart beat stoutly in his breast—knew that it would strike. It lifted its wings, squawked, teetered on its perch, lowered its beak close to the proffered finger, then half flew, half hopped across the cage, beating the air, screeching atrociously: "*Konchala Konchala!*" ("Finished! Finished!")

"Well? What do you say to that, old girl?" asked the American in English, grinning at the Baba Papagai.

Her eyes were glazed. She crashed her fist upon the table.

"Dog! Dog!" she roared.

"*Belogvardeyetz! Belogvardeyetz!*" weakly echoed the parrot.

"Once more, you dog!" commanded the Baba Papagai.

by Walter Duranty

"As often as you like," answered the American, and put his finger again through the bars.

This time the parrot never pretended to investigate. It cowered at the bottom of the cage, buried its beak in its breast feathers, and only when the Baba Papagai shrieked "Dog!" at the top of her voice did it respond with a low croak: "*Belogvardeyetz!*"

"What's the hour?" The Baba Papagai turned to the clerk beside her. Trembling, he pulled from beneath his sheepskin coat a massive gold repeater, said, "Fifteen minutes to midnight," and returned the former property of the Prince Rashkushin to his pocket.

"Release the prisoner. He is acquitted." The parrot woman kicked aside her table and strode down the aisle. For the sake of this one victim she could not disavow her favourite instrument of terror.

This time Sergey Sergeyitch McTavish sat up straight in his seat and stared at her as she passed him. The moment she disappeared, he ran forward and grasped the American by the hand.

"A Kelpie! I told you! A Kelpie!" he yelled crazily. "My father was right —my father knew."

Indifferent to the buzz of congratulations and the eager hands outstretched to them, the young soldier swung Sergey aloft.

"You're all right, kid," he shouted in English. "You may be cuckoo, but you're there with the goods." Then in Russian: "What was it, *malchik?* I kept it in my hand until the last, but afterward I dropped it. How did you do it?"

His mouth close to the other's ear, Sergey murmured: "Take a sniff at your finger."

The American gave a loud yell, then checked himself.

"Yes," whispered Sergey, "garlic—that's the charm against Kelpies."

The two set off at a trot for the home of Marfoosha.

1929: *from Bookman*

BIG BLONDE

by Dorothy Parker, whose verses, both serious and otherwise, are the joy of the sophisticated. Over the years she has been a regular contributor to cur-

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rent magazines, The New Yorker *being perhaps the most favored. Her books of collected poems include* Enough Rope, Sunset Gun, Death and Taxes, *and* Collected Poems—Not So Deep as a Well. *She has written a good deal for the screen and was co-author with Elmer Rice of the play* Close Harmony *and of the 1954 theater season's successful* Ladies of the Corridor, *written with Arnaud d'Usseau.*

1: Hazel Morse was a large, fair woman of the type that incites some men when they use the word "blonde" to click their tongues and wag their heads roguishly. She prided herself upon her small feet and suffered for her vanity, boxing them in snub-toed, high-heeled slippers of the shortest bearable size. The curious things about her were her hands, strange terminations to the flabby white arms splattered with pale tan spots—long, quivering hands with deep and convex nails. She should not have disfigured them with little jewels.

She was not a woman given to recollections. At her middle thirties, her old days were a blurred and flickering sequence, an imperfect film, dealing with the actions of strangers.

In her twenties, after the deferred death of a hazy widowed mother, she had been employed as a model in a wholesale dress establishment—it was still the day of the big woman, and she was then prettily colored and erect and high-breasted. Her job was not onerous, and she met numbers of men and spent numbers of evenings with them, laughing at their jokes and telling them she loved their neckties. Men liked her, and she took it for granted that the liking of many men was a desirable thing. Popularity seemed to her to be worth all the work that had to be put into its achievement. Men liked you because you were fun, and when they liked you they took you out, and there you were. So, and successfully, she was fun. She was a good sport. Men liked a good sport.

No other form of diversion, simpler or more complicated, drew her attention. She never pondered if she might not be better occupied doing something else. Her ideas, or, better, her acceptances, ran right along with those of the other substantially built blondes in whom she found her friends.

When she had been working in the dress establishment some years she met Herbie Morse. He was thin, quick, attractive, with shifting lines about his shiny, brown eyes and a habit of fiercely biting at the skin around his fingernails. He drank largely; she found that entertaining. Her habitual greeting to him was an allusion to his state of the previous night.

"Oh, what a peach you had," she used to say, through her easy laugh. "I thought I'd die, the way you kept asking the waiter to dance with you."

She liked him immediately upon their meeting. She was enormously

amused at his fast, slurred sentences, his interpolations of apt phrases from vaudeville acts and comic strips; she thrilled at the feel of his lean arm tucked firm beneath the sleeve of her coat; she wanted to touch the wet, flat surface of his hair. He was as promptly drawn to her. They were married six weeks after they had met.

She was delighted at the idea of being a bride; coquetted with it, played upon it. Other offers of marriage she had had, and not a few of them, but it happened that they were all from stout, serious men who had visited the dress establishment as buyers; men from Des Moines and Houston and Chicago and, in her phrase, even funnier places. There was always something immensely comic to her in the thought of living elsewhere than New York. She could not regard as serious proposals that she share a Western residence.

She wanted to be married. She was nearing thirty now, and she did not take the years well. She spread and softened, and her darkening hair turned her to inexpert dabblings with peroxide. There were times when she had little flashes of fear about her job. And she had had a couple of thousand evenings of being a good sport among her male acquaintances. She had come to be more conscientious than spontaneous about it.

Herbie earned enough, and they took a little apartment far uptown. There was a Mission-furnished dining room with a hanging central light globed in liver-colored glass; in the living room were an "overstuffed suite," a Boston fern, and a reproduction of the Henner *Magdalene* with the red hair and the blue draperies; the bedroom was in gray enamel and old rose, with Herbie's photograph on Hazel's dressing table and Hazel's likeness on Herbie's chest of drawers.

She cooked—and she was a good cook—and marketed and chatted with the delivery boys and the colored laundress. She loved the flat, she loved her life, she loved Herbie. In the first months of their marriage she gave him all the passion she was ever to know.

She had not realized how tired she was. It was a delight, a new game, a holiday, to give up being a good sport. If her head ached or her arches throbbed, she complained piteously, babyishly. If her mood was quiet, she did not talk. If tears came to her eyes, she let them fall.

She fell readily into the habit of tears during the first year of her marriage. Even in her good sport days she had been known to weep lavishly and disinterestedly on occasion. Her behavior at the theater was a standing joke. She could weep at anything in a play—tiny garments, love both unrequited and mutual, seduction, purity, faithful servitors, wedlock, the triangle.

"There goes Haze," her friends would say, watching her. "She's off again."

Wedded and relaxed, she poured her tears freely. To her who had laughed so much, crying was delicious. All sorrows became her sorrows; she was

Tenderness. She would cry long and softly over newspaper accounts of kidnaped babies, deserted wives, unemployed men, strayed cats, heroic dogs. Even when the paper was no longer before her, her mind revolved upon these things and the drops slipped rhythmically over her plump cheeks.

"Honestly," she would say to Herbie, "all the sadness there is in the world when you stop to think about it!"

"Yeah," Herbie would say.

She missed nobody. The old crowd, the people who had brought her and Herbie together, dropped from their lives, lingeringly at first. When she thought of this at all it was only to consider it fitting. This was marriage. This was peace.

But the thing was that Herbie was not amused.

For a time he had enjoyed being alone with her. He found the voluntary isolation novel and sweet. Then it palled with a ferocious suddenness. It was as if one night, sitting with her in the steam-heated living room, he would ask no more; and the next night he was through and done with the whole thing.

He became annoyed by her misty melancholies. At first, when he came home to find her softly tired and moody, he kissed her neck and patted her shoulder and begged her to tell her Herbie what was wrong. She loved that. But time slid by, and he found that there was never anything really, personally, the matter.

"Ah, for God's sake," he would say. "Crabbing again. All right, sit here and crab your head off. I'm going out."

And he would slam out of the flat and come back late and drunk.

She was completely bewildered by what happened to their marriage. First they were lovers; and then, it seemed without transition, they were enemies. She never understood it.

There were longer and longer intervals between his leaving his office and his arrival at the apartment. She went through agonies of picturing him run over and bleeding, dead and covered with a sheet. Then she lost her fears for his safety and grew sullen and wounded. When a person wanted to be with a person he came as soon as possible. She desperately wanted him to want to be with her; her own hours only marked the time till he would come. It was often nearly nine o'clock before he came home to dinner. Always he had had many drinks, and their effect would die in him, leaving him loud and querulous and bristling for affronts.

He was too nervous, he said, to sit and do nothing for an evening. He boasted, probably not in all truth, that he had never read a book in his life.

"What am I expected to do—sit around this dump on my tail all night?" he would ask rhetorically. And again he would slam out.

She did not know what to do. She could not manage him. She could not meet him.

She fought him furiously. A terrific domesticity had come upon her, and she would bite and scratch to guard it. She wanted what she called "a nice home." She wanted a sober, tender husband, prompt at dinner, punctual at work. She wanted sweet, comforting evenings. The idea of intimacy with other men was terrible to her; the thought that Herbie might be seeking entertainment in other women set her frantic.

It seemed to her that almost everything she read—novels from the drug-store lending library, magazine stories, women's pages in the papers—dealt with wives who lost their husbands' love. She could bear those, at that, better than accounts of neat, companionable marriage and living happily ever after.

She was frightened. Several times when Herbie came home in the evening he found her determinedly dressed—she had had to alter those of her clothes that were not new, to make them fasten—and rouged.

"Let's go wild to-night, what do you say?" she would hail him. "A person's got lots of time to hang around and do nothing when they're dead."

So they would go out, to chop houses and the less expensive cabarets. But it turned out badly. She could no longer find amusement in watching Herbie drink. She could not laugh at his whimsicalities, she was so tensely counting his indulgences. And she was unable to keep back her remonstrances—"Ah, come on, Herb, you've had enough, haven't you? You'll feel something terrible in the morning."

He would be immediately enraged. All right, crab; crab, crab, crab, that was all she ever did. What a lousy sport *she* was! There would be scenes, and one or the other of them would rise and stalk out in fury.

She could not recall the definite day that she started drinking, herself. There was nothing separate about her days. Like drops upon a windowpane, they ran together and trickled away. She had been married six months; then a year; then three years.

She had never needed to drink, formerly. She could sit for most of a night at a table where the others were imbibing earnestly and never droop in looks or spirits, nor be bored by the doings of those about her. If she took a cocktail, it was so unusual as to cause twenty minutes or so of jocular comment. But now anguish was in her. Frequently, after a quarrel, Herbie would stay out for the night, and she could not learn from him where the time had been spent. Her heart felt tight and sore in her breast, and her mind turned like an electric fan.

She hated the taste of liquor. Gin, plain or in mixtures, made her promptly sick. After experiment, she found that Scotch whisky was best for her. She took it without water, because that was the quickest way to its effect.

Herbie pressed it on her. He was glad to see her drink. They both felt it might restore her high spirits, and their good times together might again be possible.

"'Atta girl," he would approve her. "Let's see you get boiled, baby."

But it brought them no nearer. When she drank with him there would be a little while of gayety and then, strangely without beginning, they would be in a wild quarrel. They would wake in the morning not sure what it had all been about, foggy as to what had been said and done, but each deeply injured and bitterly resentful. There would be days of vengeful silence.

There had been a time when they had made up their quarrels, usually in bed. There would be kisses and little names and assurances of fresh starts . . . "Oh, it's going to be great now, Herb. We'll have swell times. I was a crab. I guess I might have been tired. But everything's going to be swell. You'll see."

Now there were no gentle reconciliations. They resumed friendly relations only in the brief magnanimity caused by liquor, before more liquor drew them into new battles. The scenes became more violent. There were shouted invectives and pushes, and sometimes sharp slaps. Once she had a black eye. Herbie was horrified next day at sight of it. He did not go to work; he followed her about, suggesting remedies and heaping dark blame on himself. But after they had had a few drinks—"to pull themselves together"—she made so many wistful references to her bruise that he shouted at her, and rushed out, and was gone for two days.

Each time he left the place in rage he threatened never to come back. She did not believe him, nor did she consider separation. Somewhere in her head or her heart was the lazy, nebulous hope that things would change and she and Herbie settle suddenly into soothing married life. Here were her home, her furniture, her husband, her station. She summoned no alternatives.

She could no longer bustle and potter. She had no more vicarious tears; the hot drops she shed were for herself. She walked ceaselessly about the rooms, her thoughts running mechanically round and round Herbie. In those days began the hatred of being alone that she was never to overcome. You could be by yourself when things were all right, but when you were blue you got the howling horrors.

She commenced drinking alone, little, short drinks all through the day. It was only with Herbie that alcohol made her nervous and quick in offense. Alone, it blurred sharp things for her. She lived in a haze of it. Her life took on a dream-like quality. Nothing was astonishing.

A Mrs. Martin moved into the flat across the hall. She was a great blonde woman of forty, a promise in looks of what Mrs. Morse was to be. They made acquaintance, quickly became inseparable. Mrs. Morse spent her days

in the opposite apartment. They drank together, to brace themselves after the drinks of the nights before.

She never confided her troubles about Herbie to Mrs. Martin. The subject was too bewildering to her to find comfort in talk. She let it be assumed that her husband's business kept him much away. It was not regarded as important; husbands, as such, played but shadowy parts in Mrs. Martin's circle.

Mrs. Martin had no visible spouse; you were left to decide for yourself whether he was or was not dead. She had an admirer, Joe, who came to see her almost nightly. Often he brought several friends with him—"The Boys," they were called. The Boys were big, red, good-humored men, perhaps forty-five, perhaps fifty. Mrs. Morse was glad of invitations to join the parties—Herbie was scarcely ever at home at night now. If he did come home, she did not visit Mrs. Martin. An evening alone with Herbie meant inevitably a quarrel, yet she would stay with him. There was always her thin and wordless idea that, maybe, this night, things would begin to be all right.

The Boys brought plenty of liquor along with them whenever they came to Mrs. Martin's. Drinking with them, Mrs. Morse became lively and good-natured and audacious. She was quickly popular. When she had drunk enough to cloud her most recent battle with Herbie, she was excited by their approbation. Crab, was she? Rotten sport, was she? Well, there were some that thought different.

Ed was one of The Boys. He lived in Utica—had "his own business" there, was the awed report—but he came to New York almost every week. He was married. He showed Mrs. Morse the then current photographs of Junior and Sister, and she praised them abundantly and sincerely. Soon it was accepted by the others that Ed was her particular friend.

He staked her when they all played poker; sat next her and occasionally rubbed his knee against hers during the game. She was rather lucky. Frequently she went home with a twenty-dollar bill or a ten-dollar bill or a handful of crumpled dollars. She was glad of them. Herbie was getting, in her words, something awful about money. To ask him for it brought an instant row.

"What the hell do you do with it?" he would say. "Shoot it all on Scotch?"

"I try to run this house halfway decent," she would retort. "Never thought of that, did you? Oh, no, his lordship couldn't be bothered with that."

Again, she could not find a definite day to fix the beginning of Ed's proprietorship. It became his custom to kiss her on the mouth when he came in, as well as for farewell, and he gave her little quick kisses of approval all through the evening. She liked this rather more than she disliked it. She never thought of his kisses when she was not with him.

He would run his hand lingeringly over her back and shoulders.

"Some dizzy blonde, eh?" he would say. "Some doll."

One afternoon she came home from Mrs. Martin's to find Herbie in the bedroom. He had been away for several nights, evidently on a prolonged drinking bout. His face was gray, his hands jerked as if they were on wires. On the bed were two old suitcases, packed high. Only her photograph remained on his bureau, and the wide doors of his closet disclosed nothing but coat hangers.

"I'm blowing," he said. "I'm through with the whole works. I got a job in Detroit."

She sat down on the edge of the bed. She had drunk much the night before, and the four Scotches she had had with Mrs. Martin had only increased her fogginess.

"Good job?" she said.

"Oh, yeah," he said. "Looks all right."

He closed a suitcase with difficulty, swearing at it in whispers.

"There's some dough in the bank," he said. "The bank book's in your top drawer. You can have the furniture and stuff."

He looked at her, and his forehead twitched.

"God damn it, I'm through, I'm telling you," he cried. "I'm through."

"All right, all right," she said. "I heard you, didn't I?"

She saw him as if he were at one end of a cañon and she at the other. Her head was beginning to ache bumpingly, and her voice had a dreary, tiresome tone. She could not have raised it.

"Like a drink before you go?" she asked.

Again he looked at her, and a corner of his mouth jerked up.

"Cockeyed again for a change, aren't you?" he said. "That's nice. Sure, get a couple of shots, will you?"

She went to the pantry, mixed him a stiff highball, poured herself a couple of inches of whisky, and drank it. Then she gave herself another portion and brought the glasses into the bedroom. He had strapped both suitcases and had put on his hat and overcoat.

He took his highball.

"Well," he said, and he gave a sudden, uncertain laugh. "Here's mud in your eye."

"Mud in your eye," she said.

They drank. He put down his glass and took up the heavy suitcase.

"Got to get a train around six," he said.

She followed him down the hall. There was a song, a song that Mrs. Martin played doggedly on the phonograph, running loudly through her mind. She had never liked the thing.

Night and daytime,
Always playtime.
Ain't we got fun?

by Dorothy Parker

At the door he put down the bags and faced her.

"Well," he said. "Well, take care of yourself. You'll be all right, will you?"

"Oh, sure," she said.

He opened the door, then came back to her, holding out his hand.

" 'Bye, Haze," he said. "Good luck to you."

She took his hand and shook it.

"Pardon my wet glove," she said.

When the door had closed behind him she went back to the pantry.

She was flushed and lively when she went in to Mrs. Martin's that evening. The Boys were there, Ed among them. He was glad to be in town, frisky and loud and full of jokes. But she spoke quietly to him for a minute.

"Herbie blew to-day," she said. "Going to live out West."

"That so?" he said. He looked at her and played with the fountain pen clipped to his waistcoat pocket.

"Think he's gone for good, do you?" he asked.

"Yeah," she said. "I know he is. I know. Yeah."

"You going to live on across the hall just the same?" he said. "Know what you're going to do?"

"Gee, I don't know," she said. "I don't give much of a damn."

"Oh, come on, that's no way to talk," he told her. "What you need—you need a little snifter. How about it?"

"Yeah," she said. "Just straight."

She won forty-three dollars at poker. When the game broke up Ed took her back to her apartment.

"Got a little kiss for me?" he asked.

He wrapped her in his big arms and kissed her violently. She was entirely passive. He held her away and looked at her.

"Little tight, honey?" he asked anxiously. "Not going to be sick, are you?"

"Me?" she said. "I'm swell."

2: When Ed left in the morning he took her photograph with him. He said he wanted her picture to look at, up in Utica. "You can have that one on the bureau," she said.

She put Herbie's picture in a drawer, out of her sight. When she could look at it she meant to tear it up. She was fairly successful in keeping her mind from racing around him. Whisky slowed it for her. She was almost peaceful, in her mist.

She accepted her relationship with Ed without question or enthusiasm. When he was away she seldom thought definitely of him. He was good to her; he gave her frequent presents and a regular allowance. She was even able to save. She did not plan ahead of any day, but her wants were few, and you might as well put money in the bank as have it lying around.

When the lease of her apartment neared its end it was Ed who suggested moving. His friendship with Mrs. Martin and Joe had become strained over a dispute at poker; a feud was impending.

"Let's get the hell out of here," Ed said. "What I want you to have is a place near the Grand Central. Make it easier for me."

So she took a little flat in the Forties. A colored maid came in every day to clean and to make coffee for her—she was "through with that housekeeping stuff," she said, and Ed, twenty years married to a passionately domestic woman, admired this romantic uselessness and felt doubly a man of the world in abetting it.

The coffee was all she had until she went out to dinner, but alcohol kept her fat. Prohibition she regarded only as a basis for jokes. You could always get all you wanted. She was never noticeably drunk and seldom nearly sober. It required a larger daily allowance to keep her misty-minded. Too little, and she was achingly melancholy.

Ed brought her to Jimmy's. He was proud, with the pride of the transient who would be mistaken for a native, in his knowledge of small, recent restaurants occupying the lower floors of shabby brownstone houses; places where, upon mentioning the name of an habitué friend, might be obtained strange whisky and fresh gin in many of their ramifications. Jimmy's place was the favorite of his acquaintances.

There, through Ed, Mrs. Morse met many men and women, formed quick friendships. The men often took her out when Ed was in Utica. He was proud of her popularity.

She fell into the habit of going to Jimmy's alone when she had no engagement. She was certain to meet some people she knew, and join them. It was a club for her friends, both men and women.

The women at Jimmy's looked remarkably alike, and this was curious, for, through feuds, removals and opportunities of more profitable contacts, the personnel of the group changed constantly. Yet always the newcomers resembled those whom they replaced. They were all big women and stout, broad of shoulder and abundantly breasted, with faces thickly clothed in soft, high-colored flesh. They laughed loud and often, showing opaque and lusterless teeth like squares of crockery. There was about them the health of the big, yet a slight, unwholesome suggestion of stubborn preservation. They might have been thirty-six or forty-five or anywhere between.

They composed their titles of their own first names with their husband's surnames—Mrs. Florence Miller, Mrs. Vera Riley, Mrs. Lilian Block. This gave at the same time the solidity of marriage and the glamour of freedom. Yet only one or two were actually divorced. Most of them never referred to their dimmed spouses; some, a shorter time separate, described them in terms of great biological interest. Several were mothers, each of an only child

—a boy at school somewhere, or a girl being cared for by a grandmother. Often, well on toward morning, there would be displays of kodak portraits and of tears.

They were comfortable women, cordial and friendly and irrepressibly matronly. Theirs was the quality of ease. Become fatalistic, especially about money matters, they were unworried. Whenever their funds dropped alarmingly, a new donor appeared; this had always happened. The aim of each was to have one man, permanently, to pay all her bills, in return for which she would have immediately given up other admirers and probably would have become exceedingly fond of him; for the affections of all of them were, by now, unexacting, tranquil, and easily arranged. This end, however, grew increasingly difficult yearly. Mrs. Morse was regarded as fortunate.

Ed had a good year, increased her allowance and gave her a sealskin coat. But she had to be careful of her moods with him. He insisted upon gayety. He would not listen to admissions of aches or weariness.

"Hey, listen," he would say, "I got worries of my own, and plenty. Nobody wants to hear other people's troubles, sweetie. What you got to do, you got to be a sport and forget it. See? Well, slip us a little smile, then. That's my girl."

She never had enough interest to quarrel with him as she had with Herbie, but she wanted the privilege of occasional admitted sadness. It was strange. The other women she saw did not have to fight their moods. There was Mrs. Florence Miller who got regular crying jags, and the men sought only to cheer and comfort her. The others spent whole evenings in grieved recitals of worries and ills; their escorts paid them deep sympathy. But she was instantly undesirable when she was low in spirits. Once, at Jimmy's, when she could not make herself lively, Ed had walked out and left her.

"Why the hell don't you stay home and not go spoiling everybody's evening?" he had roared.

Even her slightest acquaintance seemed irritated if she were not conspicuously light-hearted.

"What's the matter with you, anyway?" they would say. "Be your age, why don't you? Have a little drink and snap out of it."

When her relationship with Ed had continued nearly three years he moved to Florida to live. He hated leaving her; he gave her a large check and some shares of a sound stock, and his pale eyes were wet when he said good-bye. She did not miss him. He came to New York infrequently, perhaps two or three times a year, and hurried directly from the train to see her. She was always pleased to have him come and never sorry to see him go.

Charley, an acquaintance of Ed's that she had met at Jimmy's, had long admired her. He had always made opportunities of touching her and leaning close to talk to her. He asked repeatedly of all their friends if they had ever

heard such a fine laugh as she had. After Ed left Charley became the main figure in her life. She classified him and spoke of him as "not so bad." There was nearly a year of Charley; then she divided her time between him and Sydney, another frequenter of Jimmy's; then Charley slipped away altogether.

Sydney was a little, brightly dressed, clever Jew. She was perhaps nearest contentment with him. He amused her always; her laughter was not forced.

He admired her completely. Her softness and size delighted him. And he thought she was great, he often told her, because she kept gay and lively when she was drunk.

"Once I had a gal," he said, "used to try to throw herself out of the window every time she got a can on. Jee-*zuss*," he added feelingly.

Then Sydney married a rich and watchful bride, and then there was Billy. No—after Sydney came Ferd, then Billy. In her haze she never recalled how men entered her life and left it. There were no surprises. She had no thrill at their advent nor woe at their departure. She seemed to be always able to attract men. There was never another as rich as Ed, but they were all generous to her, in their means.

Once she had news of Herbie. She met Mrs. Martin dining at Jimmy's, and the old friendship was vigorously renewed. The still admiring Joe, while on a business trip, had seen Herbie. He had settled in Chicago, he looked fine, he was living with some woman—seemed to be crazy about her. Mrs. Morse had been drinking vastly that day. She took the news with mild interest, as one hearing of the sex peccadilloes of somebody whose name is, after a moment's groping, familiar.

"Must be damn near seven years since I saw him," she commented. "Gee. Seven years."

More and more her days lost their individuality. She never knew dates, nor was sure of the day of the week.

"My God, was that a year ago!" she would exclaim, when an event was recalled in conversation.

She was tired so much of the time. Tired and blue. Almost everything could give her the blues. Those old horses she saw on Sixth Avenue—struggling and slipping along the car tracks, or standing at the curb, their heads dropped level with their worn knees. The tightly stored tears would squeeze from her eyes as she teetered past on her aching feet in the stubby, champagne-colored slippers.

The thought of death came and stayed with her and lent her a sort of drowsy cheer. It would be nice, nice and restful, to be dead.

There was no settled, shocked moment when she first thought of killing herself; it seemed to her as if the idea had always been with her. She pounced upon all the accounts of suicides in the newspapers. There was an epidemic of self-killings—or maybe it was just that she searched for the stories of them

so eagerly that she found many. To read of them roused reassurance in her; she felt a cozy solidarity with the big company of the voluntary dead.

She slept, aided by whisky, till deep into the afternoons, then lay abed, a bottle and glass at her hand, until it was time to dress to go out for dinner. She was beginning to feel toward alcohol a little puzzled distrust, as toward an old friend who has refused a simple favor. Whisky could still soothe her for most of the time, but there were sudden, inexplicable moments when the cloud fell treacherously away from her, and she was sawn by the sorrow and bewilderment and nuisance of all living. She played voluptuously with the thought of cool, sleepy retreat. She had never been troubled by religious belief, and no vision of an after-life intimidated her. She dreamed by day of never again putting on tight shoes, of never having to laugh and listen and admire, of never more being a good sport. Never.

But how would you do it? It made her sick to think of jumping from heights. She could not stand a gun. At the theater, if one of the actors drew a revolver, she crammed her fingers into her ears and could not even look at the stage until after the shot had been fired. There was no gas in her flat. She looked long at the bright blue veins in her slim wrists—a cut with a razor blade, and there you'd be. But it would hurt, hurt like hell, and there would be blood to see. Poison—something tasteless and quick and painless —was the thing. But they wouldn't sell it to you in the drug stores, because of the law.

She had few other thoughts.

There was a new man now—Art. He was short and fat and exacting and hard on her patience when he was drunk. But there had been only occasionals for some time before him, and she was glad of a little stability. Too, Art must be away for weeks at a stretch, selling silks, and that was restful. She was convincingly gay with him, though the effort shook her viciously.

"The best sport in the world," he would murmur, deep in her neck. "The best sport in the world."

One night, when he had taken her to Jimmy's, she went into the dressing room with Mrs. Florence Miller. There, while designing curly mouths on their faces with lip rouge, they compared experiences of insomnia.

"Honestly," Mrs. Morse said, "I wouldn't close an eye if I didn't go to bed full of Scotch. I lie there and toss and turn and toss and turn. Blue! Does a person get blue lying awake that way!"

"Say, listen, Hazel," Mrs. Miller said impressively, "I'm telling you I'd be awake for a year if I didn't take veronal. That stuff makes you sleep like a fool."

"Isn't it poison or something?" Mrs. Morse asked.

"Oh, you take too much and you're out for the count," said Mrs. Miller.

"I just take five grains—they come in tablets. I'd be scared to fool around with it. But five grains and you cork off pretty."

"Can you get it anywhere?" Mrs. Morse felt superbly Machiavellian.

"Get all you want in Jersey," said Mrs. Miller. "They won't give it to you here without you have a doctor's prescription. Finished? We'd better go back and see what the boys are doing."

That night Art left Mrs. Morse at the door of her apartment; his mother was in town. Mrs. Morse was still sober, and it happened that there was no whisky left in her cupboard. She lay in bed, looking up at the black ceiling.

She rose early, for her, and went to New Jersey. She had never taken the tube, and did not understand it. So she went to the Pennsylvania Station and bought a railroad ticket to Newark. She thought of nothing in particular on the trip out. She looked at the uninspired hats of the women about her and gazed through the smeared window at the flat, gritty scene.

In Newark, in the first drug store she came to, she asked for a tin of talcum powder, a nail brush, and a box of veronal tablets. The powder and the brush were to make the hypnotic seem also a casual need. The clerk was entirely unconcerned. "We only keep them in bottles," he said, and wrapped up for her a little glass vial containing ten white tablets, stacked one on another.

She went to another drug store and bought a face cloth, an orange-wood stick, and a bottle of veronal tablets. The clerk was also uninterested.

"Well, I guess I got enough to kill an ox," she thought, and went back to the station.

At home, she put the little vials in the drawer of her dressing table and stood looking at them with a dreamy tenderness.

"There they are, God bless them," she said, and she kissed her finger tip and touched each bottle.

The colored maid was busy in the living room.

"Hey, Nettie," Mrs. Morse called. "Be an angel, will you? Run around to Jimmy's and get me a quart of Scotch."

She hummed while she awaited the girl's return.

During the next few days, whisky ministered to her as tenderly as it had done when she first turned to its aid. Alone, she was soothed and vague, at Jimmy's she was the gayest of the groups. Art was delighted with her.

Then, one night, she had an appointment to meet Art at Jimmy's for an early dinner. He was to leave afterward on a business excursion, to be away for a week. Mrs. Morse had been drinking all the afternoon; while she dressed to go out she felt herself rising pleasurably from drowsiness to high spirits. But as she came out into the street the effects of the whisky deserted her completely, and she was filled with a slow, grinding wretchedness so horrible

that she stood swaying on the pavement, unable for a moment to move forward. It was a gray night with spurts of mean, thin snow, and the streets shone with dark ice. As she slowly crossed Sixth Avenue consciously dragging one foot past the other, a big, scarred horse pulling a rickety express wagon crashed to his knees before her. The driver swore and screamed and lashed the beast insanely, bringing the whip back over his shoulder for every blow, while the horse struggled to get a footing on the slippery asphalt. A group gathered and watched with interest.

Art was waiting, when Mrs. Morse reached Jimmy's.

"What's the matter with you, for God's sake?" was his greeting to her.

"I saw a horse," she said. "Gee, I—a person feels sorry for horses. I—it isn't just horses. Everything's kind of terrible, isn't it? I can't help getting sunk."

"Ah, sunk, me eye," he said. "What's the idea of all the bellyaching? What have you got to be sunk about?"

"I can't help it," she said.

"Ah, help it, me eye," he said. "Pull yourself together, will you? Come on and sit down, and take that face off you."

She drank industriously and she tried hard, but she could not overcome her melancholy. Others joined them and commented on her gloom, and she could do no more for them than smile weakly. She made little dabs at her eyes with her handkerchief, trying to time her movements so they would be unnoticed, but several times Art caught her and scowled and shifted impatiently in his chair.

When it was time for him to go to his train she said she would leave, too, and go home.

"And not a bad idea, either," he said. "See if you can't sleep yourself out of it. I'll see you Thursday. For God's sake, try and cheer up by then, will you?"

"Yeah," she said. "I will."

In her bedroom she undressed with a tense speed wholly unlike her usual slow uncertainty. She put on her nightgown, took off her hair net, and passed the comb quickly through her dry, varicolored hair. Then she took the two little vials from the drawer and carried them into the bathroom. The splintering misery had gone from her, and she felt the quick excitement of one who is about to receive an anticipated gift.

She uncorked the vials, filled a glass with water, and stood before the mirror, a tablet between her fingers. Suddenly she bowed graciously to her reflection and raised the glass to it.

"Well, here's mud in your eye," she said.

The tablets were unpleasant to take, dry and powdery and sticking obstinately halfway down her throat. It took her a long time to swallow all

twenty of them. She stood watching her reflection with deep, impersonal interest, studying the movements of the gulping throat. Once more she spoke aloud to it.

"For God's sake, try and cheer up by Thursday, will you?" she said. "Well, you know what he can do. He and the whole lot of them."

She had no idea how quickly to expect effect from the veronal. When she had taken the last tablet she stood uncertainly, wondering, still with a courteous, vicarious interest, if death would strike her down then and there. She felt in no way strange, save for a slight stirring of sickness from the effort of swallowing the tablets, nor did her reflected face look at all different. It would not be immediate, then; it might even take an hour or so.

She stretched her arms high and gave a vast yawn.

"Guess I'll go to bed," she said. "Gee, I'm nearly dead."

That struck her as comic, and she turned out the bathroom light and went in and laid herself down in her bed, chuckling softly all the time.

"Gee, I'm nearly dead," she quoted. "That's a hot one!"

3: Nettie, the colored maid, came in late the next afternoon to clean the apartment and found Mrs. Morse in her bed. But then, that was not unusual. Usually, though, the sounds of cleaning waked her, and she did not like to wake up. Nettie, an agreeable girl, had learned to move softly about her work.

But when she had done the living room and stolen in to tidy the little square bedroom, she could not avoid a tiny clatter as she arranged the objects on the dressing table. Instinctively she glanced over her shoulder at the sleeper, and without warning a sickly uneasiness crept over her. She came to the bed and stared down at the woman lying there.

Mrs. Morse lay on her back, one flabby white arm flung up, the wrist against her forehead. Her stiff hair hung untenderly along her face. The bed covers were pushed down, exposing a deep square of soft neck and a pink nightgown, its fabric worn uneven by many launderings; her great breasts, freed from their tight confiner, sagged beneath her armpits. Now and then she made knotted, snoring sounds, and from the corner of her opened mouth to the blurred turn of her jaw ran a lane of crusted spittle.

"Mis' Morse," Nettie called. "Oh, Mis' Morse! It's terrible late."

Mrs. Morse made no move.

"Mis' Morse," said Nettie. "Look, Mis' Morse. How'm I goin' get this bed made?"

Panic sprang upon the girl. She shook the woman's hot shoulder.

"Ah, wake up, will yuh?" she whined. "Ah, please wake up."

Suddenly the girl turned and ran out in the hall to the elevator door, keeping her thumb firm on the black, shiny button until the elderly car and its Negro attendant stood before her. She poured a jumble of words over the

boy and led him back to the apartment. He tiptoed creakingly in to the bedside; first gingerly, then so lustily that he left marks in the soft flesh, he prodded the unconscious woman.

"Hey, there!" he cried, and listened intently, as for an echo.

"Jeez. Out like a light," he commented.

At his interest in the spectacle, Nettie's panic left her. Importance was big in both of them. They talked in quick, unfinished whispers, and it was the boy's suggestion that he fetch the young doctor who lived on the ground floor. Nettie hurried along with him. They looked forward to the limelit moment of breaking their news of something untoward, something pleasurably unpleasant. Mrs. Morse had become the medium of drama. With no ill wish to her, they hoped that her state was serious, that she would not let them down by being awake and normal on their return. A little fear of this determined them to make the most, to the doctor, of her present condition. "Matter of life and death" returned to Nettie from her thin store of reading. She considered startling the doctor with the phrase.

The doctor was in and none too pleased at interruption. He wore a yellow and blue striped dressing gown, and he was lying on his sofa, laughing, with a dark girl, her face scaly with inexpensive powder, who perched on the arm. Half-emptied highball glasses stood beside them, and her coat and hat were neatly hung up with the comfortable implication of a long stay.

Always something, the doctor grumbled. Couldn't let anybody alone after a hard day. But he put some bottles and instruments into a case, changed his dressing gown for his coat, and started out with the Negroes.

"Snap it up there, big boy," the girl called after him. "Don't be all night."

The doctor strode loudly into Mrs. Morse's flat and on to the bedroom, Nettie and the boy right behind him. Mrs. Morse had not moved; her sleep was as deep, but soundless, now. The doctor looked sharply at her, then plunged his thumbs into the lidded pits above her eyeballs and threw his weight upon them. A high, sickened cry broke from Nettie.

"Look like he tryin' to push her right on th'ough the bed," said the boy. He chuckled.

Mrs. Morse gave no sign under the pressure. Abruptly the doctor abandoned it, and with one quick movement swept the covers down to the foot of the bed. With another he flung her nightgown back and lifted the thick, white legs, cross-hatched with blocks of tiny, iris-colored veins. He pinched them repeatedly, with long, cruel nips, back of the knees. She did not awaken.

"What's she been drinking?" he asked Nettie, over his shoulder.

With the certain celerity of one who knows just where to lay hands on a thing, Nettie went into the bathroom, bound for the cupboard where Mrs. Morse kept her whisky. But she stopped at the sight of the two vials, with

their red and white labels, lying before the mirror. She brought them to the doctor.

"Oh, for the Lord Almighty's sweet sake!" he said. He dropped Mrs. Morse's limp legs and pushed them impatiently across the bed. "What did she want to go taking that tripe for? Rotten yellow trick, that's what a thing like that is. Now we'll have to pump her out, and all that stuff. Nuisance, a thing like that is; that's what it amounts to. Here, George, take me down in the elevator. You wait here, maid. She won't do anything."

"She won' die on me, will she?" cried Nettie.

"No," said the doctor. "God, no. You couldn't kill her with an ax."

4: After two days Mrs. Morse came back to consciousness, dazed at first, then with a comprehension that brought with it the slow, saturating wretchedness.

"Oh, Lord, oh, Lord," she moaned, and tears for herself and for life striped her cheeks.

Nettie came in at the sound. For two days she had done the ugly, incessant tasks in the nursing of the unconscious, for two nights she had caught broken bits of sleep on the living room couch. She looked coldly at the big, blown woman in the bed.

"What you been tryin' to do, Mis' Morse?" she said. "What kine o' work is that, takin' all that stuff?"

"Oh, Lord," moaned Mrs. Morse again, and she tried to cover her eyes with her arms. But the joints felt stiff and brittle, and she cried out at their ache.

"Tha's no way to ack, takin' them pills," said Nettie. "You can thank you' stars you heah at all. How you feel now?"

"Oh, I feel great," said Mrs. Morse. "Swell, I feel."

Her hot, painful tears fell as if they would never stop.

"Tha's no way to take on, cryin' like that," Nettie said. "After what you done. The doctor, he says he could have you arrested, doin' a thing like that. He was fit to be tied, here."

"Why couldn't he let me alone?" wailed Mrs. Morse. "Why the hell couldn't he have?"

"Tha's terr'ble, Mis' Morse, swearin' an' talkin' like that," said Nettie, "after what people done for you. Here I ain' had no sleep at all, an' I had to give up goin' out to my other ladies!"

"Oh, I'm sorry, Nettie," she said. "You're a peach. I'm sorry I've given you so much trouble. I couldn't help it. I just got sunk. Didn't you ever feel like doing it? When everything looks just lousy to you?"

"I wouldn't think o' no such thing," declared Nettie. "You got to cheer up. Tha's what you got to do. Everybody's got their troubles."

"Yeah," said Mrs. Morse. "I know."

by Dorothy Parker

"Come a pretty picture card for you," Nettie said. "Maybe that will cheer you up."

She handed Mrs. Morse a post card. Mrs. Morse had to cover one eye with her hand, in order to read the message; her eyes were not yet focusing correctly.

It was from Art. On the back of a view of the Detroit Athletic Club he had written:

Greeting and salutations. Hope you have lost that gloom. Cheer up and don't take any rubber nickels. See you on Thursday.

She dropped the card to the floor. Misery crushed her as if she were between great smooth stones. There passed before her a slow, slow pageant of days spent lying in her flat, of evenings at Jimmy's being a good sport, making herself laugh and coo at Art and other Arts; she saw a long parade of weary horses and shivering beggars and all beaten, driven, stumbling things. Her feet throbbed as if she had crammed them into the stubby champagne-colored slippers. Her heart seemed to swell and fester.

"Nettie," she cried, "for heaven's sake, pour me a drink, will you?"

The maid looked doubtful.

"Now you know, Mis' Morse," she said, "You been near daid. I don' know if the doctor he let you drink nothin' yet."

"Oh, never mind him," she said. "You get me one and bring in the bottle. Take one yourself."

"Well," said Nettie.

She poured them each a drink, deferentially leaving hers in the bathroom to be taken in solitude, and brought Mrs. Morse's glass in to her.

Mrs. Morse looked into the liquor and shuddered back from its odor. Maybe it would help. Maybe, when you had been knocked cold for a few days, your very first drink would give you a lift. Maybe whisky would be her friend again. She prayed without addressing a God, without knowing a God. Oh, please, please, let her be able to get drunk, please keep her always drunk.

She lifted the glass.

"Thanks, Nettie," she said. "Here's mud in your eye."

The maid giggled. "Tha's the way, Mis' Morse," she said. "You cheer up, now."

"Yeah," said Mrs. Morse. "Sure."

1930: *from Harper's Magazine*

DRESSING-UP

by W. R. Burnett, *who won a wide public with his first book,* Little Caesar, *which lifted the Chicago gang wars into literature. This book appeared after eight years of unrewarded literary effort, during which time Mr. Burnett divided his time between writing and his job as a statistician, encouraged only by his wife. Since those humble beginnings he has been a frequent contributor of fiction to popular magazines. Over half of his books have been made into movies, and in addition he has written many other screen plays. Some of his books are as follows:* High Sierra, Nobody Lives Forever, The Asphalt Jungle, Little Men, Big World, *and* Vanity Row, *the latter three being a trilogy of civic corruption. He has also written* Adobe Walls *and* Captain Lightfoot.

When the store manager saw Blue and his girl, Birdy, coming in the front door, he turned to Al, one of the clerks, and said:

"Look at this, Al. The stockyards're moving downtown."

Al laughed, then he put on his best professional manner, clasped his hands in front of his stomach, inclined his head slightly, and walked up to Blue.

"What can I do for you, sir?"

Blue was short and stocky. His legs were thin, his waist small, but his shoulders were wide enough for a man six feet tall. His face was red and beefy, and his cheekbones were so prominent that they stuck out of his face. He looked up at Al.

"I'm buying an outfit, see," he said. "I'm gonna shed these rags and climb into something slick."

"Yes, sir," said Al. "How about one of our new spring models?"

"He wants a gray suit," said Birdy, adjusting her new fur neckpiece.

"Double-breasted," said Blue.

"Yes, sir," said Al.

"But first I want some silk underwear," said Blue. "I'm dressing from the hide out."

The store manager came over and smiled.

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"Take good care of this young man, won't you, Mr. Johnson?"

"Yes, sir," said Al.

"Warm, isn't it?" the store manager said to Birdy.

"Yeah, ain't it?" said Birdy, taking off her neckpiece and dangling it over her arm like the women in the advertisements.

The store manager walked to the back of the shop and talked to the cashier:

"There's a boy that's got a big hunk of money all of a sudden," he said, "and he's gonna lose it the same way."

"Yeah?" said the cashier. "Well, I wish my rich uncle that I haven't got would die. Take a look at that neckpiece his girl's wearing. He didn't get that for five dollars."

Al spread out the silk underwear on the counter, and Blue looked through it. Birdy held up a lavender shirt.

"Here you are, Blue. Here's what you ought to get."

"Say . . . !" said Blue.

"Yes, sir," said Al; "we're selling lots of that. Just had an order for a dozen suits from Mr. Hibschmann out in Lake Forest."

"That's where the swells come from," said Birdy.

Blue looked at the lavender shirt and the lavender shorts and said:

"All right. I'll take a dozen."

Al glanced up from his order book, caught the manager's eye, and winked. The manager came up to Blue, put his hand on his shoulder and said:

"My dear sir, since you seem to know real stuff when you see it, I'll let you in on something. We got a new shipment of cravats that we have only just begun to unpack. But if you'd like to look at them, I'll send down to the stockroom for them."

"Sure," said Blue.

"Thanks awfully," said Birdy.

"It's our very best stock. Handmade cravats of the best material obtainable."

"We want the best, don't we, Blue?" said Birdy.

"Sure," said Blue.

While the manager sent for the cravats, Blue bought a dozen silk shirts, some collars, a solid gold collar pin, some onyx cuff links, a set of military brushes, and two dozen pairs of socks. Al bent over his order book and wrote in the items swiftly, computing the possible amount of this windfall. In a few minutes a stock boy brought up the neckties and stood with his mouth open while Blue selected a dozen of the most expensive ties. The manager noticed him.

"Just leave the rest of the stock, please," he said. Then he turned his back to Blue. "Get out of here!"

The stock boy went back to the basement, and the manager turned back to Blue, smiling.

"Those cravats retail at four dollars apiece," he said, "but because you're giving us such a nice order, I'll let you have them for three fifty."

"O.K.," said Blue.

"Them sure are swell ties, Blue," said Birdy, putting her arm through his. "Won't we be lit up though?"

"Sure," said Blue.

When the accessories had been selected, Blue began to try on the suits Al brought him. Blue strode up and down in front of the big triple mirror, puffed out his chest, struck attitudes, and studied his profile, which he had never seen except in one Bertillon picture. Al stayed at his elbow, offering suggestions, helping him with the set of a coat, telling him how wonderful he looked; and the manager stayed in the background, occasionally making a remark to Birdy whom he addressed as "Madam."

Blue, after a long consultation with Birdy, selected two of the most expensive suits: a blue serge single-breasted and a gray double-breasted. Then he bought a gray felt hat at twelve dollars, a small sailor at eight, and a panama at eighteen.

"Well," said Blue, "I guess you guys got about as much of my jack as you're gonna get."

"How about shoes?" Al put in.

"By God, I forgot," said Blue. "Hey, Birdy, I forgot shoes. Ain't that good? Look at this suitcase!"

He held up his foot. He was wearing big tan brogans, and there was a hole in the sole which went clear through the sock to the skin.

"Put your foot down, Blue," said Birdy. "Where you think you're at?"

Blue bought a pair of tan oxfords, a pair of black oxfords, and a pair of white and tan sport shoes.

"Now we're done," said Blue. "I guess I ought to look pretty Boul' Mich' now."

Al totaled up the bill. Birdy and the manager had a long conversation about the weather; and Blue stood before the triple mirror studying his profile.

Al hesitated before he told Blue the amount of the bill. He called for the manager to O.K. it, then he said:

"Cash or charge, sir?"

Blue took out his billfold which was stuffed with big bills.

"Cash," he said, "how much?"

"Four hundred and sixty-five dollars," said Al.

Blue gave him five one-hundred-dollar bills.

"Now," said Blue, "I want you to get that gray suit fixed up right away

so's I can put it on. I'm gonna dress from the hide out, and you guys can throw my old duds in the sewer."

"Yes, sir," said Al. "I'll get our tailor right away. We got a dressing room on the second floor."

The cashier rang up the sale and gave the change to the manager.

"Are you going away for the summer?" asked the manager as he handed Blue his change.

"Yeah," said Blue; "me and the girl friend are gonna see New York. It'll be our first trip."

"That'll be nice," said the manager. "Are you in business for yourself?"

Blue glanced at Birdy, and she shook her head slightly.

"I'm in the oil business," said Blue. "I got some wells. I'm from Oklahoma."

"That's interesting," said the manager.

When they were leaving the café Blue took out his billfold and gave the doorman a five-dollar bill. The doorman's eyes popped but he managed to bow and smile.

"Yes, sir, yes, sir," he said. "Do you want a cab?"

"Yeah," said Blue, hanging on to Birdy who was drunker than he was.

"Yeah, you're damn right we want a cab," said Birdy. "Do we look like the kind of people that walk?"

"That's right," said Blue.

"Yes, sir," said the doorman, and he went out into the middle of the street and blew his whistle.

Before the taxi came a small sedan drew up at the curb across the street, and two men got out.

"There he is," said one of them, pointing at Blue.

"Hello, Guido," shouted Blue. "Look at me. Ain't I Boul' Mich'?"

Guido ran across the street, took Blue by the arm, shook him several times and said:

"You got to sober up, keed! Get it! You got to sober up. Somebody spilled something, see? Me and Bud's taking it on the lam. Saint Louie won't look bad to us."

"Yellow," said Blue.

"Sure," said Guido, "but I got a stake and I'm gonna spend some of it before I get bumped. Somebody wised Mike's boys up. They're looking for Pascal right now."

"What the hell!" said Blue, laughing. "Look at me, Guido. Ain't I Boul' Mich'? I got silk underwear under this suit. Look at Birdy."

"Look at me," said Birdy; "ain't I Boul' Mich'?"

"Say," said Guido, "you better ditch that tommy and put in with us. We got room in the heap."

"Not me," said Blue. "I ain't scairt of Mike Bova. I'll bump him next."
"All right," said Guido; "You'll have a swell funeral."
"Guido," called the other man, "let that bum go."
"So long, Blue," said Guido.
"So long," said Blue.
"Bye, bye, Guido," said Birdy.

Guido crossed the street, got into the driver's seat, slammed the door, and the sedan moved off. The taxi was waiting, and the doorman helped Birdy and Blue into it.

"Good-night, sir," said the doorman.

Birdy was lying on the lounge flat on her back with her hands under her head and an empty drinking glass sitting upright on her stomach. Blue, in his shirtsleeves, his collar wilted and his tie untied, was sitting at the table reading a crumpled newspaper. There were three-inch headlines.

BOVA'S LIEUTENANT KILLED
SHOT DOWN AS HE LEFT
HIS OFFICE BY GUNMEN

"You hear me!" said Blue. "Funniest thing ever pulled. There I was waiting in a room across the street trying to read a magazine, and Pascal was sitting with his head against the wall sleeping. 'Christ,' I says, 'there's Pete now.' He was coming out of his office. We wasn't looking for him for two hours yet. So I jist set there. Hell, I couldn't move, see, 'cause he come sudden, see, and I was figuring he wouldn't be out for two hours yet. 'Pascal,' I says, 'there's Pete now.' But Pascal he jist opens his eyes like a fish and don't say nothing. Pete he stops and looks right up at the window where I'm sitting, see, and I wonder does this guy know something. Hell, I couldn't move. I wasn't ready, see? Well, so Pascal he slips and falls over and hits his head. This makes me laugh but still I couldn't move my trigger finger. Pete he holds out his hand like he's looking for rain, then I let him have it. I don't know. It was funny. I just let him have it without knowing it, see, and before, I couldn't pull that trigger when I wanted to. When the old Thompson starts to bark, Pascal gets up and yells, 'What you smoking for, you bum? It ain't time yet.' Then he looks out the window and there's Pete on the sidewalk dead as yesterday's newspaper and an old woman is pointing up at us. We ditch the gun and beat it down the back stairs. That's all there was to it. There wasn't nobody in the alley, see, so we jist walked along slow, and pretty soon we come to a drug-store and went in to get some cigs 'cause we smoked all ours waiting for that guy to come out."

"Pour me a little drink, honey," said Birdy.

Blue got up, took a big flask out of his hip pocket, and poured Birdy

another drink. Then he sat down, took out his billfold and extracted a couple of railroad tickets.

"Look at them, old kid," he said. "When we ride, we ride. Twentieth Century to New York. That's us, kid; and won't we give 'em a treat over in Brooklyn! Say, them Easterners think we're still shooting Indians. Hell, Chi makes that place look like a Y. M. C. A. Yeah, I used to know Ruby Welch, and he was big stuff from Brooklyn; but what did he do when Guido started gunning for him? He got himself put in the can as a vag. Yeah, we ought to go big over in New York, kid. What they need over there is guts. We can give 'em that, kid. When somebody needs somebody for the No. 1 caper, Blue's the guy for the job. I was born with a rod in my cradle and I'm the best there is. Yeah, when the Big Boy wanted Pete bumped who did he call on first? Old Blue, yes, sir, old Blue."

Blue got up, turned on the gramophone, and started to dance with a chair.

"Hey," he said, "come on, let's dance, Birdy. We're big shots now, Birdy; let's dance. Look at me! If I had my coat on I'd look like the Prince of Wales. Boul' Mich', kid; that's us; Boul' Mich'. We'll knock their eyes out on Fifth Avenue, kid; yes, sir. Let's dance."

"I'm getting sick," said Birdy.

Blue went over and looked down at her. Her face was pale and drawn; there were blue circles under her eyes.

"Getting sick, Birdy?"

"Yeah. I can't stand it like I used to when I was with the Madam. Put me to bed, honey."

Blue picked Birdy up and carried her into the bedroom. Birdy began to hiccough.

"Gimme glass of water," she said.

"You don't want water," Blue said; "you want a nice big slug."

"No, gimme glass of water."

She lay down on the bed and, before Blue could bring her a glass of water, she was asleep. He stood looking down at her, then he went back into the living room, took a long pull at his flask, and picked up the crumpled newspaper. But he had read the account of the killing of Big Pete so many times that he knew it by heart. He sat staring at the paper, then he threw it on the floor and sat rolling a cigarette between his palms.

It had begun to get light. He heard a milk wagon passing the house. He got up and went over to the window. The houses were still dark, and far off down the street a string of lighted elevated cars ran along the horizon, but the sky was gray and in the east some of the clouds were turning yellow. It was quiet. Blue began to notice how quiet it was.

"Birdy," he called.

But he heard her snoring, and turned back to the table.

The telephone rang, but when he answered it there was nobody on the line.

"What's the idea?" he said.

He sat down at the table, took out his billfold and counted his money, then he took out the railroad tickets and read everything printed on them. Again he noticed how quiet it was. He got up, put away his billfold, and went into the bedroom. Birdy was sleeping with her mouth open, flat on her back, with her arms spread out. Blue lay down beside her and tried to sleep, but he turned from side to side, and finally gave it up.

"I don't feel like sleeping," he thought. "I'm all het up about going East on the Century. Here I am, old Blue, riding the Century dressed up like John Barrymore and with a swell frail. Yeah, that's me. Boul' Mich' Blue."

He got up, put on his coat, and began to pose in front of the living-room mirror.

"Boul' Mich' Blue," he said.

Finally he sat down at the table and laid out a game of solitaire; but he had so many bad breaks with the cards that he began to cheat and then lost interest in the game.

"I know," he said, "what I need is food."

He got up and went to the refrigerator, but there wasn't anything in it except a few pieces of cold meat.

"Hell!" he said, "I guess I'll have to go down to Charley's."

He put on his new soft hat, but hesitated. If they was looking for Pascal, they was looking for him, too. Right now there wasn't nobody on the streets and it was a good time to bump a guy.

"Hell!" he said, buttoning his coat, "I got a streak of luck. It'll hold. Boul' Mich' Blue'll be on the Century to-morrow. Yeah bo! I ain't scairt of no Mike Bova."

When Blue came out of the apartment house the sun was just coming up. The alleys and areaways were still dark, but there was a pale yellow radiance in the streets. There was no one about; no sign of life. Not even a parked car.

"Hell!" said Blue; "safe as a tank town."

A window across the street was raised, and Blue ducked without meaning to; but a fat woman put her head out of the window and stared into the street.

There was nobody in Charley's, not even a waiter. Behind the counter the big nickel coffee urns were sending up steam. Blue took out a fifty-cent piece and flung it on the counter. Wing, the counterman, looked in from the kitchen.

"Come on, Wing," said Blue, "snap it up."

"Didn't know you, kid," said Wing. "Ain't you dressed up, though? Must've struck it."

"I sure did," said Blue. "Give me a combination and some muddy water."

"Muddy water, hell," said Wing. "I jist made that Java."

Blue leaned on the counter and stared at himself in the mirror, while Wing went back to make his sandwich.

"Hey, Wing," Blue shouted, "did you know I was going East on the Century?"

"Are, hunh?" Wing shouted back. "You're on the big time now, ain't you, kid?"

"That's the word," said Blue.

Blue turned to look out into the street. He saw a man passing, and stared at him. The man was small and had a slouch hat pulled down over his face. Blue thought he recognized him and slid his gun out of the holster under his armpit and put it in his coat pocket. The man passed without looking in.

"I got the jumps," said Blue. "It's that rotten gin."

Wing came in with the sandwich, drew Blue a cup of coffee, then leaned his elbows on the counter and watched Blue eat.

"Well," said Wing, "I see where they got Big Pete."

"Yeah," said Blue.

"I knew they was gonna," said Wing. "I got inside dope."

"Yeah?" said Blue.

"It was coming to him."

"Yeah."

Blue finished his sandwich, lighted a cigarette, and sipped his coffee. It was broad daylight now, and trucks had begun to pass the restaurant.

"Going East, are you, kid?" said Wing.

"Yeah," said Blue. "I got in on a big cut and I don't have to worry none for some time. I just took my dame down and dressed her up this afternoon. Is she hot? Me, I got silk underwear on."

He unbuttoned his shirt and showed Wing his lavender underwear.

"You're sure a dressed-up boy," said Wing. "I bet you paid ten bucks for that hat you got on."

"Twelve," said Blue. "It was the best they had. I paid eighteen for a panama. You like this suit?"

"It's red hot," said Wing; then with a twinge of envy, "If I wasn't going straight maybe I could wear rags like that."

"How long's your parole got to run yet?"

"Plenty long. And I got the dicks down on me. They thought I'd stool for 'em in this ward. But that ain't my way."

"Why don't you make a break for Canada?"

"Yeah," said Wing, "and get jerked back to stir."

Blue finished his coffee, paid his check, and gave Wing a dollar bill. Wing turned the bill over and over.

"Say," he said, "give me another buck and I'll put you on to something hot at Arlington."

Blue laughed and tossed Wing a silver dollar.

"Never mind the tip," he said. "I know lots of better ways to lose my dough. Why don't you lay off the ponies, Wing? You can't beat that racket."

"I got the itch," said Wing.

Blue looked into the mirror and adjusted his hat to the proper angle.

"Well," he said, "I'm leaving you. I'll send you a postcard from the Big Burg, Wing."

But Blue noticed that Wing had begun to get nervous; his face was twiching.

"Blue," said Wing, "for Christ's sake watch your step. I'm telling you straight, kid. One of Mike's boys was in here buzzing me about you jist 'fore she began to get light. I'm telling you straight, kid. It ain't my fight and I wasn't gonna peep. But you're a right guy, Blue."

Blue rubbed his hand over his face, then he said:

"It was the Wolf. I seen him go past."

"Yeah," said Wing.

"Jesus!" said Blue, "which way'd I better go?"

"I'd put you upstairs . . ." Wing began.

"No use," said Blue. "The Wolf seen me."

Wing drew himself a cup of coffee and drank it at a gulp.

"If they knew I'd peeped they'd bump me sure," said Wing.

Blue stood staring at the counter, then he pulled his hat down over his eyes, and slipped his right hand into the pocket where the gun was.

"Well," he said, "the alley's no good. It's blind my way. The side street won't get me no place. So all I got's the front way. Hell!" he went on, puffing out his chest, "I got a streak of luck, Wing. It'll hold."

Wing drew himself another cup of coffee.

"Here's hoping," he said.

Blue went to the door and, putting his head out a little way, looked up and down. The street was deserted except for a truck which was coming toward him slowly. It was a Standard Oil truck.

"Wing," he said, "has any of Mike's boys got a hide-out anywhere around here?"

"Don't know of none."

"Well," said Blue, "here I go."

"So long," said Wing.

Blue stepped out of the restaurant, threw his shoulders back, and began

by W. R. Burnett

to walk slowly toward Birdy's apartment. The Standard Oil truck passed him and went on. The street was quiet. At the end of the street he saw an elevated on its way toward the Loop.

"I wish I was on that baby," he said.

But the nearer he got to the apartment the surer he became that his luck would hold. Hell! it was the first break he'd had since he and Guido hijacked that big Detroit shipment. He had tickets on the Century. When a guy has tickets on the Century he uses them. And that wasn't all. He was a big shot now; the Big Boy had promised him a bonus; he had on silk underwear.

"Hell!" said Blue, "it ain't in the cards."

Across from Birdy's apartment he saw the same fat woman leaning out of the window. When he looked up she drew her head in hastily. Blue made a dash for the door, but across the street a Thompson gun began to spit. Blue stumbled, dropped his gun, and ran blindly out into the middle of the street; then he turned and ran blindly back toward the house. An iron fence caught him just below the belt and he doubled over it. Across the street a window was slammed.

1931: *from Pictorial Review*

CAN'T CROSS JORDAN BY MYSELF

by Wilbur Daniel Steele

There are ghosts in Charleston. At certain hours on some nights on the dwindling peninsula between the Ashley and the Cooper it seems as if there were more of the dead afoot than of the living. Doubt as you can, you can't doubt some of them. You can't doubt the one that, incorruptibly, at the hour of the rising of the moon on the first night of its final quarter, hangs by its neck from the Hanging-tree. There's too much evidence. They would never have left that solitary obstacle of a live-oak to rear its gray bole in the very center of the pavement of Ashley Avenue all these years if there hadn't been *something*.

The conscientiousness of that "haunt," by the calendar, is its most impressive quality. There are few of us nowadays who even know on what date

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of the month the half-moon comes up at midnight, for few of us ever really see the moon. That sort of spectral punctuality was to be expected in the days when the tree was still one of the twelve in the short oak avenue leading in to the stately mansion known as "Indigo Landing," and when the rise of the midnight moon, silvering open reed lands and the farther river, marked a moment for weirdness, fit for spirit doings.

But now that the town is grown thick and new along that thoroughfare, and the midnight can no longer see the moon for the glows spread out from drug stores and filling stations and the headlights of automobiles wheeling from moment to moment over the trunk of that inconvenient and even dangerous oak, the fact that the shade of the hanged man can still manage to swing in noisy air there under city-bitten leaves (and so have been glimpsed through dazzled wind shields by at least three several drivers, who thereupon piled up their cars against the dire tree) argues a strength of spectral character beyond the common run.

Indigo Landing, the house, is not to be seen from the avenue now. In the steep perspective even its tallest relic chimneys are hidden by the screen of early gingerbread and late stucco residences that have come in between. It is still there, however, and it can be reached through an alley at the north side of the Caroilco Service Station, on the corner of which, in fact, they have allowed Joanna to tack her modest business card, "Readings and Séances; Lost Articles Found." For to so low an estate has come in her lean age the one-time secretary of the South Carolina Spiritist Circle, old Legare's "darn-Yankee" daughter-in-law, Joanna of Hartford—and to so paltry a business with her, no doubt, the still leaner shade of her famous "control," the Hindu mystic Bhundi Ras.

When Judge Legare was alive, forty-odd years ago, when Joanna held one of her "darn-fool table-tapping flimflams" in the house, he got out of it. Another man might have been futilely disagreeable about it. Seeing it was not only his home, but the home of the gentlemen of his blood for five generations gone, he might have been forgiven for flying into a Carolinian temper with the white-trash upstart and psychic carpetbagger that Joanna must have seemed to him.

In his younger days he would have. But now, turned in upon himself, first by the marriage and then by the demise of his only son (whom, since the Judge was a stalwart atheist, he had no hope of remeeting in a beyond, and of upbraiding, as he would have upbraided him, with a ferocious gentleness) —now Percy Legare did neither of these things.

Now, on such evenings as Joanna's coterie gathered in the drawing room to scare each other with their silly slates and bells, if the aging rice planter sighed as he beat his retreat out to the twilight peace beneath his scuppernong vine in the rear, it was not in bitterness. It was a sigh compounded

rather of the sardonic commiseration of the clear-eyed for the blind that lead the blind, and of relief at having to talk with, instead, two human beings as solid on earth, as richly sympathetic, and as comparatively aristocratic as old Sam, the coachman-gardener-butler of these lean days, and his sister, Venus, the cook.

Sole survivors of the Legare servant body of slavery times, they were pulled two ways in their minds. The fiercer, of course, was toward indignation.

"How-come Mis' Joanna do t'ink dis house *she* house," Sam would protest with the license of one born into the family. "Wha'-foh you do allow dat Yankee woman dribe you out you-own gentleman family house—wid dem sperrit an' t'ing?"

The Judge would smile then his patient, clear-eyed smile. "You ignorant black swamp darky, how many times have I told you there *are* no such things as spirits?"

"You mean tell me, suh, dey no sperrit, nor-so no ha'nt, nor no plat-eye or t'ing?"

Now Venus would come in, torn between loyalty and the fearful and obvious fact.

"How-come you too nerbous stay inside de house den, Maussa, night when Mis' Joanna do call de sperrit up?" And before the master could even snort in protest, her ear cocked in terror toward the windows through which the fearful sounds came seeping, the Negress hurried on: "Hear dem ha'nt do holler now. Dat one wid de crack voice, Maussa——"

"You know who dat one, suh?" Sam would shiver. "Dat one de Indy sperrit, call um Bhundi Ras, an' he bound obliged do Mis' Joanna's biddin' over yonduh in tudduh world."

"Hocus-pocus, Sam. There's only one world, the one you're standing in."

"Oh, Maussa! I'd t'ink you frighten some time Gawd hear you say dat an' strike you dead. What-fashion you gwine git across de Jordan, suh, ef you say such a t'ing?"

Then Venus, feeling the strain, would make haste to turn the conversation into a safer channel.

"*She*," she would mutter, glooming toward the house, "she t'ink she know eberyt'ing, but she don' know eberyt'ing."

They hated Joanna, these two. Why they had never left an employ where they must take orders from such a woman may seem strange. As a matter of fact, though they had been free under the law to do so for twenty years, they had never actually realized it. Nor were they apt to, so long as "Maussa Percy" remained alive. Their own mother had been his "mauma," and though other colored folks might think they could go gallivanting around like poor swamp trash if they cared to, Sam and Venus were not of that kind.

It was unfortunate that Joanna was too Yankee-ignorant to appreciate this

Negro reasoning. In the end it was worse than unfortunate; it was catastrophic.

The Judge had been away a few days, visiting his cousin James in Walterboro. The evening of his return was the evening the Spiritist Circle had chosen to hold its weekly "flimflam" at Indigo Landing, and the dusk out back was chill for old bones with the coming of November.

The moment he came into the yard Percy Legare knew something was wrong by the dismal note in Venus's singing. What chewing gum is to the modern young woman, their "spirituals" were to Carolina servants. These folk hymns Venus was accustomed to roll between her gums with an enthusiasm that robbed them of all their inherent mournfulness. But to-night there was mournfulness in plenty, where the black woman rocked on the sill of the "slave house."

"By myse'f—by myse'f—
Sometime my trouble make me trimble—trimble—trimble.
An' I can't cross Jordan by myse'f——"

The Judge challenged her. "What's wrong, Venus?" A premonition made a hollow around his heart. "Where's *Sam?* Stop that yowling straightaway, and tell me!"

Venus stopped and told him. The pent-up grief and panic of days came pouring out.

The Judge was aghast. "You mean to tell me my daughter-in-law has *turned Sam off?*"

"Yes-suh, gib um he *dis*ch'ge, wha' she say. Tell um he good-foh-nottin', *git.*"

"And he went? But—where?"

"Dat what I say—wheh? Dat poor old ign'unt nigguh, wheh *he* know to go? Mos'-like he got run-obuh in de street, or-so he starve to deat', or drowned in de ribbuh. Oh! Oh!"

"Hush up, you black baboon! Do you want me to give you a caning?"

Venus, comforted, moderated her sobbing. The master was "mixed up in his mind," and that was a step in the right direction. As a matter of fact, the Judge was stunned.

"Now, this," he muttered, "is too much. I've tried to be patient. But *this*——"

Now that he was angry he was so angry that his old knees shook beneath him. He couldn't march into the house, remonstrate, that way, with knocking legs, and decided that a dram or two would do him no harm. So he started in the opposite direction, out back.

Venus's wail was sharp with a new alarm. "Wheh you gwine? You ain't gwine in dat-yah *smoke house,* wid all dem ha'nt an' hag an' t'ing—*in de dark*—for de Lawd sake!"

by Wilbur Daniel Steele

"I am not a child," the Judge growled over his shoulder.

It was true that the floor of the abandoned wreck of a smoke house out there was unsafe, and the walls so near collapse that any jar might bring one or more of the great rotten rafters crashing down. But now the fact that it was his daughter-in-law who had taken it upon herself not only to warn him, but substantially to *forbid* him (as if he were a child) to go near that "eye-sore and death trap," only set him in his purpose.

He had been there before, by stealth; that was why he was going now. Joanna was not only a Spiritist, but a militant teetotaler as well. The Judge might have continued to argue and quarrel, but essentially he hated hag-gling. So, instead, he had quietly removed his two-gallon keg of ripe corn whisky from the house-cellar and concealed it, on the day he left for Walter-boro, under a heap of rubbish in that last of all places where Joanna might be expected to go snooping, the smoke house.

It was as dark as seven nights inside the rickety shell, but Percy Legare needed no light to guide him as he moved on soles as discreet as ghosts' across the precarious planking. He knew where the rubbish was, and found it with his hands. But then, at the feel of it, not satisfactorily swollen, as by a keg, but all rifled and flat, an involuntary deep groan broke from his lips.

What happened then happened swiftly. A wind and screech, like a bat's flight overhead. A crack of timber. Something falling. A stunning concus-sion. Momentary stars.

From the instant when Percy Legare picked himself up from the smoke-house floor, everything was queer. He wouldn't have known himself. A kind of cosmic terror; an enormity of panic. Where to go? Joanna? No! Of all human beings, not Joanna. In what seemed to him a perfectly silly way he thought of his nearest of blood kin, Cousin James. What was still sillier, no sooner had he thought of Cousin James than he was over the back wall and bound at a run for Walterboro, fifty miles away. But what was silliest of all, there he was, presently, hardly panting, in Walterboro, on Cousin James's steps.

When he had set his clothing a little straight and smoothed his small but well trimmed imperial, he pulled at the bell rope several times. He had to go in finally, getting no response. Cousin James was napping before the fire; but his pretty granddaughter Vi, playing cribbage with her beau at the center table, should have heard the bell.

For all he could do, Percy Legare felt out of place and ill at ease. It showed in the way he rubbed his hands together and chuckled, when he felt so little like chuckling.

"Well, my good friends, you hardly expected to see me so—*James!*" he finished sharply.

The old gentleman in the easy chair twitched out of sleep and blinked around him.

"Here," the Judge directed him. "Right over here I am, Percy. Are you blind?" He appealed to Vi. "Is your grandfather blind, or—or what?"

The girl ignored not only his question but his very existence. "Fifteen-four," she counted on the board; then, to Cousin James, "Cold, Grandfather?"

"I thought I felt a draft," the old gentleman complained, his eyes as blank as a fish's, though they were fixed directly on his cousin where he stood. "I guess, though, it's just one of those—how do they say it?—someone stepping over my grave."

All this queerness was too much for Percy Legare: his mind mixed up and his heart heavy, he left the house and started back home. There was a great to-do there when he arrived; by the sound there must have been more people than were ever in the Spiritist Circle, milling around in the oak avenue out front. Too confused and too depressed to want to face them, he got in by the rear and up the back stairs. His bed was the one thing on earth he needed now.

Of all the bad business, though, the worst was still in store. When he got into his bedroom, his cravat already half untied, he found it crowded with people, many of whom he did not even know. Red with confusion and resentment, he made haste to set his neck gear straight again; then he did the only thing a gentleman can do: he stood and stared at them, his brow knotted with interrogation.

Fiasco. No one paid him any attention. All they were interested in was the bed, his bed, and the figure of some stranger with a broken pate they had laid there without even asking his permission. Joanna, down on her knees, was shaking with fearful, angular sobs. Dr. Hatton of Calhoun Street, who had been bending over, unbent with an air of lugubrious finality to say, "I'm sorry, there's nothing to be done: the Judge's death must have been quite instantaneous."

Percy Legare felt a sudden hollowness under his midriff as he craned over the encircling shoulders to study the shape on the bed.

"Why—why, darn it!—it's *me*."

He got out of the room. He wanted to be alone; wanted some solitude where he could sit down quietly and think this whole distracting business out at length. There was none to be had in this neighborhood; the crowd out front seemed to have increased rather than lessened, and with its numbers its turbulence. So, slipping out again by the river way, now by the light of the half-moon that had risen in the east, the poor fellow set his course in a bee-line across St. Andrews Parish.

How far he went he had no way of estimating. It was probably in north-

ern Georgia that he stumbled upon exactly the kind of abandoned house he was looking for, set in the midst of weed-grown acres. His satisfaction was not to last long, however, for no sooner had he got himself settled down to cogitation in the great dank hall than footsteps on the stair behind him proved his mistake in imagining himself alone in the old mansion.

Confused to find himself even an innocent trespasser, he was doubly so when he perceived that the woman coming down the stair was a lady. She was good enough to accept his apologies graciously, however, and when he made to mend his mistake by leaving she bade him by a gesture not to go.

"I am lonely here," she said with a smile, half wistful, half preoccupied.

The Judge was troubled. She was far from old and very far from uncomely, and if there was a certain awkwardness about her carriage, it should not have been enough to bother him. But it did. It wouldn't let him be. And when, by edging around, he made the discovery that the slight obliquity of her bearing came from favoring an ugly-looking butcher knife whose handle obtruded from her back just under the left scapula, he was new enough in such things to be frankly uncomfortable.

The lady had marked the direction of his glance.

"I suppose you are wondering about—that."

"No—that is—no, no."

"I wonder if you would like to know the story of my——"

"I'm sorry, Ma'am, I—I—some other time——"

The Judge was out of the front door by that, and hurrying on faster than ever, west.

He had always wanted to travel, but since the war between the States he had never got much farther than Beaufort, because of the expense. Even upset as he was in his mind now, to find himself crossing the Mississippi gave him a thrill. His first sight of the Rockies gave him another. A veteran of the Tennessee campaign, he had thought he knew mountains, but here were mountains.

In a gulch in southern Colorado, beginning to tire a little, he took refuge in the timbered mouth of an abandoned prospect hole. Here again he found himself an intruder, and he would have apologized and left immediately, had the owner's way of trying to scare him off by groaning from the darker end of the tunnel not brought out an almost forgotten streak of Carolinian obstinacy.

And after all, when the fellow found that that did no good, he turned out to be an almost pathetically sociable sort. He had struck it rich in this hill, it seemed, after a lifetime of indifferent luck, but unfortunately in doing it he had starved to death, and he showed it in his cadaverous cheeks, weedy whiskers, and rags, and possibly in the one bad habit he had, when interested or in absence of mind, of eating off a thumb or one or two of his fingers.

Otherwise, in the weeks the Judge spent with him at the mine, "Nebraska" Hillhouse proved an ideal companion, so far as his guest was concerned, spending most of his time at the far end of the drift, "in the vein," and so giving the Judge all the time he needed for thinking.

The trouble was that he couldn't seem to think. He could reason to a certain point, and there, by the very logic of the thing, he was balked. "There is no such thing in existence as a disembodied spirit, so I am certainly not a disembodied spirit. What, then?"

Nebraska took him up on it one evening, when they were loafing at the mine entrance.

"If you ain't a ghost, then you must be one o' these here second-sighters that can see 'em—spiriters, I guess they call 'em. Otherwise you couldn't see hide nor hair o' *me*."

"*Spiritist! I?*"

"All right, then, Judge, no two ways, ghost you be." Mistaking silence for acceptance, after a moment of rumination in which he consumed all but one of the fingers on his right hand, the prospector went on: "What I can't see, Judge, I can't see what's holding you on earth all this while. With me, with this unregistered claim on my mind, it's one thing. But the way you tell me you've lived, you should've been over the river long ago."

"What river?"

"Why, you know, Judge." Nebraska had been reared in some minor Baptist faith. "Why, across the Jordan, like, to the Promised Land. If you was murdered now, and your murderer not found, that would be a horse of another color. But you wasn't, you say, murdered."

The Judge had to laugh.

"Or if you had a cache of something valuable somewheres about your place, or if there was somebody you should have forgive and didn't, I could understand your hankering to get back there so bad."

The Judge started, the wraith of a flush on his cheek. "What on earth ever put it into your head I'd want to go back *there?*"

"Well, if not exactly want to, feel kind of drawed like. Eh?" The challenge in Nebraska's eyes was touched with sadness. "I been watching you lately, Judge." And though Percy Legare protested "Fiddlesticks!" he had to turn his own eyes away.

It was true, for upward of a week he had been aware of a deepening restlessness to be getting East again. He had tried to put it down to simple nostalgia (even with Joanna there), but it was not nostalgia. Nor mere curiosity. Nebraska had hit it; it was more nearly "feeling drawed like"; and as such, Legare, the rationalist, resented it bitterly.

He was so self-conscious about it that when he capitulated a few nights later, he refrained from awakening Nebraska, but, leaving a note of good-

bye thanks tacked on one of the timbers, stole softly out of the gulch and set his face toward Carolina.

Indigo Landing was all quiet when he came in by the rear way, everybody apparently fast asleep. If this was so, Venus must have had a hair-raising dream, for as the Judge passed the "slave house" there burst out through the shuttered window a shriek so powerful that the mistress in the big house waked and called down to know what the matter was.

Percy Legare had not seen his daughter-in-law for a long while. In the bloodless moonlight up there, in the nightgown with the stiff ruching tight around its throat, all the unpleasant qualities of her character were brought back strongly. He felt a chill up his spine as her scrutiny came to where he stood, and sighed when it passed on unseeing.

"Venus," she repeated, "*will* you open those blinds and tell me *what* is wrong with you?"

Venus did not open the blinds, but her yowlings grew coherent: "I hear um!"

"You hear *what?*"

"De maussa, Maussa Percy, he foot out dah in de yard. Hear um go *tromp, tromp.*"

"Imbecile!" There was in it all the cold scorn of the professional for the amateur.

"You and your haunts, you wicked, superstitious old ninny! You hush now, or I warn you!" Retiring, Joanna left the Negress to muffle her wails in her gunny-bag pillow.

The Judge, who had planned to go into the house and have a look around, thought better of it. With that miserable, inexplicable pull of the old home still on him, however, he found he couldn't go away. So, compromising, he shinnied up a drain pipe, got over the eaves, and climbed the slippery slates, intending to sit and rest awhile on the ridgepole.

But there in mid-roof he was given a start that nearly dislodged him. He had not expected to find another before him in that peaked solitude between the sleeping chimneys.

"Who are you?" he demanded, "and what the devil are you doing here?"

The figure, jackknifed in silhouette on the ridgepole, stared, gasped, and quavered.

"Do-Lawd-in-hebben! Who dat do speak like my ol' maussa?"

Astonishment, relief, and happiness sang in the Judge's heart, and moisture prickled his lids.

"*Sam*, you black hound! So it's *you!*"

"Yes-suh, yes-suh, yes-suh; but how-come? Maussa—*is you dead too?*"

Percy Legare was too full of joy to go into that now; as he scrabbled on

up, all he could say was, "You thieving old no-account! You miserable scoundrel!"

Tears of beatitude rolled down Sam's face. "Glory to Gawd! I *too* sorry you dead, Maussa. Only tell me dat t'ing, Maussa—how-*come* you dead?"

The Judge flushed. He was still touchy on the score of that fiasco of the smoke house.

"Speak when you're spoken to! Now be good enough to tell me what under the sun it was that happened to *you?* Speak up!"

An enigmatical embarrassment whitened the old fellow's eyes. The Judge blew out his cheeks. "What's this? Why don't you answer? Sam, you double-faced baboon, what's that you're so anxious I shan't see—that thing you've got behind you?"

"Oh, Maussa——"

"Out with it!"

"Oh, Maussa!" The fellow's distress was pitiable as he withdrew from its concealment, under his sitting-portion, a length of hempen rope with a noose improvised at its extremity.

"So!" The Judge pursed his lips and gathered his brows. "I've no doubt you deserved it richly. For what *particular* crime, may I ask, did they feel called upon to hang you?"

"I ain't know, suh. Oh, Maussa, beliebe me or not beliebe me, ever I ain't know one t'ing I do, foh git hang foh. One minute de white folks dey graff ol' Sam, an' nudder minute, *bamm*, dey string um on a tree limb. Angel Gab'rul know dat de Gawd-truth, suh."

"A likely one." The frown deepened. "Blockhead, didn't you know enough to tell them you belonged to the Legares? Mmmm. Throw that blasted thing away!" And when the wretched man had done so (only taking pains to mark with one eye where the rope caught in falling, behind a chimney)—"Now," the Judge said grimly, "let's talk about something else. I've never been up here before. It's astonishing, the view of James Island."

"Yes-suh, Maussa, 'deed-suh."

"The geese are flying late this year."

" 'Deed-suh, dey is, berry late dis——" But there the old darky interrupted himself. At sound of cart wheels creaking along the outer road he broke off to harken. Then he stretched out his neck, opened his mouth impulsively, and gave a long, loud groan.

It made Percy Legare jump. He glared at the offender. But when he started to upbraid him, finding that when he opened *his* mouth nothing would seem to come out but a stentorian groaning of its own, he shut it again in dismay, and fell into a cold perspiration. Not till the racket of the frightened teamster's flight had died in the distance did he speak, and then it was in a small voice.

"Why did I do that?"

"Oh, but, Maussa, excusin' me, a ghost bound *obliged* do dat when he *ha'ntin'*."

The Judge never got over it. There was nothing he could have resented more. At times in the long night watches that followed upon that first one it depressed, at times it infuriated him. "Me, Percy Legare, *haunting!*" He tried to fight it. Squaring his shoulders sometimes, stiffening his spine, "I'm through with this puerile idiocy. Never another groan do they get out of me." But then at the very next footfall vagrant in the dark his good resolutions went to pieces and he fell.

He made a study of this wretched spectral impulse. He proved by experiment that it was quite spontaneous and uncontrollable, and that no personal animus against the passer-by need enter into it. One night it was Venus herself who had the ill fortune to venture out of doors at too late an hour.

One was the brother, the other the lifelong master, guide, and friend; neither would have distressed the poor old negress for anything in the world. In fact, both of them were praying she might get back in the house before the last of their self-control was gone. But it was of no use. And when she had screeched to shelter then, half dead with terror of the grizzly salvo unloosed among the chimneys overhead, when the two up there looked at each other, the one face was drawn with remorse, and down the other poured a rain of tears.

The Judge struck down an angry fist. "Why, if we're bound to make pub lic nuisances of ourselves around here—why in the name of human decency don't we-all clear out?"

"Yes-suh, yes-suh. But wheh-to, suh? You don't mean, Maussa—not across de ribbuh?"

"Across the river or anywhere. What's to hinder us, Sam?"

"Y-y-yes-suh." The air of nervous depression that the Judge had observed growing on his companion of late seemed to deepen. "Yes-suh—de only t'ing, Maussa, I bound obliged be back here to-morrow night by middle night."

"Why?"

"To-morrow night, suh, he de night o' de middle-night moon."

"Yes? What's *that* got to do with it?"

Sam had said too much already. He looked this way, he looked that. When the Judge began to question and berate him, to save himself he retreated down the farther slope of the roof and scissored out to a lonely perch at the tip of the blue-room gable, where the Judge heard him singing to himself for comfort Venus's favorite:

". . . trimble—trimble—trimble,
And I can't cross Jordan by myse'f——"

Next night the Judge was prepared to give the truant a going-over for that. And then he had to wait. His indignation grew with the hours, until with the rise of the "middle-night moon," and no Sam yet, it gave place, first to anxiety, and then to a sense of his own aloneness and thoughts of despair. What could have happened to that darky? He asked himself if it could be that Sam, hurt by last night's words, had gone away forever.

By the time dawn grayed its warning in the east he was in so craven a state of despondency at the prospect of having to sit there twiddling his thumbs in solitude throughout the rest of eternity that when Sam did turn up again, all sound, the following evening, he was happy enough to let the whole thing go without comment.

The next time it happened, however (four weeks later), the Judge, being less agitated, was more put out. Between exasperation and curiosity he climbed down from the roof and poked about the grounds, and so it was, shortly after moonrise, that he came on the colored man hanging by his rope from one of the oak trees in the avenue, his limbs dejected, his neck awry, and a look of patient suffering in his swollen eyes. The rice planter was taken sharply aback and showed it in the acidity of his sarcasm.

"So this is where you're always running off to, Sam. It must be fun."

"No-suh." It was hard for Sam to talk, on account of the noose around his windpipe. "I don't like um, suh."

"May I inquire, then, what in the name of all asinine darn-foolish-ness——"

"Suh?"

"*What are you hanging there for?*"

"I ain't know, suh; dey ain't remembuh to told me. I respect I bound obliged to gwine on doin' dis-a-way on de middle-night moon till my sin forgibben."

"What sin?"

"Gawd, he know, Maussa. I sutten *I* don't."

"Either you're a liar or you're a numskull, Sam; that's all I can say." Washing his hands of the whole ridiculous business, the Judge went back to his haunting on the roof.

It can be cold on winter nights, even as far south as the Carolinas. Both the Judge and Sam were well past their warm-blooded prime, and there were plenty of dark hours that January and February when their bones ached in the winds that ricocheted up the polished slates, and their teeth chattered. Sometimes it seemed to Percy Legare that spring was never to come, and when he let his mind dwell, in that mood, on eternity, he could see nothing but black. Sam was not so bad; in the way of his race he could never stay pessimistic long. "When we-all *is* allowed foh go 'cross de ribbuh, suh," he prefaced so often that the Judge, who had started by squelching him, ended by simply sighing.

by Wilbur Daniel Steele

Spring did come eventually, of course. And with it, on a warming night in March, came a surprise in the shape of an invasion. Joanna had recommenced her "flimflamming" of late, and this was one of her evenings, solemn racketings filling the bottom of the house and leaking up the chimneys to add a salt of mockery to the venom of discomfiture already bitter enough in one old listener's heart.

"Nobody but a darn-Yankee female would be so poison low——" the Judge was in the midst of assuring Sam, when a scuttle in the roof not far from their feet was opened so unexpectedly, and a figure so strange came climbing out, that all they could do was sit and gape.

It was rather a frail-built man of a dark complexion, with a large white turban on, and a robe of flimsy lilac cotton that kept catching on the corners of the uneven slates. Altogether he was so queer that the Judge, to hide the fact that he was startled, took the offensive.

"Who the devil are *you?*"

In place of answering, the other queried, "You are the late father-in-law, are you not?"

"I'm Judge Percy Legare, if that's what you mean. *Who the devil,* I repeat, *are you?*"

The stranger bowed slightly. "My name is Bhundi Ras, at your service, sir. I was the eldest son of a highly placed Brahman family of Cawnpur, and held the post——" But there he broke off and waited with an urbane patience, on account of Sam, whose teeth had gone to chattering. "Oh-my-Gawd! De Indy-man, Maussa, he *him.*"

"*Be* quiet!" The Judge could have thrashed him. "And you," he reverted, his face crimson, "I don't care who or what you *were!* What I want to know is, what are you doing around *here* so free and easy, *now?*"

Bhundi Ras never lost his air of breeding. "The owner of this property, Mrs. Wallace Legare, who happens to be a—ah—client of mine, has asked, if possible, sir, to be put in touch with you. Would you be good enough, I wonder, sir, to step down with me for only a very few moments, so that Mrs. Legare may have the happiness and comfort of hearing——"

"*I will not.*" It was almost a bellow.

"Sorry." The Indian mystic shrugged his slender shoulders and studied the slates. "I'm sure, sir, if you knew how much your daughter-in-law has desired, ever since your death——"

"Death? Bosh!" Now all the obstinate devil in Percy Legare was aroused. "I'm not dead by a darned sight, and you can go straight down there and tell Joanna so. I'm alive, you can tell her, and a great deal aliver than she is. And while you're at it"—the Judge had got up on his heels on the ridge-pole, carried away by his own vindictive violence—"and while you're at it, sir, you can tell her a deal of good I get being alive around my own home.

Tell her, for all the respect and sympathy and companionship I get, if it weren't for Sam here—poor ignorant swamp darky that he is——"

But the Brahman, with a slight start, was withdrawing. "Sam!" he echoed. He stared at the hunched-up colored man above him. "Am I mistaken, then, in—— But there must be some mistake. Tell me, Judge Legare, had you perhaps another servant named Sam?"

"I had not. Why?"

Bhudi Ras got halfway down through the scuttle before resuming. Courageous in some ways, he was timid in others.

"I'm sorry, sir, but I am at a loss at finding this—this association of you two. Pardon me if I'm in error, but is this not the same Sam who—ah—in fact—murdered you?"

"Murdered! *Me!* SAM!"

There was something so menacing in that Gargantuan guffaw that the peace-loving Brahman let the scuttle down over him with a bang and was gone.

For moments Percy Legare continued to heave and chuckle. "Did you hear that, Sam, you bloodthirsty ruffian? You jail-bird! You *gallows-meat!* You—you—gallows-meat——"

That last was airless. Lost in sudden thought, the Judge fell silent. Little by little, as he stared out unseeing across the starlit reed lands and the farther river, a horrid arithmetic began to busy his brain. The more he grew appalled, the oftener he put his swiftly clarifying two's and two's together, the heavier that silence lay.

Once he hazarded a side glance at his companion, and at sight of Sam's round white eyes glued on him, fascinated, he got his own back quickly.

The most awful part of it was the embarrassment.

They sat and they sat and they sat, side by side. The stars dimmed. The east began to pale before the coming of the "middle-night moon," and for once neither of them knew it and neither cared. It was that embarrassment; that perfectly hideous mortification.

At last Percy Legare could stand it no longer. Self-consciousness made his voice sound cold.

"Sam, what's all this I hear?"

"Whu-whu-what all what you h-h-hear?"

"Sam, where were you on the evening I was—I had the accident—in the smoke house?"

Now that it was said and done, Sam let go.

"Oh! Oh! Oh! Maussa, was *dat you* in de smoke house?"

"Stop blubbering. I was—yes—in the smoke house."

"You *wasn't* a ha'nt or hag, den, gib a groan like dat?"

"How often must I tell you, Sam, that there are no such things as——" Coloring a little, the Judge recommenced. "Calm down. Go on. So you too were in the smoke house? What, may I ask, were you doing there?"

"Maussa, Mis' Joanna done tu'n me out, an' I so lonesome I ain't know wheh-to I got foh to go to. I binna walk out in de town, but I ain't easy in my mind. Nigger say, 'Who you?' Buckrah say, 'Moob-along!' So bime-by, Maussa——"

"You came back and hid in the smoke house. Very well. But did that justify you in——"

"Oh, oh, oh, Maussa, foh Hebben sake—I nebbuh respect it am my *maussa*. When I do hear dat foot come creepy in de dark, I respect he a sperrit, or-so a hag or plat-eye, do come foh graff ol' Sam, an' when I hear sucha monst'ous groan do groan, I tek a wood an' I hit um *blamm*, an' I tek my foot in my hand out o' dat place, an' I still do runnin' when de white folks graff me an' pit a rope 'pon-top me an' hang me on de oak tree."

"So!"

There followed a silence.

"*So!*"

Then Sam's sobbing and wailing broke out: "Don't nebbuh forgib me, no-suh, nebbuh-suh. Even ef I bound oblige hang on dat tree ebbuh an' foreb-buh now, I wouldn't *aks* you ebbuh forgib me foh such a hebby sin I done. No-suh, no-suh, no-suh, Maussa."

"Hmmmm——"

"Yes-suh, yes-suh, dah come de middle-night moon do raise up now: bet-tuh I tek my ol' hang-rope an' go out to de oak tree; my sin too hebby foh ebbuh forgib, suh, ebbuh, *ebbuh*."

Percy Legare wet his lips.

"You good-for-nothing!"

The sense of well-being in his throat grew richer.

"You monkey-faced, flea-brained blunderer!" He took his time. Like a *gourmet*, he savored it.

"You crocodile!"

"Oh, Maussa! Oh—Maussa!" Sam began to rise on the ridgepole, teeter-ing, incredulous.

"You poor, ignorant, misbegotten—I don't know what!"

Sam's face was transfigured. He had believed his ears at last.

"Maussa, you *done* forgib me."

"*Good-for-nothing!*"

"Glory! I *nebbuh* aks um, an' my maussa done-*done* forgib me, an' *my soul set free!*"

Percy Legare had no soul; nevertheless, he began to feel very queer. Some-thing like a balloon when the tether lines are being loosened. As for Sam,

he was another person. He was actually prancing on the roof peak, between impatience and beatitude.

"Glory, we-all set free, free, free, an' we-all don't oblige ha'nt dis-yuh place no more, Maussa, nebbuh more. Mek-haste, Maussa Percy, mek-haste an' do come."

The master was too mixed up in his mind to do anything but follow the man down. There was a short stay in the back yard, while Sam sneaked into the "slave house," and out again with a roll of something white under his arm.

"What's that?" the Judge demanded, a little crabbedly, but Sam had no time for it. "Glory, Glory!" seemed to be all he could say as he got over the brick wall at the end of the yard and set off across the marsh-land toward the river, excitement heightening his steps. It was all the Judge could do to keep anywhere near up with him.

The moon had risen, and the night grew diamond clear. When Sam got to the river bank he halted and unrolled the thing he had under his arm, and the Judge perceived that it was a best nightshirt, long and clean. The darky put it on and smoothed it down, but then, recollecting something, re-hoisted it to unwind from around his waist the dismal rope his shame had led him to wear there, concealed beneath his coat. With a whoop, a grin, and a chuckle he threw it away on the ground.

But then his eyes, falling on his master, clouded.

"Why—why, Maussa—wheh is yoh snow-white gahment? Why you nebbuh fotch um along?"

"Do you mean my nightshirt? Why should I?"

"More-manners hab a white gahment on when you do come foh cross de ribbuh, suh."

"Never heard of such a crazy thing. Wear a nightshirt to cross the Ashley River?"

"Ohhh, *Maussa!*" Sam's eyes were whiter than the shirt. "Ain't you know de Jordan Ribbuh when you *see um?*"

"Jordan my hat! Why, Sam, you driveling idiot!"

There was an emphasis of assurance about it that gave the Negro a momentary catch of doubt. Was he, could he be, wrong? But when he had wheeled and studied the tranquil flood for a wink, he had to shake a sadly puzzled head.

"Sho', Maussa, you only do try foh plague ol' Sam. *Ashley* ain't hab no Hebben City todder-side um, same like dat-yah one obuh dah. Look-a-dah, suh, wheh de wall o' al'baster an' t'ing do h'ist umself up, an' de monst'ous pearly gate, *spang* before yoh own two eye dah yonduh, an' de gold street inside-um, and Peter do shine up he key an' wave he wing. Maussa Percy—you lookin' wheh I lookin'?"

Percy Legare, feeling foolish, stared in the line of Sam's pointing finger.

"Sam, you've been at my liquor again." A crease deepened between his brows. "There's the wood-piece over there on the St. Andrews bank where the big bird coveys used to lay, and then the three water oaks at the end toward Old Town Creek, and the marsh where we kept the duck boat, and there's the chimney of the Plum house——"

"Ohhh, *M a u s s a !*"

The incredulity, the pity and reproach of it were too much for Percy Legare. All he could do was blow out purpling cheeks, clench his fists, and stare about him hopelessly for some rational help. It was so that he discovered that he and Sam were no longer alone on the margin of the stream. There had been a little arrival of colored people, with one scrawny white woman of the swamp-cracker type among them, and now they were excitedly busy in putting on white raiment. To these he appealed.

The nearest darky touched his forelock decently. "Ashley Ribbuh, suh? Sutten I do know Ashley Ribbuh, spang near Charleston in de State of Ca'lina. No-suh, Maussa, *dis-yuh* ribbuh de *Jordan* Ribbuh; ain't you know dat when you see de Hebben City todduh side?"

There was the white one, the cracker woman, as a last resort. But the Judge was too late; already she was rods out from shore, wading to her knees in the brown current. Now they were all in, with a joyful splashing. All but Sam. Like a leashed old hunting dog he trembled as his gaze followed after them, great tears welling between his lids.

The Judge could have slain him.

"Get along with you; go drown yourself with the kit of them, if that's any pleasure."

"Oh, Maussa, suh—you gwine come too?"

"Thank you, no. Quit squirming and blubbering, and go. Do you hear me?"

"But M-M-Maussa, what-fashion you gwine git along widout ol' Sam? If I do *do* cross Jordan by myse'f, what you gwine do foh somebody look out foh you, Maussa Percy?"

"Hmmmph!"

The old African wet one foot, then both, in the flood. Sobbing aloud then between grief and glory, he started floundering after the diminishing waders.

Percy Legare stood and watched him for a moment, a white wraith against the dark pediment of—yes, darn it!—of St. Andrews woods. For a flash he was conscious of being tempted; insidious, seductive doubt. "When ignorance is bliss——" If he could have been so fortunately credulous. . . . No; *ignoble* doubt! Putting it behind him, he turned and strode back, stiff-spined, toward Indigo Landing.

The low moon was behind the house, and its rays, thinly penciling the

peaks and chimney edges, gave it a look of infestivity beyond any it had ever worn before. No matter. The Judge stuck his hands deeper in his pockets and began to do something he hadn't done since youth—he began to whistle to himself a sprightly tune.

"No-*sir!*" he broke off to growl, at sound of an appealing "*Maussa!*" trailing after him from the direction of the river. "Never!" He tramped fiercely on.

But then, when nearly to the wall of his property, he *had* to turn around.

"What," he gasped, trying his best to frown, "what are you doing *here?*"

The panting darky stood there, abashed eyes on his toes.

"Dat—uh—dat Ashley Ribbuh watuh, suh, he cold my foot too-much."

"Liar! What's that you've got behind you? Out with it!"

"Do-suh, he nottin' only dis-yuh old rope I gots a debbil trouble findin' again."

A silence that the Judge tried to make withering. Sam wormed his toes, sucked his lips, and fiddled with the hempen coil.

"You see, suh," he deprecated, "you gots a idea I don't like dis-yuh rope, no-more-so dat-yah tree. But sho'-suh, Maussa Percy, dis nigguh he don' mind um. De more I do ha'nt in dat live-oak tree, suh, de more it seem I don' mind um."

The Judge took out his handkerchief and blew his nose violently, twice.

"You paltry, good-for-nothing, lying black sinner, Sam!"

"Yes-suh, yes-suh!" Contentment rang in the darky's voice. "'Scuse me, Maussa Percy," he cast back as he scrambled first over the garden wall. "But I bound oblige mek-haste dis-yuh night now. De moon stan' high."

There are still ghosts in Charleston. Doubt as you can, you can't doubt some of them. You can't doubt the one that, incorruptibly, at the hour of the rising of the midnight moon each month, hangs by its neck from the Hanging-tree.

1932: *from Pictorial Review*

AN END TO DREAMS

by Stephen Vincent Benét, the only three-time first-prize winner thus far in the O. Henry Memorial Award series. He belonged to a small group of

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by Stephen Vincent Benét

authors who find their themes in American life and legend. The other first-prize stories were "The Devil and Daniel Webster," 1937, and "Freedom's a Hard-Bought Thing," 1940. When he died in 1943 this country lost one of its foremost writers of short stories as well as one of its leading poets. Mr. Benét won a Pulitzer Prize in poetry for John Brown's Body *in 1929 and repeated the performance with* Western Star *in 1944. His first successful book, from the standpoint of popular response, was* The Beginning of Wisdom *in 1921. Other works include, in addition to collections of poetry, ballads, radio scripts, and other dramatizations, prose works such as* Spanish Bayonet, Thirteen O'Clock, Tales Before Midnight, Zero Hour, *and* Summons to the Free.

A native of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, and a graduate of Yale, Stephen Vincent Benét probably inherited at least a part of his genius from his family. His father was a historian, and his brother and sister, William Rose and Laura, are both widely recognized as poets and critics of distinction.

The last thing Rimington remembered was the anæsthetist's voice saying "Breathe in deeply" and the taste of pungent sweet. But now he was looking at his own face in a mirror; so he must be out of the ether. Only it was strange to be looking *up* at your mirrored face. He concentrated, and received an impression of a hand and a white-sleeved arm. Of course. He was lying flat on his back, and the nurse was holding the mirror over him so that he could see himself. A queer thing to do—and for a moment he felt sheer terror.

Then, slowly, with the discipline of half a lifetime, he beat the terror off. Of course it was queer. Everything was queer. He hardly recognized himself, in this shaken point of consciousness, staring at a shining glass. But it must be himself, James Rimington, since it was alive and thought. Alive—and over the worst.

He had known all along that this was a serious operation for a man of fifty. A weak person might go under. But he, James Rimington, had never been a weak person. At the very last hadn't he waited thirty-six hours, to get De Blowitz on from Baltimore? And now it was done—successfully—and so it should be. He had paid the doctors enough.

The next thing to do was—sleep. He knew that. Sleep and rest, for hours and days, till the rebellious body healed into the smoothly working, unobtrusive machine to which he was accustomed. It would be irritating—hospital slops and the long drag of convalescence. But he could do it. He would not even think of business for two weeks. And when he did come back to it—by Heaven they'd know he was there!

His eyelids closed obediently, but, for the moment, that was all. He was still awake, and, in a sense, wide awake, except for this curious feeling of detachment from his body. Well, that was all right, too. The effects of the anæsthetic had probably not yet worn off. Soon, perhaps, after another interval of darkness, he might wake to self and pain, but he was oddly comfortable now.

He had no wish to move so much as a muscle, but it seemed to him as if he had never been able to think more clearly or dispassionately. That Mexican Power business, for instance. It suddenly spread out before him like a giant chessboard. He could put his finger instantly on the one weak place—Patterson, the young engineer. Recall Patterson immediately, and Grommett could take care of the report.

He checked himself. Breaking resolutions already. Bad. It must not occur again. But counting sheep over a fence was merely silly; and, as sleep would not come, it seemed a pity to waste this clarity of mind. That was how he had become James Rimington, by wasting nothing. Well, then, why not retrace the steps by which one had become James Rimington? They said the drowning did it; and had he not been drowning in deep, black waters? Surely that would not hurt; that would pass the time till sleep.

He called before his shut eyes the face he had just seen in the mirror. At first it seemed like the face of an utter stranger; then, suddenly, it fitted and was his own. He read it feature by feature with dispassionate interest—the strong jaw, the clamped lips, the full cheeks of fifty, the bleak, undefeated eyes. A busy man didn't get much time to look at his face. But it was there, waiting for him, all the time.

On this face there was strong writing—the years had scored with a heavy pen. Or was it only the years? Somebody had said that we all made our faces by fifty. Perhaps that was so.

As he watched it, the lines began to smooth away, the heavy cheeks grew younger. It was as if he gazed at one of those magic tricks of the camera where a seed pushes up from soil and grows into leaf and flower in a few seconds of time. But here the reel of the picture was running in reverse. The strong tree of his life grew backward into its beginnings, diminishing slowly to the first green shoot.

Yes, that was the way he had looked at nine. Good heavens, he could even remember the patch on the right elbow of that jacket! He'd been ashamed of the patch—bitterly ashamed—and tried to hide it by holding his arm close to his body all the way through morning school. But old Miss Lang had noticed—she would, darn her!—and asked him if he'd hurt himself; and there he was, red in the face, without a word to say, in front of the giggling class.

"Hey, Patches, who's your tailor?" That was at recess.

by Stephen Vincent Benét

What's old Patches made of?
What's old Patches made of?
Patches and tags and calico rags,
And that's what old Patches is m-a-de of!

He glared furiously around the circle of taunting faces. They'd started out just funning, and then, when they saw it made him mad, they suddenly wanted to make him madder. People were like that. He wanted to fight now, but he didn't know where to start. Somebody pushed him from behind, and as he wheeled, sobbing with anger, a big boy tripped him neatly, and he stumbled, striking out blindly.

"Oh, P-a-tches—lookit how fierce he is—lookit him fight! Don't hurt me, Patches, darling!" the mocking voices squealed.

And then, like a pig-tailed avenger, Elsa Mercer burst into the group. Elsa was only eight, but she could throw a ball like a boy and wasn't afraid of anything. It was she who led him away, wheezing and sobbing, and pumped cold water on his eye till he could see out of it again. But he wasn't grateful. You couldn't be grateful to a girl.

He thought it out that afternoon in the woodshed, with the twisted, conclusive logic of a boy, as he split kindling. You wore patches because you were poor. And, when you were poor, people laughed at you. They didn't laugh the same way at Toby Beach, whose father owned the bank. He was fat and placid and they teased him some, but everybody liked to play in his yard because he had a pony. If you had a pony and your father owned the bank they wouldn't laugh at you.

"I'm going to be rich, do you hear?" he said, chopping fiercely at an obdurate log. "Rich! And then let 'em ask me to ride on my pony!"

He came back to the house in his shirt sleeves.

"Why, Jimmy, where's your jacket?"

"I lost it, Mom." He looked at his shoes.

"*Lost* it! Oh, Jimmy!"

Nobody'd ever find it in the creek, with the big stone tied up in it.

"Well," he said defiantly, "it wasn't much good. It was patched."

For a moment he thought he was going to be spanked hard. Well, he was ready for it. Then, unexpectedly, Mom's face got funny.

"Come here, Jimmy," she said in a different voice. "Sit down. You're a big enough boy now to understand what I say. That jacket——"

He sat rebelliously. Didn't she think he knew? Poor—poor—poor—of course they were—of course it was true—every word she said. Of course Mom was always working; that was why she didn't look pretty like Mrs. Beach. But you could stop being poor if you wanted to enough.

When she was finished explaining he looked at her and said, in a strange, unboyish voice:

"You've got almost two dollars in the ginger jar, Mom. I counted it the other day. I can wear my Sunday suit until there's enough."

He could see her very plainly looking at him with those bewildered eyes. Mom had always been bewildered; that was the trouble. He could visualize her still, trudging about the house, dropping one task in the middle to start another, never once cleanly finishing any single piece of work on time. Of course, she had five children to bring up, and James Rimington Senior had died when his eldest son and namesake was six. So she had worked hard. But hadn't he worked hard? And look where he was now! It just showed where you could get with system and ambition.

Mom's only ambition had been to have her children grow up decent small-town citizens, and even that hadn't quite worked out with George. James Rimington smiled grimly. He was remembering a mawkish copy-book sentiment, "Behind every famous man there stands a great mother!" If the fellows who wrote that sort of thing only knew!

Astonishing, though, going back for the funeral, and having so many people speak about Mom. It seemed as if she must have known three quarters of Bladesburg, and liked them, which was stranger. But then, of course, when you lived all your life in a little town—he begged their pardons, a "thriving young metropolis"—like that—— Why, they'd even taken him on a tour of the place, shown him the big new high school where Sally was head of the English department, and the Beach Memorial Hospital. And he hadn't cracked a smile.

Hospital. After he had slept he would remember something important about a hospital. But first, though his eyes were shut, he must look at the mirror again. It clouded and grew clear.

Great Scott! Was that actually he with the ridiculous pompadour, with the clothes and the mandolin of the small-town beau? It seemed incredible, yet the face was very distinct. An adolescent face, unformed and eager enough, but with certain prophecies in it. The eyes were older than the lips, the jaw already decided. He felt more comfortable, tracing these resemblances. But there was something there that was there no longer—he couldn't put his finger on it—mere youth, he supposed.

And there was Elsa, in the preposterous garb of the time, and yet not so preposterous when you looked at her closely. Astonishing that she should have grown up like that; she had not been considered a pretty child. But at seventeen—well, no wonder he had been a fool.

Why, there he was, actually plunking that mandolin, seated on the porch steps of the Mercer house, while Toby Beach and the rest of the crowd sang. Cold lemonade and cookies and the smell of the old wistaria vine in Mrs. Mercer's garden. They said that wistaria vine was forty years old. Sometimes they swung a hammock under it, and Elsa sat there with the light in her honey-colored hair.

That had been when he started in at the bank. Oh, now he remembered it all! He remembered Mr. Dacey's paper cuff protectors and the big iron inkwells, solid as a vault door. Some of those country banks had been through hard weather recently. When he got out of the hospital it might be amusing to find out how the Bladesburg Trust had stood the storm. He supposed, a little unwillingly, that it was all right. It had certainly been safe and stodgy enough in his time.

He saw himself, with a flushed face, arguing with Mr. Beach, and heard the older man's answer: "It's a brilliant scheme, Son, but we can't touch it. We're here to serve our own folks, not the Easterners. Now, you tell Jerry Grant I'll see him about that note."

Why, that very plan, modified to suit other conditions, had been the first stepping stone of James Rimington's fortune. And Beach had thrown it in the wastebasket to spend an hour with an old windbag of a dairy farmer just because he lived in the community. Of course he always showed clean books to the bank examiner. Who couldn't with a ten-foot margin of safety on everything you did? He could just imagine Beach and the Cuban sugar contract. On second thought he couldn't imagine him at all.

Two long, hot summers passed before the mirror—summers with the smell of ripe grain in them and long evening shadows—summers of hard work and foolish gayety and all the sights and sounds of a little town. And always he and Elsa, Elsa and he. "They were going together"—yes, that was the country phrase. He saw his face grow thin and his eyes darken, saw moments of anguish, moments of ecstasy.

"I love you, Elsa."

"I love you, Jim."

"It's a long time before we can get married."

"I can wait."

"You know, Sally's finishing school this month and George is growing up big. Next year, maybe, things'll be better."

"It's all right, Jim."

The ceaseless grind of never having the money—the grindstone continually turning in his head. Not that anyone else in Bladesburg was very rich then. But then nobody else was James Rimington.

"I love you so much, darling Elsa. Oh, Elsa, you know how it is!"

"Why, Jim, of course I know."

Just as well, perhaps. Those years had taught him work. And that was the great thing. That paid for having been a fool with a mandolin. If it hadn't been for Elsa he'd never have had the nerve to try for New York—never waylaid John Q. Dixon when the great man's private car was sidetracked at Bladesburg one hot afternoon.

They called old Dixon a pirate—the smart financial writers on the news-

papers. Well, they were right. But he was a pirate who knew how to pick his crew. James Rimington still remembered the gray eyes under the big eyebrows the first time he had seen them. Curious eyes, looking all the way through a man, expecting to find what they almost always found. When Rimington's eyes met his there had been an instant comprehension. Not sympathy, not even respect, but comprehension, definite and complete.

Then, later, there had been that strange little talk with Mr. Beach in the bank, with the blinds drawn down and the other people gone.

"Well, Jim, I hear you've been moving in high financial circles these days."

"Mr. Dixon? Yes, sir. I—I just happened to run into him—he was out on the tracks, smoking——"

"Uh-huh. Well, he's a smart man, Dixon."

"Yes, sir."

A silence.

"A smart man," repeated Mr. Beach, "and crooked as a ram's horn."

A longer silence. At last Mr. Beach spoke again.

"Jim, there'll be a vacancy this fall. Assistant cashier. I'd like to give that job to a married man."

"Yes, sir."

"Yes, Son. And Dacey's getting old, and I'm not so young myself. Toby, he wants to be a lawyer. I think a heap of this bank, Jim."

"So do I, sir."

He went on as if he had not heard the words. "And I think a good deal of your mother, Jim. I'd bank on her. There are only two kinds of people in the world, Jim. Straight—and crooked. At least that's been my experience."

"Yes, sir."

"Well, Jim, think it over. But, as I say, it's a job for a married man."

As soon as he had his coat on he had gone over to tell Elsa. He stared at the hurrying figure in the mirror. What a fool! But even the fool had had some sense in his folly. Halfway over to the Mercer house his fingers had gone to his pocket and closed on John Dixon's card.

"Say you love me, Elsa. Say it."

"I love you, Jim."

"Say you'll always love me, Elsa."

"Silly! Is anything the matter?"

"No—no—no——"

He hadn't told her. And that evening, in the bare, hot room, he had lain awake and listened to George's breathing in the other bed. And, with that breathing, he had heard the whirring noise of the grindstone of poverty, grinding out years and days.

If he and Elsa married he would never get out of Bladesburg. He couldn't stop helping Mom. Elsa was too decent for that. And, when that was done,

there'd be children. Assistant cashier. Cashier. Vice president at forty if all went well. President, perhaps, at fifty, and a house like Mr. Beach's. A solid man. A settled, small-town citizen. And thirty years of rolling a stone uphill. "There goes old man Rimington. Yes, sir, it's quite a story. Why, I can remember when we used to call him 'Patches.'" No, thanks.

He wouldn't be able to send Mom a cent if he went with Dixon. Dixon paid his clever young men starvation wages at first. He wouldn't be getting back to see Elsa, either. Dixon worked his crew too hard.

Of course, he could come back to Elsa later. But, even while he told himself that, he knew the truth.

He got up silently and moved with softly restless steps around the room. For a moment he picked up the coat of the suit he had worn that day. The sleeve was wearing at the right elbow. He threw it on the floor.

The mirror clouded again. James Rimington took a deep breath. Suppose you'd stayed in Bladesburg, worn the patched coat? Would you still be James Rimington?

"You can buy anything there is," he thought, "but you have to pay for it." Yes, that was true; that was what he had always believed. And yet——

He turned back with relief to the mirror. Now the face in it was quite familiar, the face of a young, pushing man. Time moved faster—already the young man was thirty—thirty-five—and a power, long past his first big *coup*. Already you could see James Rimington in every line and gesture. He remembered the Wall Street reporter who had called him "the quiet earthquake," and how the name had stuck. He saw many scenes, many faces, but the pace of the reel never halted. Was that because there were no real decisions to make any more? He did not know.

He caught a flash of John Dixon and himself, staring at each other across a desk. The pirate captain was older; there was gray in the bushy brows and the eyes were tired, but they could still look through a man. "Well," he said, looking through James Rimington, "how much do you expect me to settle for, Jim?"

James Rimington heard his own voice remark, "A hundred and sixty," and hated the voice a little for not being quite composed.

The pirate leaned back in his chair. "Hundred and sixty," he drawled. "When you first came into the office, Jim, I told you something, didn't I? 'Always squeeze the shorts,' I said."

"Yes."

"Well," said John Dixon, "appears you've got a good memory." James Rimington looked away from the passionless comprehension of the eyes.

Now things began to accumulate around James Rimington. There was the house in New York and the house on Long Island, the yacht, and the guests who came and ate and drank, cadged for tips, and went away. There

were the books and the pictures, the charities and the gifts, not because one was interested, but because one was not interested enough. There were women of various ages and different looks. They passed, light and hollow as figures made of pasteboard; they had no importance. Always there was the work and the growing power. And those were real.

Elsa had come to Mom's funeral, and he'd seen her afterwards. The children all looked like Toby. He couldn't find Elsa in any of them, except, possibly, the youngest girl. "We all know about you, Jim." How tranquil her voice had sounded! What a power women had of blotting things out of memory! It had been a hot afternoon, with the smell of wistaria drifting in through the open window, and she had stood, for an instant, with her hand on young Toby's shoulder. Then they had taken him to see the Beach Memorial Hospital.

The thing to do now was—sleep—sleep and get well. He had bought life on his own terms and paid for it, and just now he had bought off death. But only sleep could quiet the rapid, shuttling flow of scenes in the mirror—the deepest, the darkest sleep. For now, with a tiny click, the reel spun back to its beginning, and there he was, a boy with a patch on his sleeve, just starting out for morning school.

No, no, it was too much; it was not to be borne. Of course you made a decision and took one path out of two. That was what life was for. The children of Elsa call their father Judge Beach, but that was only literature, and stupid. John Dixon's eyes were as crooked as a ram's horn. The old iron inkwell was heavy—far too heavy—but, once the doctors operated, the room would be full of the smell of wistaria, and Mom wouldn't have to work so hard any more. Get well—yes, that was the trick—and marry afterwards, for it is better to marry than burn; and when a man's tired making money it's time he founded a family

But "When a man's tired making money he's tired of life," said John Q. Dixon's scornful voice; and James Rimington sighed feebly and tried to turn in the bed.

He'd beat them yet—show them—all of them—a man of fifty was young. No dissipations—nothing but work and power—no wasted energies—all the eggs in one basket. What more could a man desire? If only that face called James Rimington would go away from the mirror; that was the only thing. He forced it away by a terrific effort of will, and subsided, shaken. Better now.

But was it better? For now a room took the place of the face—a room in a hospital, with a sick man quiet in a bed. A big room, a private room, somebody important. Look at the flowers. A nurse was moving toward the door with soft, catlike steps. He followed her.

What a lot of doctors—count all the pretty doctors—one, two, three! But

why did they look so serious in this other room? Their lips moved, making sounds, but James Rimington could not hear what they said.

Ah, but he could do better! He might not hear what they said, but, in the mirror, he could see what they thought; beneath the bristling hair and hard skull of the famous surgeon, he could look into the clever brain. It was very interesting, lit and bright, a switchboard of thoughts and emotions, pulsating like tiny lamps. There De Blowitz had told his hand to get him a cigarette, and the hand had done it—all so smoothly and surely and in the twinkling of an eye.

But what was the meaning of this? Treachery. De Blowitz was not thinking of the sick man at all. He was wondering how soon he could get back to Baltimore, and worrying about his son's marks at school. James Rimington shifted to the young doctor next him. He was thinking that it would do him a good deal of good to be associated with De Blowitz in a case like this, and wondering if his wife had bought a paper and seen his name signed under De Blowitz's in the bulletin that they had issued at two o'clock.

Desperately, James Rimington looked in the mind of the nurse. One part of it was taking instructions efficiently, but the rest speculated on a telephone call from an interne at another hopsital and the price of a hat in a store on the avenue.

James Rimington longed to speak, to cry out, to deafen their ears with "Stop! Stop thinking about anything but this sick man! He must get well. He's paid you to get well! Who cares about your wives and your children? You mustn't even think of them till he gets well!" But James Rimington was helpless. He could only look on.

He pondered frantically, trying to think of someone whose sole concern might be with the sick man. Mallinson, his secretary—oh, he knew Mallinson—Mallinson would be putting out a short line already, just in case. His servants—perfect servants—he saw to that—but you didn't make friends with your servants any more than you made friends with your forks and spoons. Sally, his nearest sister—no, if she had the news she would be thinking of Mom and the hard years. Elsa——

He saw Elsa now, in her garden, her quick hands moving, gathering flowers. Thank goodness, she was alone. He could get to her—tell her a man was very sick, a man in a hospital. He tried, with all the force of his will, to drive the message through.

A vague discomposure crossed her features; she lifted a hand to her brow. James Rimington could have shouted with relief. If he could only make her think of him—of him, not merely James Rimington—all would be well. But, briefly as it had lit, the feebly burning lamp that had to do with James Rimington winked out. Toby Junior was going to be married in a month.

Elsa was thinking of that, of the girl, of how things would be different, and yet how much there was still to know. He could not get through.

A flicker—a giddiness—and he was back in the hospital. Ah, that was better. They were all thinking about the sick man now, doctors and nurses. And not only thinking, but working. But then he realized what it was they thought.

He seemed to hear a voice say, "I simply don't understand this sudden collapse. If it were anyone else—— But a man with everything to live for——"

"My young vriendt, how do we know what he has to live for?" Those were De Blowitz's gutturals. "He may have nozzing. I have seen such collapse before in men like him."

"Shall I try the oxygen, Doctor?"

"Oh, yes, try the oxygen. It will do no harm."

It couldn't be true. James Rimington couldn't be there, dying. James Rimington was a boy in a patched coat who meant to grow up and marry Elsa and do all sorts of things.

"Try the mirror," said a distant terrible voice, "the mirror," and, hearing it, James Rimington summoned his last ounce of spirit. But the mirror, when he looked at it, was blank and shining. There was no breath. Then darkness fell on James Rimington.

The patient middle-aged woman who had been waiting in the chair moved a little now.

"Now?" she said in a whisper.

"Yes," said the nurse's voice. "He's just coming out, Mrs. Rimington."

The figure in the bed stirred, moaned. The woman took its hand.

"Elsa."

"Yes, Jim, right here."

"You're here? I—I tried to get to you, but I couldn't. Are we married, Elsa?"

"Thirty years, dear. Try to sleep now. Everything's all right."

"I will, but—Elsa—I dreamt I—did I ever wear a—a coat with a patch?"

"Why, Jim, don't you remember? They made fun—and then, by the end of the year, every boy in school wanted a patch, because you made them believe it helped you shooting marbles. That was like you, Jim."

"I didn't—throw it away—I kept it—and wore it——"

"Of course, dear. Now just keep quiet and try to go to sleep. Dr. Lee says you're doing splendidly—the best patient he ever had in the Beach Memorial. And I'll be here all the time—and the children and Sally are just crazy to see you——"

by Stephen Vincent Benét

He looked away from her a moment, up at the ceiling. A round spot of sun lay on it, bright and shining, the size and shape of a mirror.

"But," he said, "I saw——"

Her eyes followed his. "Oh, poor darling—right in your eyes—don't worry—I'll get Miss Foster to——"

"Never mind," he said. "All right now," and, taking her hand, he knew the measure of his victory and defeat, and was at peace.

1933: *from Harper's Magazine*

GAL YOUNG UN

by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, who found the Florida scrub an excellent background for the lives of the people she undertook to portray. This inspiration led to the writing of "Gal Young Un," the first-prize winner for 1933; "The Pelican's Shadow," which appeared in the 1940 volume of this series; and The Yearling, *a story that gave Miss Rawlings a nationwide audience of admirers. She received the Pulitzer Prize for* The Yearling *in 1939.*

Miss Rawlings was born in 1896 in Washington, D.C., the daughter of a government official. She was raised on a farm in Rock Creek, Maryland, and graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1918. Her writing career, which began in 1907, included advertising and newspaper work and frequent contributions to leading magazines and anthologies. Books by Miss Rawlings are South Moon Under, Golden Apples, When the Whippoorwill *(a collection of short stories)*, Cross Creek, *and* Jacob's Ladder. *Until her death in December 1953 she lived in Hawthorne, Florida, managing her large orange grove.*

1: The house was invisible from the road which wound, almost untraveled, through the flat-woods. Once every five days a turpentine wagon creaked down the ruts, and negroes moved like shadows among the pines. A few hunters in season came upon them chipping boxes, scraping aromatic gum from red pots

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into encrusted buckets; inquired the way and whether quail or squirrel or turkey had been seen. Then hunters and turpentiners moved again along the road, stepping on violets and yellow pitcher-plants that rimmed the edges.

The negroes were aware of the house. It stood a few hundred yards away, hidden behind two live oaks, isolated and remote in a patch of hammock. It was a tall square two stories. The woman who gave them water from her well when the nearby branch was dry looked to them like the house, tall and bare and lonely, weathered gray, like its unpainted cypress. She seemed forgotten.

The two white men, hunting lazily down the road, did not remember—if they had ever known—that a dwelling stood here. Flushing a covey of quail that flung themselves like feathered bronze discs at the cover of the hammock, their first shots flicked through the twin oaks. They followed their pointer dog on the trail of single birds and stopped short in amazement. Entering the north fringe of the hammock, they had come out on a sandy open yard. A woman was watching them from the back stoop of an old house.

"Shootin' mighty close, men," she called.

Her voice sounded unused, like a rusty iron hinge.

The older man whistled in the dog, ranging feverishly in the low palmettos. The younger swaggered to the porch. He pushed back the black slouch hat from his brazen eyes.

"Never knowed nobody lived in six miles o' here."

His tone was insolent. He drew a flattened package of cigarettes from his corduroy hunting jacket, lighted one, and waited for her to begin scolding. Women always quarreled with him. Middle-aged women, like this one, quarreled earnestly; young ones snapped at him playfully.

"It's a long ways from anybody, ain't it?" she agreed.

He stared at her between puffs.

"Jesus, yes."

"I don't keer about you shootin'," she said. "It's purely sociable, hearin' men folks acrost the woods. A shot come thu a winder jest now, that's all the reason I spoke."

The intruders shifted their shotguns uneasily. The older man touched his finger to his cap.

"That's all right, ma'am."

His companion strolled to the stone curbing of an open well. He peered into its depths, shimmering where the sun of high noon struck vertically.

"Good water?"

"The finest ever. Leave me fetch you a clean cup."

She turned into the house for a white china coffee cup. The men wound up a bucket of water on creaking ropes. The older man drank politely from the proffered cup. The other guzzled directly from the bucket. He reared

back his head like a satisfied hound, dripping a stream of crystal drops from his red mouth.

"Ain't your dog thirsty? Here—reckon my ol' cat won't fuss if he drinks outen his dish." The woman stroked the animal's flanks as he lapped. "Ain't he a fine feller?"

The hunters began to edge away.

"Men, I jest got common rations, bacon an' biscuit an' coffee, but you're plumb welcome to set down with me."

"No, thank you, ma'am." They looked at the sun. "Got to be moseyin' home."

The younger man was already on his way, sucking a straw. The other fumbled in his game-pocket.

"Sorry we come so clost upon you, lady. How 'bout a bird fer your dinner?"

She reached out a large hand for the quail.

"I'd shore thank you fer it. I'm a good shot on squirrel, an' turkeys when I got 'em roosted. Birds is hard without no dog to point 'em. I gits hungry fer quail . . ."

Her voice trailed off as the hunters walked through the pines toward the road. She waved her hand in case they should turn around. They did not look back.

The man was hunting alone because he had been laughed at. His cronies in the Florida village, to which he had returned after a few years' wandering, knew that he detested solitude. It was alien to him, a silent void into which he sank as into quicksand. He had stopped at the general store to pick up a hunting partner. The men lounging there hours at a time were usually willing to go with him. This time none was ready.

"Come go with me, Willy," he insisted. "I cain't go by myself."

The storekeeper called over his shoulder, weighing out a quarter's worth of water-ground meal for a negro:

"You'll git ketched out alone in the woods sometime, Trax, an' nobody won't know who 'tis."

The men guffawed.

"Trax always got to git him a buddy."

His smoldering eyes flared at them. He spat furiously across the rough pine floor of the store.

"I ain't got to git me none o' these sorry catbirds."

He had clattered down the wooden steps, spitting angrily every few feet. They were jealous, he thought, because he had been over on the east coast. He had turned instinctively down the south road out of the village. Old man Blaine had brought him this way last week. He hunted carelessly for two or three hours, taking pot shots at several coveys that rose under his feet.

His anger made him miss the birds widely. It was poor sport without a companion and a dog.

Now he realized that he was lost. As a boy he had hunted these woods, but always with other boys and men. He had gone through them unseeing, stretching his young muscles luxuriously, absorbing lazily the rich Florida sun, cooling his face at every running branch. His shooting had been careless, avid. He liked to see the brown birds tumble in midair. He liked to hunt with the pack, to gorge on the game dinners they cooked by lake shores under oak trees. When the group turned homeward, he followed, thinking of supper; of the 'shine his old man kept hidden in the smoke-house; of the girls he knew. Someone else knew north and south, and the cross patterns of the piney-woods roads. The lonely region was now as unfamiliar as though he had been a stranger.

It was an hour or two past noon. He leaned his 12-gauge shotgun against a pine and looked about him nervously. He knew by the sun that he had come continuously south. He had crossed and recrossed the road, and could not decide whether it now lay to the right or left. If he missed it to the right, he would come to cypress swamp. He licked his lips. If he picked the wrong road to the left, it would bring him out a couple of miles above the village. That would be better. He could always get a lift back. He picked up his gun and began to walk.

In a few minutes a flat gray surface flashed suddenly from a patch of ham-mock. He stopped short. Pleasure swept over him, cooling his hot irritation. He recognized the house where he and Blaine had drawn water. He had cursed Blaine for giving a quail to the woman. He wiped the sweat from his face. The woman would feed him and direct him out of the flat-woods. Instinctively he changed his gait from a shuffling drag to his customary swagger.

He rapped loudly on the smooth cypress front door. It had a half-moon fanlight over it. The house was old but it was capacious and good. There was, for all its bareness, an air of prosperity. Clean white curtains hung at the windows. A striped cat startled him by rearing against his legs. He kicked it away. The woman must be gone. A twig cracked in the yard beyond the high piazza. He turned. The woman was stalking around the side of the house to see before she was seen. Her gray face lightened as she recognized him. She laughed.

"Mister, if you knowed how long it's been since I heerd a rap. Don't nobody knock on my front door. The turpentine niggers calls so's I won't shoot, and the hunters comes a-talkin' to the well."

She climbed the front steps with the awkwardness of middle age. She dried a hand on her flour-sacking apron and held it out to him. He took it limply, interrupting the talk that began to flow from her. He was ugly with hunger and fatigue and boredom.

by Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings

"How 'bout a mess o' them rations you was offerin' me last week?"

His impatience was tempered with the tone of casual intimacy in which he spoke to all women. It bridged time and space. The woman flushed.

"I'd be mighty well pleased——"

She opened the front door. It stuck at the sill, and she threw a strong body against it. He did not offer to help. He strolled in ahead of her. As she apologized for the moments it would take to fry bacon and make coffee, he was already staring about him at the large room. When she came to him from the kitchen half an hour later, her face red with her hurry, the room had made an impress on his mind, as roads and forests could not do. The size of the room, of the clay fireplace, the adequacy of chairs and tables of a frontier period, the luxury of a Brussels carpet, although ancient, over wood, the plenitude of polished, unused kerosene lamps—the details lay snugly in his mind like hoarded money.

Hungry, with the smell of hot food filling his breath, he took time to smooth his sleek black hair at a walnut-framed mirror on the varnished match-board wall. He made his toilet boldly in front of the woman. A close watching of his dark face, of the quickness of his hands moving over his affectation of clipped side-burns, could only show her that he was good to look at. He walked to the kitchen with a roll, sprawling his long legs under the table.

With the first few mouthfuls of food good humor returned to him. He indulged himself in graciousness. The woman served him lavishly with fried cornbread and syrup, coffee, white bacon in thick slices, and fruits and vegetables of her own canning. His gluttony delighted her. His mouth was full, bent low over his heaped plate.

"You live fine, ma'am, for anyone lives plumb alone."

She sat down opposite him, wiping back the wet gray hair from her forehead, and poured herself a convivial cup of coffee.

"Jim—that was my husband—an' Pa always did say if they was good rations in the house they'd orter be on the table. I ain't got over the habit."

"You been livin' alone quite some time?"

"Jim's fifteen year dead. Pa 'bout six."

"Don't you never go nowheres?"

"I got no way to go. I kep' up stock fer two-three year after Pa died, but 'twa'n't wuth the worry. They's a family lives two mile closer to town than me, has a horse an' wagon. I take 'em my list o' things 'bout oncet a month. Seems like . . ."

He scarcely listened.

A change of atmosphere in her narrative indicated suddenly to him that she was asking him about himself.

"You a stranger?"

She was eager, leaning on the table waiting for his answer.

He finished a saucer of preserved figs, scraping at the rich syrup with relish. He tilted back in his chair luxuriously and threw the match from his cigarette in the general direction of the wood stove. He was entirely at home. His belly well filled with good food, his spirit touched with the unfailing intoxication to him of a woman's interest, he teetered and smoked and talked of his life, of his deeds, his dangers.

"You ever heard the name o' Trax Colton?"

She shook her head. He tapped his chest significantly, nodding at her.

"That's me. You've heard tell, if you on'y remembered, o' me leavin' here a few years back on account of a little cuttin' fuss. I been on the east coast—Daytona, Melbourne, all them places. The fuss blowed over an' I come back. Fixin' to take up business here."

He frowned importantly. He tapped a fresh cigarette on the table, as he had learned to do from his companions of the past years. He thought with pleasure of all that he had learned, of the sophistication that lay over his Cracker speech and ways like a cheap bright coat.

"I'm an A-1 bootlegger, ma'am."

For the time being he was a big operator from the east coast. He told her of small sturdy boats from Cuba, of signal flares on the St. Augustine beach at midnight, of the stream of swift automobiles moving in and out just before high tide. Her eyes shone. She plucked at the throat of her brown-checked gingham dress, breathing quickly. It was fitting that this dark glamorous young man should belong to the rocket-lit world of danger. It was ecstasy painful in its sharpness, that he should be tilted back at her table, flicking his fragrant ashes on her clean, lonely floor.

He was entirely amiable as he left her. Pleased with himself, he was for a moment pleased with her. She was a good woman. He laid his hand patronizingly on her shoulder. He stroked the striped cat on his way down the steps. This time he turned to lift his hand to her. She waved heartily as long as his lithe body moved in sight among the pines.

An impulse took her to the mirror where he had smoothed his hair, as though it would bring him within her vision again. She saw herself completely for the first time in many years. Isolation had taken the meaning from age. She had forgotten until this moment that she was no longer young. She turned from the mirror and washed the dishes soberly. It occurred to her that the young man had not even asked her name.

The hammock that had been always a friendly curtain about the old house was suddenly a wall. The flat-woods that had been sunny and open, populous with birds and the voice of winds, grew dense and dark. She had been solitary. She had grieved for Jim and for the old man her father. But solitude had kept her company in a warm natural way, sitting cozily at her hearth, like

the cat. Now loneliness washed intolerably over her, as though she were drowning in a cold black pond.

The young man's complacency lasted a mile or two. As his feet began to drag, fact intruded on the fiction with which he had enraptured the gray-haired woman. Memories seeped back into him like a poison: memories of the lean years as ignorant hanger-on of prosperous bootleggers; of his peddling to small garages of lye-cut 'shine in ignominious pints. The world for which he considered himself fitted had evaded him. His condition was desperate. He thought of the woman who had fed him, whom he had entranced with his story. Distaste for her flooded him, as though it was her fault the story was a lie. He lifted his shotgun and blew the head from a red-bird trilling in a wild plum tree.

The storekeeper in the village was the only person who recognized Mattie Syles. The store was packed with the Saturday-night buyers of rations. A layer of whites milled in front of the meat counter; a layer of blacks shifted behind them. At the far grocery counter along a side wall a wedge of negroes had worked in toward the meal and sugar barrels, where helpers weighed out the dimes' and quarters' worth with deliberately inaccurate haste. Two white women were buying percale of the storekeeper's wife at the dry-goods counter.

The woman came in defiantly, as though the store was a shameful place where she had no business. She looked searchingly from side to side. The storekeeper's wife called, "Evenin', ma'am," and the two white women wheeled to stare and whisper after her. She advanced toward the meat counter. The negroes parted to let her in. The storekeeper poised his knife over a pork backbone to look at her. He laid it down, wiped his hands with a flourish on his front, and shook hands across the counter.

"If this ain't a surprise! Must be four-five years since you been to town! Meat I been sendin' you by Lantry's been all right? What kin I do fer you? Butchered this mornin'—got fresh beef. How 'bout a nice thin steak?"

She made her purchases slowly and moved to the staples counter. She insisted on being left until the last.

"I ain't in no hurry."

The store was almost empty and ready to close when she gathered her sacks together and climbed into the Lantrys' wagon, waiting outside the door. As Lantry clicked to his horse and they moved off she did not notice that the man she had hoped desperately to see was just strolling into the store.

"Gimme a couple o' packs o' Camels to tide me over Sunday."

"Fifteen cents straight now, Trax."

"Jest one, then."

The storekeeper spoke across the vacant store to his wife, rolling up the bolts of cloth.

"Edna, you have better manners with the customers, or we'll be losing 'em. Why'n't you take up some time with Mis' Syles?"

"Who?"

"Mis' Syles—Jim Syles' widder—ol' man Terry's daughter—lives four-five mile south, out beyond Lantry's. You know her, Edna. Lantry's been buyin' fer her."

"I never knowed her. How'd I know her now? Why'n't you call her by name, so's I'd of knowed?"

"Well, you keep better track of her if she's goin' to take to comin' to town agin. She's rich."

Trax turned in the doorway.

"You talkin' about that gank-gutted woman left jest now?"

He had avoided going into the store until she left. He had not intended to bring her volubility upon him in public, have her refer to their meal together. He had half-guessed she had come looking for him. Women did.

"She live alone in a two-story house you cain't see from the road?"

"That's her," the storekeeper agreed. "That's Mis' Syles, a'right."

"She's rich?"

"I mean rich. Got her five dollars a week steady rent-money from turpentine, an' three thousand dollars insurance in the bank her daddy left her. An' then lives 'tother end o' nowhere. Won't leave the old house."

" 'Bout time somebody was fixin' to marry all that, goin' to waste."

"She wouldn't suit you, Trax. You didn't git a good look at her. You been used to 'em younger an' purtier."

The man Colton was excited. He walked out of the store without the customary "Well, evenin' " of departure. He hurried to Blaine's, where he was boarding, but did not go in. It was necessary to sit alone on the bench outside and think. His luck had not deserted him. As he leaned his dark head against the wall, the tropical stars glittering over him were the bright lights of city streets. Here and there a fat star flickered. These were the burnished kerosene lamps of the widow Syles. The big room—the fireplace that would heat it on the coolest nights—one by one he drew out the remembered details and tucked them into his plans.

The man courted the woman with the careless impatience of his quail hunting. He intended to be done with it as quickly as possible. There was, astonishingly, a certain pleasure in her infatuation. He responded to any woman's warmth as a hound does to a grate fire, stretching comfortably before it. The maternal lavishness of her emotion for him was satisfying. Younger women, pretty women, expected something of him, coaxed and coquetted.

On his several visits to the widow before he condescended to be married to her, he sprawled in the early spring nights before the big fireplace. He made

it plain that he was not one to sit around the kitchen stove. His fastidiousness charmed her. She staggered into the room with her generous arms heaped with wood: live oak and hickory, and some cedar chips, because Trax liked the smell. From his chair he directed the placing of the heavy logs. A fire must crackle constantly to please him. She learned to roll cigarettes for him, bringing them to him to lick flickeringly, like a snake, with his quick tongue. The process stirred her. When she placed the finished cigarette between his lips and lighted it with a blazing lighter'd splinter; when he puffed languidly on it and half-closed his eyes, and laid his fingers perhaps on her large-boned hand, she shivered.

The courting was needlessly protracted because she could not believe that he would have her. It was miracle enough that he should be here at all in these remote flat-woods. It was unbelievable that he should be willing to prolong the favor, to stay with her in this place forever.

She said, "Cain't be you raly wants me."

Yet she drank in his casual insistence.

"Why not? Ain't a thing the matter with you."

She understood sometimes—when she wakened with a clear mind in the middle of the night—that something strange had happened to her. She was moving in a delirium, like the haze of malaria when the fever was on. She solaced herself by thinking that Trax too might be submerged in such a delicious fog.

When he left her one night in the Blaine Ford he had borrowed, the retreating explosions of the car left behind a silence that terrified her. She ran to the beginning of the pines to listen. There was no sound but the breath of the south wind in the needles. There was no light but the endless flickering of stars. She knew that if the man did not come back again she would have to follow him. Solitude she had endured. She could not endure desolation.

When he came the next day she was ready to go to the village with him to the preacher. He laughed easily at her hurry and climbed ahead of her into the borrowed car. He drove zestfully, with abandon, bouncing the woman's big frame over the ruts of the dirt road.

As they approached the village he said casually, "I keep my money in Clark City. We'd orter do our business together. Where's yours?"

"Mine's there too. Some's in the post office an' some in the bank."

"Supposin' we go git married there. An' reckon you kin lend me a hundred till I add up my account?"

She nodded an assent to both questions.

"Don't you go spendin' no money on me, Trax, if you ain't got it real free to spend." She was alarmed for his interests. "You leave me pay fer things a while."

He drew a deep breath of relief. He was tempted for a moment to get her

cash and head for the east coast at once. But he had made his plans to stay. He needed the old house in the safe flat-woods to make his start. He could even use the woman.

When they came back through the village from the city she stopped at the store for supplies. The storekeeper leaned across the fresh sausage to whisper confidentially:

"Tain't my business, Mis' Syles, but folks is sayin' Trax Colton is sort o' courtin' you. You come of good stock, an' you'd orter step easy. Trax is purely trash, Mis' Syles."

She looked at him without comprehension.

She said, "Me an' Trax is married."

The gray of the house was overlaid with the tenderness of the April sun. The walls were washed with its thin gold. The ferns and lichens of the shingled roof were shot through with light, and the wren's nest under the eaves was luminous. The striped cat sprawled flattened on the rear stoop, exposing his belly to the soft warmth. The woman moved quietly at her work, for fear of awakening the man. She was washing. When she drew a bucket of water from the well she steadied it with one hand as it swung to the coping, so that there should be no sound.

Near the well stood bamboo and oleander. She left her bucket to draw her fingers along the satin stoutness of the fresh green bamboo shoots, to press apart the new buds of the oleander in search of the pale pinkness of the first blossoms. The sun lay like a friendly arm across her square shoulders. It seemed to her that she had been chilled, year on year, and that now for the first time she was warmed through to her marrow. Spring after the snapping viciousness of February; Trax sleeping in the bed after her solitude. . . . When she finished her washing she slipped in to look at him. A boyish quiet wiped out the nervous shiftiness of his waking expression. She wanted to gather him up, sleeping, in her strong arms and hold him against her capacious breast.

When his breakfast was almost ready, she made a light clatter in the kitchen. It irritated him to be called. He liked to get up of his own accord and find breakfast smoking, waiting for him. He came out gaping, washed his face and hands in the granite basin on the water-shelf, combed his hair leisurely at the kitchen mirror, turning his face this way and that. Matt stood watching him, twisting her apron. When he was quite through, she came to him and laid her cheek against his.

"Mornin', Trax-honey."

Her voice was vibrant.

"Mornin'."

He yawned again as he dropped into his chair. He beat lightly on his down-turned plate with his knife and surveyed the table. He scowled.

"Where's the bacon?"

"Honey, I didn't think you'd want none with the squirrel an' eggs an' fish."

"My God, I cain't eat breakfast without bacon."

"I'm sorry, Trax. 'Twon't take me but a minute now."

She was miserable because she had not fried bacon and he wanted it.

He slid eggs and meat and biscuits to his plate, poured coffee with an angry jerk, so that it spilled on the table, shoveled the food in, chewing with his mouth open. When Matt put the crisp thick slices of white bacon before him, he did not touch them. He lighted a cigarette and strolled to the stoop, pushed off the cat so that he might sit down. He leaned back and absorbed the sun. This was fine.

He had deliberately allowed himself these few idle weeks. He had gone long without comfort. His body needed it. His swaggering spirit needed it. The woman's adoration fed him. He could have had no greater sense of well-being, of affluence if she had been a nigger servant. Now he was ready for business. His weasel mind was gnawing its hole into the world he longed for.

"Matt!"

She left her dishes and came to stand over him.

"Matt, you're goin' in business with me. I want you should git me three hundred dollars. I want to set up a eight-barrel still back o' the house, down by the branch."

Trax had crashed like a meteor into the flat-woods. It had not occurred to her that his world must follow him. That was detached from him, only a strange story that he had told. She had a sensation of dismay that any thing, any person, must intrude on her ecstasy.

She said anxiously, "I got enough to make out on, Trax. You don't need to go startin' up nothin' like that."

"All right—if you want I should put my outfit some'eres else——"

"No, no. Don't you do that. Don't you go 'way. I didn't know you was studyin' on nothin' like that—you jest go ahead an' put it clost as you like."

"Down by the branch, like I said."

He visioned the lay-out for her. She listened, distraught. The platform here, for the barrels of mash. There, the woodpile for the slow fire. Here again, the copper still itself. The cover was dense, utterly concealing. The location was remote.

"The idee, Matt," he was hunched forward, glowing, "is to sell yer own stuff what they call retail, see? It costs you fifty, seventy-five cents a gallon to make. You sell by the five-gallon jug fer seven dollars, like they're doin' now, you don't make nothin'. That's nigger pay. But what do you git fer it by the drink? A quarter. A quarter a drink an' a dollar a pint. You let people know they kin git 'em a drink out here any time to Trax Colton's, you got 'em

comin' in from two-three counties fer it. You git twenty gallons ahead an' color some up, cook it a whiles underground to darken it, an' you take it to places like Jacksonville an' Miami—you got you real money."

It was as though thunder and lightning threatened over the flat-woods. The darkness of impending violence filled them. She stared at him.

" 'Course, if you don't want to invest in my business with me, I got to be gittin' back where I come from."

The smoke from his cigarette drifted across her.

"No, no! It's all right!"

His glamorousness enfolded her like the April sun.

"Honey, anything you want to do's all right."

Setting up the still was a week's work. Men began to come and go. Where there had been, once in five days, the silent turpentiners, once in a while the winter hunters, there were now negroes bringing in cut wood; a local mason putting togther brick and mortar; a hack carpenter building a platform with a roof; men in trucks bringing in sacks of meal and sugar, glass demijohns and oak kegs.

The storekeeper brought five hundred pounds of sugar.

"Howdy, Mis' Colton. Reckon you never figgered you'd be 'shinin'."

"No."

"But you couldn't git you no better place fer it."

Her square face brightened.

"That's jest what Trax says."

That night she approached him.

"Trax, all these here men knowin' what you're doin'—reckon it's safe?"

"They got no reason to say nothin'. The only reason anybody'd turn anybody else up was if he'd done somethin' to him. Then they'd git at him that-a-way. Git his still, see? Git him tore up. That way they'd git him."

She made no further comment. Her silence made its way through the wall of his egotism.

"You don't talk as much as you did, Matt. Else I got used to it."

"I was alone so long, honey. Seemed like I had to git caught up."

But the spring warmth was no longer so loosening to the tongue. The alien life the man was bringing in chilled the exuberance that had made her voluble.

"I'm fixin' to learn you to make the whiskey, Matt."

She stared at him.

"Less help we have, knowin' how much I got an' where 'tis, better it suits me, see?"

She said finally, "I kin learn."

The work seemed strange, when all her folk had farmed and timbered. But

her closest contact with Trax was over the sour, seething mash. When they walked together back of the house, down to the running branch, their bodies pushing side by side through the low palmettos, they were a unit. Except to curse her briefly when she was clumsy, he was good-natured at his work. Crouching by the fire burning under the copper drum, the slow dripping from the coils, of the distillate, the only sound except for small woods life, she felt themselves man and wife. At other times his lovely body and unlovely spirit both evaded her.

He was ready to sell his wares. He drove to the village and to neighboring towns and cities, inviting friends and acquaintances to have a drink from one of the gallon jugs under the rear seat of the borrowed car. They pronounced it good 'shine. To the favored few financially able to indulge themselves he gave a drink of the "aged" liquor. Accustomed to the water-clear, scalding rawness of fresh 'shine, they agreed gravely that no better whiskey ever came in from Cuba. He let it be known that both brands would be available at any time, day or night, at the old Terry house four miles south of the village. He made a profound impression. Most bootleggers sold stuff whose origin and maker were unknown. Most 'shiners had always made it, or drifted into it aimlessly. Trax brought a pomp and ceremony to the local business.

Men found their way out the deep-rutted road. They left their cars among the pines and stumbled through the hammock to the house. They gathered in the big room Trax had recognized as suitable for his purposes. The long trenchered table old man Terry had sliced from red bay, held the china pitcher of "corn" and the jelly glasses from which they drank. Their bird-dogs and hounds padded across the piazza and lay before the fire. Trax drank with them, keying their gatherings to hilarity. He was a convivial host. Sometimes Blaine brought along his guitar, and Trax clapped his hands and beat his feet on the floor as the old man picked the strings. But he was uneasy when a quarrel developed. Then he moved, white-faced among the men, urging someone else to stop it.

At first the woman tried to meet them hospitably. When, deep in the hammock at the still, she heard the vibration of a motor, she hurried up to the house to greet the guests. She smoothed back the gray hair from her worn face and presented her middle-aged bulk in a clean apron. If there was one man alone, Trax introduced her casually, insolently:

"This is my old woman."

When a group of men came together, he ignored her. She stood in the doorway, smiling vaguely. He continued his talk as though she were not there. Sometimes one of the group, embarrassed, acknowledged her presence.

"How do, ma'am."

For the most part they took their cue from Trax and did not see her. Once, on her withdrawal to the kitchen, a stranger had followed for a match.

"Don't you mind workin' way out here in the woods?"

But she decided that Trax was too delicate to want his wife mixing with men who came to drink. At night he sometimes invited her into the big room with conspicuous courtesy. That was when one or two women had come with the men. Her dignity established the place as one where they might safely come. She sat miserably in their midst while they made banal jokes and drank from the thick glasses. They were intruders. Their laughter was alien among the pine trees. She stayed at the still most of the time. The labor was heavy and exacting. The run must be made when the mash was ready, whether it was day or night. It was better for Trax to stay at the house to take care of the customers.

In the early fall he was ready to expand. Matt was alone, scrubbing the floors between runs of whiskey. She heard a powerful car throbbing down the dirt road. It blew a horn constantly in a minor key. Men usually came into this place silently. She went to the piazza, wet brush in hand. With the autumnal drying of foliage, the road was discernible. The scent of wild vanilla filled the flat-woods. She drew in the sweetness, craning her neck to see.

A large blue sedan of expensive make swerved and rounded into the tracks other cars had made to the house. Trax was driving. He swung past the twin live oaks and into the sandy yard. He slammed the door behind him as he stepped out. He had bought the car with the remainder of Matt's three thousand and most of the summer's profits. He was ready to flash across his old haunts, a big operator from the interior.

"I kin sell that hundred gallons of aged stuff now fer what it's worth."

He nodded widely. He sauntered into the house, humming under his breath.

"Hi-diddy-um-tum——" He was vibrant with an expectancy in which she had no part.

She heard him curse because the floor was wet. The cat crossed his path. He lifted it by the tail and slid it along the slippery boards. The animal came to her on the piazza. She drew it into her lap and sat on her haunches a long time, stroking the smooth hard head.

Life was a bad dream. Trax was away a week at a time. He hired the two Lantry boys to take his place. Matt worked with them, for the boys unwatched would let the mash ferment too long. Trax returned to the flat-woods only for fresh supplies of liquor and of clean clothes. It pleased him to dress in blues that harmonized not too subtly with the blue sedan. He wore light-blue shirts and a red necktie that was a challenging fire under the dark insolent face. Matt spent hours each week washing and ironing the blue shirts. She protested his increasing absences.

"Trax, you jest ain't here at all. I hardly got the heart fer makin' the runs, an' you gone."

He smiled.

"Any time it don't suit you, I kin move my outfit to the east coast."

He laid the threat across her like a whip.

The young Lantrys too saw Trax glamorously. They talked of him to Matt as they mixed the mash, fired, and kept their vigils. This seemed all she had these days of the man: talk of him with the boys beside the still. She was frustrated, filled, not with resentment, but with despair. Yet she could not put her finger on the injustice. She flailed herself with his words. "Any time you don't like it, I kin move."

She waited on Trax's old customers as best she could, running up the slight incline from the still-site to the house when she heard a car. Her strong body was exhausted at the end of the week. Yet when she had finished her elaborate baking on Saturday night she built up a roaring fire in the front room, hung the hot water kettle close to it for his bath, and sat down to wait for him.

Sometimes she sat by the fire almost all night. Sometimes he did not come at all. Men learned they could get a drink at Colton's any hour of the night on Saturday. When the square dance at Trimtree's was done, they came out to the flat-woods at two or three o'clock in the morning. The woman was always awake. They stepped up on the piazza and saw her through the window. She sat brooding by the fire, the striped cat curled in her lap. Around her bony shoulders she hugged the corduroy hunting jacket Trax had worn when he came to her.

She existed for the Saturday nights when the throb of the blue sedan came close; the Sunday mornings when he slept late and arose, sulky, for a lavish breakfast and dinner. Then he was gone again, and she was waving after him down the road. She thought that her love and knowledge of him had been always nothing but this watching through the pine trees as he went away.

The village saw more of him. Occasionally he loitered there a day to show off before he headed for the coast. At times he returned in the middle of the week and picked up fifteen or twenty gallons cached at Blaine's and did not go out to the flat-woods at all. On these occasions he had invariably a girl or woman with him; cheap pretty things whose lightness brought them no more than their shoddy clothes. The storekeeper, delivering meal and sugar to Matt, lingered one day. The still needed her, but she could not with courtesy dismiss him. At last he drew courage.

"Mis' Matt, dogged if I don't hate to complain on Trax to you, but folks thinks you don't know how he's a-doin' you. You're workin' like a dog, an' he ain't never home."

"I know."

"You work at 'shinin', somethin' you nor your folks never done—not that it ain't all right—— An' Trax off in that big fine car spendin' the money fast as he turns it over."

"I know."

"The Klan talks some o' givin' him down the country fer it."

" 'Tain't nobody's business but his an' mine."

"Mis' Matt"—he scuffled in the sand—"I promised I'd speak of it. D'you know Trax has got him women goin' round with him?"

"No. I didn't know that."

"Ev'ybody figgered you didn't know that." He mopped his forehead. "The day you an' Trax was married, I was fixin' to tell you 'twa'n't nothin' but your money an' place he wanted to git him set up."

"That's my business, too," she said stonily.

He dropped his eyes before the cold face and moved to his truck. She called after him defiantly:

"What else did I have he'd want anyway!"

She went into the house. She understood the quality of her betrayal. The injustice was clear. It was only this: Trax had taken what he had not wanted. If he had said, "Give me the money and for the time, the house," it would have been pleasant to give, solely because he wanted. This was the humiliation: that she had been thrown in on the deal, like an old mare traded in with a farm.

The Lantry boys called unanswered from the palmettos.

She had known. There was no need of pretense. There was no difference between to-day and yesterday. There was only the dissipation of a haze, as though a sheet had been lifted from a dead body, so that, instead of knowing, she saw.

The man came home late Saturday afternoon. Startled, Matt heard the purr of the motor and hurried to the house from the still. She thought the woman with him had come for liquor. She came to meet them, wiping her hands on her brown gingham apron. Trax walked ahead of his companion, carrying his own shiny patent leather bag and a smaller shabby one. As they came into the house, she saw that it was not a woman, but a girl.

The girl was close on his heels, like a dog. She was painted crudely, as with a haphazard conception of how it should be done. Stiff blond curls were bunched under a tilted hat. A flimsy silk dress hung loosely on an immature frame. Cheap silk stockings bagged on thin legs. She rocked, rather than walked, on incredibly spiked heels. Her shoes absorbed Matt's attention. They were pumps of blue kid, the precise blue of the sedan.

"I mean, things got hot fer me on the east coast." Trax was voluble. "Used

that coastal highway oncet too often. First thing I knowed, down below New Smyrna, I seed a feller at a garage give the high sign, an' I'm lookin' into the end of a .45." He flushed. "I jest did git away. It'll pay me to work this territory a whiles, till they git where they don't pay me no mind over there agin."

The girl was watching Matt with solemn blue eyes. Beside the gray bulk of the older woman, she was like a small gaudy doll. Trax indicated her to Matt with his thumb.

"Elly here'll be stayin' at the house a while."

He picked up the shabby bag and started up the stairs.

"Long as you an' me is usin' the downstairs, Matt, she kin sleep upstairs in that back room got a bed in it."

She pushed past the girl and caught him by the sleeve.

"Trax! What's this gal?"

"Ain't no harm to her." He laughed comfortably. He tweaked a wisp of her gray hair.

"She's jest a little gal young un," he said blandly, " 's got no place to go."

He drew the girl after him. The woman stared at the high-heeled blue slippers clicking on every step.

2: A warm winter rain thrummed on the roof. The light rush of water sank muffled into the moss that padded the shingles. The sharpest sound was a gurgling in the gutter over the rain barrel. There had been no visible rising of the sun. Only the gray daylight had protracted itself, so that it was no longer dawn, but day. Matt sat close to the kitchen stove, her bulk shadowy in the dimness. Now and then she opened the door of the fire-box to push in a stick of pine, and the light of the flames flickered over her drawn face.

She could not tell how much of the night she had sat crouched by the range. She had lain long hours unsleeping, while Trax breathed regularly beside her. When the rain began, she left the bed and dressed by the fresh-kindled fire. Her mouth was dry; yet every few minutes an uncontrollable chill shook her body. It would be easy to walk up the unused stairs, down the dusty hall to the back room with the rough pine bed in it, to open the door and look in, to see if anyone was there. Yet if she continued to sit by the fire, moving back the coffee pot when it boiled, surely Trax would come to the kitchen alone, and she would know that yesterday no woman had come home with him. Through the long days her distraught mind had been busy with imaginings. They might easily have materialized, for a moment, in a painted girl, small and very young, in blue kid slippers.

Trax was moving about. She put the frying pan on the stove, sliced bacon into it, stirred up cornmeal into a pone with soda and salt and water. Trax called someone. He came into the kitchen, warmed his hands at the stove.

He poured water into the wash basin and soused his face in it. Matt set the coffee pot on the table. The girl pushed open the door a little way and came through. She came to the table uncertainly as though she expected to be ordered away. Matt did not speak.

Trax said, "How's my gal?"

The girl brought her wide eyes to him and took a few steps to his chair.

"Where your shoes, honey?"

She looked down at her stockinged feet.

"I gotta be keerful of 'em."

He laughed indulgently.

"You kin have more when them's gone. Matt, give the young un somethin' to eat."

The thought struck the woman like the warning whir of a rattler that if she looked at the girl in this moment she would be compelled to lift her in her hands and drop her like a scorpion on the hot stove. She thought, "I cain't do sich as that." She kept her back turned until the impulse passed and she could control her trembling. Her body was of metal and wood. It moved of itself, in jerks. A stiff wooden head creaked above a frame so heavy it seemed immovable. Her stomach weighed her down. Her ample breasts hurt her ribs, as though they were of lead. She thought, "I got to settle this now."

She said aloud slowly, "I'll not wait on her, nor no other woman."

The girl twisted one foot over the other.

She said, "I ain't hungry."

Trax stood up. His mouth was thin. He said to Matt, "You'll wait on her, old lady, or you'll git along without my comp'ny."

She thought, "I got to settle it. I got to say it."

But she could not speak.

The girl repeated eagerly, "I ain't a bit hungry."

Trax picked up a plate from the table. He held it out to his wife.

She thought, "Anyway, cornbread an' bacon's got nothin' to do with it."

She dished out meat and bread. Trax held out a cup. She filled it with coffee. The man sat down complacently. The girl sat beside him and pecked at the food. Her eyes were lowered. Between mouthfuls, she twisted her fingers in her lap or leaned over to inspect her unshod feet.

Matt thought. "Remindin' me."

The paint had been rubbed from the round face. The hair was yellow, like allamanda blooms. The artificial curls that had protruded from the pert hat had flattened out during the damp night, and hung in loose waves on the slim neck. She wore the blue silk dress in which she had arrived.

Trax said, "You eat up good, Elly. May be night 'fore we git back to eat agin." He turned to Matt. "Lantry boys been doin' all right?"

"They been doin' all right. Them's good boys. I heerd 'em come in a

hour back. But they needs watchin' right on. They'll let the mash go too long, spite of everything, if I ain't right on top of 'em."

She hardened herself.

"You jest as good to stay home an' do the work yourself. I ain't goin' near the outfit."

"They kin make out by theirselves," he said easily.

He rose from the table, picking his teeth.

"Come on, Elly."

The girl turned her large eyes to the older woman, as though she were the logical recipient of her confession.

"I forgot to wash my hands an' face," she said.

Trax spoke curtly.

"Well, do it now, an' be quick."

He poured warm water in the basin for her and stood behind her, waiting. She washed slowly, with neat, small motions, like a cat. Trax handed her the clean end of the towel. They went upstairs together. Trax's voice was low and muffled. It dripped through the ceiling like thick syrup. Suddenly Matt heard the girl laugh.

She thought, "I figgered all thet owl-face didn't let on no mor'n she meant it to."

In a few minutes they came down again. Trax called from the front room:

"Best to cook dinner to-night, Matt. We're like not to git back at noon."

They ran from the porch through the rain.

She walked after them. She was in time to see them step in the blue sedan. The high-heeled slippers flickered across the running-board. The car roared through the live oaks, down the tracks among the pines. Matt closed her eyes against the sight of it.

She thought, "Maybe she takened her satchel an' I jest didn't see it. Maybe she ain't comin' back."

She forced herself to go to the upstairs bedroom. The drumming on the roof sounded close and louder. The bed was awkwardly made. The shabby handbag stood open in a hickory rocker, exposing its sparse contents. A sound startled her. The cat had followed, and was sniffing the unfamiliar garments in the chair. The woman gathered the animal in her arms. They were alone together in the house, desolate and lonely in the rain-drenched flat-woods.

She thought of the Lantry boys under the palmettos. They were careless when they were cold and wet. They might not put the last five hundred pounds of sugar under cover. Shivering in the drizzle, they might use muddy water from the bank of the branch, instead of going a few yards upstream where it ran deep and clear. She threw Trax's corduroy jacket about her and went down the incline behind the house to oversee the work.

She had decided not to cook anything for the evening. But when the mist

lifted in late afternoon, and the sun struck slantwise through the wet dark trees, she left the Lantry boys to finish and went to the house. She fried ham and baked soda biscuits and sweet potatoes. The meal was ready and waiting and she stirred up a quick ginger cake and put it in the oven.

She said aloud, desperately, "Might be he'll be back alone."

Yet when the dark gathered the bare house into its loneliness, as she had gathered the cat, and she lighted kerosene lamps in the long front room and a fire, the man and girl came together as she had known they would. Where she had felt only despair, suddenly she was able to hate. She picked up her anger like a stone and hurled it after the blue heels.

"Go eat your dinner."

She spoke to them as she would to negro field hands. Trax stared at her. He herded Elly nervously ahead of him, as though to protect her from an obscure violence. Matt watched them, standing solidly on big feet. She had not been whole. She had charred herself against the man's youth and beauty. Her hate was healthful. It waked her from a drugged sleep, and she stirred faculties hurt and long unused.

She sat by the clay fireplace in the front room while the pair ate. They spoke in whispers, shot through by the sudden laugh of the girl. It was a single high sound, like the one note of the thrush. Hearing it, Matt twisted her mouth. When the casual clatter of plates subsided, she went to the kitchen and began scraping the dishes to wash them. Trax sat warily in his place. The girl made an effort to hand Matt odds and ends from the table. The woman ignored her.

Trax said to Elly, "Le's go by the fire."

Matt cleaned up the kitchen and fed the cat. She stroked its arching back as it chewed sideways on scraps of meat and potato. She took off her apron, listened at the open door for sounds from the Lantrys, bolted the door, and walked to the front room to sit stiff and defiant by the blazing pine fire. The girl sat with thin legs tucked under her chair. She looked from the man to the woman and back again. Trax stretched and yawned.

He said, "Guess I'll go down back an' give the boys a hand. I ain't any too sure they run one batch soon enough. I got to keep up my stuff. I got high-class trade. Ain't I, Elly?" He touched her face with his finger as he passed her.

The woman and the girl sat silently after his going. The cat padded in and sat between them.

The girl called timidly: "Kitty!"

Matt turned savagely.

"Keep your hands off him."

The girl laced her fingers and studied the animal.

"Do he scratch?"

Matt did not answer. She loosened her gray hair and combed it by the fire with a side-comb, plaiting it into two thin braids over her shoulders. Inside the childish hairdressing her face was bony and haggard. She went into the adjoining bedroom, undressed and got into bed. She lay reared up on one elbow, straining for every sound. The fire popped and crackled. Once the juice oozed from a pine log faster than it could burn. It made a sizzling, like boiling fat. A chair scraped and Elly went up to the back bedroom. Her high heels clicked overhead. Matt thought with satisfaction that the girl had no light. She was floundering around in the dark in the unfamiliar house.

In a little while the front door opened and closed softly. Matt heard Trax creak cautiously up the stairs to the back room.

Trax was sleeping away the bright March morning. Matt made no effort to be silent about her washing. She dipped noisily into the rain barrel. When the soft water was gone she drew from the well, rattling galvanized buckets. Elly sat on the bottom step of the rear stoop, scuffling her bare toes in the sand. She wore the blue silk dress. Beside her was a handful of her own garments in need of washing, a pair of silk stockings and two or three pieces of underwear. Matt passed in front of her to go to the clothes line.

Elly said, "Trax give me this dress."

The woman did not seem to hear her.

Elly continued. "Reckon it'll wash? It's spotted."

Matt did not answer. She hung flour-sacking towels on the line. The girl picked up her small pile, looked uncertainly at the tub of soapsuds, laid down the clothes. She went to the tub and began rubbing on the first garment she drew from the suds. It was one of Matt's gingham aprons. She rubbed with energy, and Matt towered over her before she noticed that the woman had left the line.

"Take your dirty hands out o' my tub."

The girl drew back, dripping suds from her thin arms. She turned her hands back and forth.

"They ain't dirty," she protested.

Matt laughed shortly. "Mighty simple, ain't you?"

An obscure doubt brushed her, like a dove that wavers to a perch and is gone again without lighting.

"Who do you figger I am?"

The girl faced her across the wash-tub. She said gravely, "The lady lives in Trax's house."

"Trax's house? Well, he lives in mine. Never heerd tell o' no sich thing as his wife, eh?"

The girl hesitated. "Trax jest said the old woman."

Matt breathed heavily. The girl took her silence and her questions for a mark of interest.

"Trax said you'd romp on me," she offered confidentially, "but you ain't." She wrapped one bare leg around the other. "I been romped on," she went on brightly. "Pa romped on me reg'lar."

"You got you folks then!"

"Yessum, but I don't know where he is. He run a blacksmith shop an' garage offen the hard road, but he closed up an' goed to Georgia with a lady. Then I lived with another lady down the road a piece. Trax sold her liquor, that's how come him to know me. She moved off, an' he takened me with him from there. Now I'm gonna live with him," she finished, adding with studied tact "—and you."

Trax came yawning to the rear stoop in time to see Matt walk toward the girl. Elly stared uncomprehending. He jumped to the sand and caught the woman's muscular arms from behind.

"Don't you touch her." He cracked his familiar whip over her. "You hurt that gal young un an' you've seed the last o' me."

The woman shook free from him in the strength of her rage.

"You git out o' here before I hurts her an' you, too. You take yer gal young un an' git."

He adjusted his mind slowly. Inconceivably, he had gone too far. Bringing the girl to the flat-woods had been dangerously brazen. It was done now. He understood that his hold on this place had become suddenly precarious. He had the car and he could move the still. Yet the lay-out suited his needs too exactly to be relinquished. He could not give it up. If the gray-headed woman was done with her infatuation, he was in trouble.

He said boldly, "I got no idee o' goin'. Me an' Elly'll be here right on."

She said, "I kin break ary one o' you in two with my hands."

"Not me, you cain't. Leave me tell you, ol' woman, I'm too quick fer you. An' if you hurt Elly"—his dark face nodded at her—"if you crack down on her—with them big hands o' yourn—if you got any notion o' knifin' "—he paused for emphasis—"I'll git you sent to the chair, or up fer life—an' I'll be here in these flat-woods—in this house—right on."

He pushed the girl ahead of him and walked into the house, lighting a cigarette. He said over his shoulder, thickly between puffs, "An' that'd suit me jest fine."

She turned blindly to the wash-tub. She soaped the blue shirts without seeing them, rubbing them up and down automatically. Her life that had run like the flat-woods road, straight and untraveled, was now a maze, doubling back on itself darkly, twisted with confusion. The man stood with his neat trap at the end of every path; the girl with her yellow hair and big eyes, at the beginning.

She thought, "I got to settle it."

Trax and Elly came and went like a pair of bright birds. The blue kid slippers, scuffed by the sand, flashed in and out of the old house. Matt watched the comings and goings heavily, standing solidly on the hand-hewn pine-board floors.

She did not go near the still. Her absence did not make the difference she had imagined. The Lantrys had the work well in hand. Trax paid their wages, and their product was satisfactory. Often she did not hear them come to their work through the pines and past the hammock. A northwest wind sometimes brought the scent of the mash to her nose. The storekeeper brought in sugar and meal by a lower trail, and she seldom saw him. Trax was selling all his liquor at a high urban price, and local patronage dwindled away. The woods were quiet day and night.

Then Trax and Elly were back again, talking of hotels and highways, of new business, the talk pierced through now and again by the girl's single-noted laughter. She eyed Matt gravely, but the woman felt that the girl, oddly, had no fear. Trax was insolent, as always, his eyes narrow and his ways wary. Matt cut down on the table. She cooked scarcely enough for the three to eat. Elly ate with her catlike slowness, taking twice as long at her meager plate as the others. Matt took to rising and clearing the table as soon as she and Trax had finished. She picked up the plates casually, as though unaware that the third one still showed half its food uneaten. Trax did not seem to notice. The girl sometimes looked hungrily after the vanishing portion. She made no protest. Once Matt found her in the kitchen between meals, eating cold corn bread. Trax backed her up in her curt order to Elly to keep out.

It enraged Matt to see Elly feed the cat. Elly saved bits from her sparse helpings and held them under the table when she thought herself unobserved. Occasionally when the girl held the animal in her lap, and Matt ignored it, Trax stroked him too, because it was Elly who held him. Matt knew they sometimes had food in Elly's room at night. She began to hear a soft padding up the stairs and on the bare floor overhead, and knew the cat went up to join them. In the morning he was smug, washing his whiskers enigmatically. His desertion was intolerable. She shut him out at night. He wailed for hours at the door, accustomed to sleeping snugly inside the house.

Suddenly Trax was not taking Elly with him any more. The village had become accustomed to the grave childish face beside him when it disappeared. Casually he left her behind with Matt in the flat-woods. He drove away one morning and did not come back that night or the next.

Matt took it for a taunt. It seemed to her that he was daring her to trap herself. Elly watched the road anxiously the first day. She accepted, hours

before Matt, his solitary departure. At their first breakfast alone together, she said hesitantly:

"I had a idee Trax was fixin' to go off alone."

Matt thought, "The fool don't know enough to keep quiet about it."

After the second day, Elly devoted herself to exploring outside the house. Trax had kept her close to him, and the hammock had been only a cluster of shrubs and great trees through which they came and went. The Spanish moss was hazed with green by the early spring, and she discovered that the gray strands were alive with infinitesimal rosy blossoms. Matt saw her sitting at the far edge of the hammock, pulling the stuff apart.

The woman thought, "She better git herself out o' my sight."

Elly roamed, through the pines as far as the road, staring up and down its silent winding, then scampered back toward the house like an alarmed squirrel. She walked stealthily to the palmettos where the Lantrys worked the still, and watched them for hours, unseen. Except when Matt stared directly at her, her round-eyed gravity lifted into a certain lightness, as though she felt newly free to move about in the sunlight. She seemed content.

On a rainy afternoon Matt, ironing in the kitchen, heard a steady snipping from the front room. She stole to the door and peered through a crack. Elly was cutting pictures from an old magazine and making an arrangement of rooms and figures of men and women and children. She was talking to herself and occasionally to them. The cat was curled in her lap, shifting lazily as she moved forward or back.

Their meals together were silent. Matt became aware at dinner one day that the pink oleanders in a jelly glass were not of her picking and placing. She had always a spray of flowers or greenery on the table. Because Elly had brought in the blooms, she snatched them from the water and stuffed them in the stove.

She allowed the girl a minimum of food. Once when she took away the plates before Elly had fairly begun, the girl reached after her desperately and said "Matt!" Again, when Matt moved from the table, leaving a plate of biscuits behind, Elly pounced on the largest and crammed it into her mouth. She began to laugh, poking in the crumbs.

She said, "You ain't romped on me yet."

Matt decided that Trax had put Elly up to goading her. She spoke for the first time in days.

"Don't you let Trax put no notions in yore head. I got no idee o' rompin' on you. That ain't what I'm fixin' to do."

For the most part, the girl was uncomplaining and strangely satisfied. The immature body, however, was becoming rapidly emaciated.

Trax was gone two weeks. He came in for an afternoon and loaded up

with twenty gallon-jugs concealed under the large rear seat, and went hurriedly away. He called to the two women who stood watching on the piazza.

"Got a order."

Matt nodded grimly after him. She thought, "You got you one more chance, too, if you on'y knowed it." She turned to observe the girl beside her. There was apparent on the young face a faint wistfulness and no surprise. Matt thought, "She's got her orders jest to set tight."

Trax came home for the following week-end. He slept most of the time and was sulky. He paid no more attention to Elly than to the older woman. At no time in the two days or nights did he go to the upstairs room. When he was about, Elly followed him a few steps. Then, as he continued to ignore her, she dropped behind and took up her own simple affairs. Matt told herself that if he left this time without the girl, she was ready. On Monday morning, after loading, he went alone to the car.

She said carelessly, "I might take a notion to go some'eres or do somethin'. When you comin' back this time?"

He laughed insolently. "Steppin' out, Matt?" He was sure of himself. He was too quick for her. Whatever futilities she was planning, it would surprise her most to return on the day he named.

"Be back Sat'day."

He drove off smiling.

Matt was nervous all week. On Saturday morning she surprised the Lantry boys by appearing at the still. They had come and gone without contact with her for some weeks.

She said, "Boys, I jest got word the Pro-hi's is comin' lookin' fer Trax's outfit. Now I ain't quick as you-all, an' I want each one o' you should go down the road a good piece an' stay there all day, watchin', one to the north an' 'tother to the south. I'll tend the outfit, an' if I hears a whistle I'll know what it means an' it'll give me time to smash the jugs an' git to the house."

The boys were in instant alarm.

"Must be somebody's turned Trax up," they said.

Matt said, "Mighty likely. Somebody's likely got it in fer him. Trax hisself done tole me a long ways back, if anybody had it in fer a man, that was the way they'd git at him."

They nodded in agreement.

"That's about it, Mis' Matt. Git him tore up an' git at him that-a-way."

They hid several demijohns in near-by cover and hurried anxiously the two ways of the road. They reported later in the village that they heard no sound for an hour or so. Toward noon their straining ears caught the crash of an axe on metal. There was the high thin splintering of glass. The isolated crashes settled into a steady shattering of wood and iron and copper. A col-

umn of smoke began to rise from the vicinity of the still. The Lantry to the south skirted the road through the pines and joined his brother. They cut through the woods to the village and announced that the Pro-hi's had come in from the west and were tearing up Colton's outfit. The word went out to avoid the flat-woods road.

The Lantrys were waiting for Trax when he came through in late afternoon. They flagged him down. They drove with him as far as their own place, telling him what they knew.

"When we lit out we could hear 'em maulin' on the barrels an' purely see the smoke. Things is tore up an' burnt up all right."

They conjectured who, of his numerous enemies, might have betrayed him. He drove at a spring-breaking clip over the root-filled ruts of the sand road. His face was black and frightened. When he let the boys out of the car he had said nothing about the week's wages. They looked at each other.

One said, "How 'bout us gittin' ten dollars, anyway, Trax?"

"That's it. I ain't got it. I on'y got five myself. I was fixin' to turn over this lot quick."

"We hid out 'bout twenty gallons, if they ain't found it," they informed him eagerly. He listened tensely to a description of the location and was gone.

He drove into the yard and stopped the car in gear with a jerk. No one was in sight. He ran back of the house to the palmettos. A ring of fire had blackened palms and oaks and myrtle for a hundred feet around. A smoldering pile of bricks and barrel hoops and twisted metal in the center marked the site of the still. He began a frenzied search for the hidden jugs.

Matt peered from a window in the front room. She ordered Elly upstairs.

"You stay there till I tell you different."

The woman hurried into the yard with a jug of kerosene and a handful of papers. The sedan was twenty-five feet from the house, but the direction of the wind was safe. She soaked the hood and seats of the car with oil and piled papers on the floor. She tied a bundle of oil-soaked paper on the end of her longest clothes prop; touched a match to it. She lowered the pole to the machine. The oil caught fire. When the blaze reached the gas tank, the explosion disintegrated an already charring mass.

Trax heard the muffled roar up the incline behind him. The demijohns were where the Lantry boys had indicated. They were broken. He left the stench of over-turned mash and spilled alcohol and ran to the house. He could not for a moment comprehend that the twisting mass of metal and flame was the blue sedan.

Matt stood on the rear stoop. He looked at her in bewilderment. His stare dropped from her straggling gray hair down the length of her frame. Her apron was smudged and torn. Her hands were black and raw. He came back to her implacable cold eyes. He choked.

"You done it yourself!"

He burst into spasmodic curses, then broke off, overcome by their futility. The sweat ran into his eyes. He wiped it out and gaped about him in loose-mouthed confusion. He shuffled a few feet to the stoop and sank down on the bottom step. The woman looked down at him.

"Better git goin'."

He rose, swaying.

"You ol' . . ."

His obscenities fell away from her as rain washed from the weathered shingles of the old house. She towered over him. The tall house towered over him. He was as alien as on the bright day when he had first come hunting here.

He plunged up the steps toward her, his head low between his shoulders.

"Better git back."

His outstretched fists dropped at his sides. The fingers fell open. The woman lifted the shotgun.

"Better git——"

He shook his head, unbelieving. His eyes clung to the dark cavities of the pitted steel. He moved one foot slowly to the next step.

The woman aimed carefully at the shoe, as though it were some strange reptile creeping into the house. She fired a trifle to the left, so that the pattern of the double-ought buckshot shell sprayed in a close mass into the sand. One pellet clipped through the leather, and a drop of blood sank placidly into the pine step. The man stared fascinated. His hand jerked to his mouth, like a wooden toy moved by strings. He stifled a sound, or tried to make one. The woman could not tell. He lifted a face dry with fear and backed down the steps.

It was necessary to walk widely to the side to avoid the heat of the burned car. He threw out his hands hopelessly and hesitated. The sun slanted orange and gold through the hammock. Beyond, there were already shadows among the dark pines. It would be twilight before he could be out of the flat-woods. He found voice.

"Matt," he whined, "how'll I git to town?"

The woman wiped her streaked face with a corner of her apron.

"Reckon you'll have to git there on foot, Mister—the way you come in the first place."

She turned her back and went into the house. The girl had come down the stairs and was flattened against a wall. Her face was brushed with a desperate knowledge. Matt jerked her head at the open front door.

"All right. I'm thu. You kin go on with him now."

"Matt——"

"Go on. Git."

The girl did not move. Matt pushed her headlong to the door. Elly took hold of the big arm with both hands, drawing back, and Matt struck her away. She went confusedly down the steps. Trax was leaving the hammock. He struck wildly through the pines. The girl took a few steps after him, then turned toward the woman watching from the doorway. Matt called loudly:

"Go on. Git."

The man had reached the road and was plunging along it to the north. The girl ran three or four paces in his direction, then stopped again, like a stray dog or cat that would not be driven away. She hesitated at the edge of the hammock. The small uncertain figure was visible between the twin oaks beyond the high porch. Matt turned into the house and closed the door.

She was strong and whole. She was fixed, deep-rooted as the pine trees. They leaned a little, bent by an ancient storm. Nothing more could move them.

The car in the yard had settled into a smoking heap. The acrid smell of burned rubber and paint filled the house. Matt closed the north window to keep out the stench. The glass rattled in its frame. The air was gusty and the spring night would be cold. There were swift movements and rattlings among the oak boughs above the roof, as though small creatures were pattering across the floor of the wind.

Matt shivered and kindled a fire in the front room. She looked about for the cat. The noise and disorder of the day had driven him to distant hunting grounds and he had not yet ventured to return. She drew close to the fire in her rocker and held her smudged hands to the blaze.

She thought, "I've lit a bait o' fires to-day."

That was over and done with. There would be no more 'shining among the palmettos; no more coming and going of folk; no more Trax and his owl-faced girl. She was very tired. Her square frame relaxed in its exhaustion. She leaned back her head and drowsed deeply in her chair.

When she wakened, the fire had burned to ashes. The moon rode high over the flat-woods, with clouds scurrying underneath. The room was silver, then black, as the moonlight came and went. The chill wind sucked through the pines. There was another sound; the sobbing of a lighter breath. Suddenly Matt knew the girl was still there.

She rose in a plunge from the rocker. She wasn't done with them yet. . . . She opened the door a few inches and listened. The muffled sound was unmistakable. It was the choked gasping of a child that has cried itself breathless. It came from the edge of the hammock. Where the pines began she could distinguish a huddle on the ground that was neither stump nor bushes. She closed the door.

Trax was gone—and Elly was here.

He had flung away and left her behind. She was discarded, as Matt had been long discarded. He was through with Elly, too. For the first time the woman was able to conceive of them separately. And the one was gone, and the other was here. She groped her way stupefied to the kitchen, lighted a kerosene lamp, and made a fire in the range. She wanted a scalding pot of tea to stop her shivering. She split a cold biscuit and fried it and sat down with her plate and tea-cup. She breathed hard, and ate and drank mechanically.

"He was done with her a long ways back."

He had driven off alone in the blue sedan, not to infuriate, but because there was nothing else to do with the girl. Matt chewed her biscuit slowly. She laughed grimly.

"I give him too much credit fer smartness."

A flash of anger stirred her, like a spurt of flame from an old fire, that Elly should be now at the edge of the hammock.

"Trax wa'n't man enough to take off his mess with him."

She sipped her cooling tea.

She remembered grudgingly the girl's contentment. The shadow of the man, passing away, left clear the picture of a child, pulling moss apart and cutting paper dolls. Rage at Trax possessed her.

"I'd orter hided him fer takin' sech a young un along his low-down way."

In a burst of fury she conceded the girl's youth. Elly was too young . . .

"I'd orter been hided. Me an' Trax together."

Matt rose from the table and gathered up the few dishes. She stopped in the act. She looked at her hands as though their knotty strength were strange to her.

"Snatchin' off a young un's rations . . ."

She leaned heavily on the table, pondering. Emptiness filled the house—a living presence—appalling—still.

She strode abruptly out the door and through the hammock to the pines. The moon had swung toward its setting and the rays lay long under the trees. The girl lay crouched against a broad mottled trunk.

Matt said, "You kin come on back."

The emaciated figure wavered from the ground on spindling legs. It tried to crowd close to the warmth of the woman's body. As they moved toward the house, the girl stumbled in the run-over slippers.

Matt said, "Here. Gimme them crazy shoes."

Elly stooped and took them from her bare feet. The woman put them in her apron pockets. She went ahead of the girl into the front room and bent down to kindle a fire.

1934: *from Esquire*

NO MORE TROUBLE FOR JEDWICK

by Louis Paul, who had the happy experience of having his first short story accepted by the first magazine to which it was submitted. That story, "No More Trouble for Jedwick," was chosen as the first-prize story of 1934 by the O. Henry Memorial Award Committee. Despite his excellent treatment of the subject, Mr. Paul claims that Negro fiction is no métier of his; rather, "the story is merely a distillation of what Sully, the bum in the tale, told me one hot day in Virginia." His first published novel, The Pumpkin Coach, *was followed by a long list of other works of fiction* (Summer Storm, A Husband for Mama, A Father in the Family, *and others*) *and by many contributions to leading magazines.*

Mr. Paul has led an extremely interesting and varied life. In addition to his literary pursuits he has been a hospital orderly, a soldier, a movie extra, a teacher in a school for immigrants, a longshoreman, and a ditchdigger.

Jedwick smiled at the woman drawing water from the well. "Kin I have me a drink, ma'am?" he drawled, his broad shoulders drooped shyly in a half bow.

She was tall and dark. The sun blazed down on the white-hot Virginia highway. Jedwick's clothes were saturated with sweat. Scintillant beads shone like translucent jewels against his shiny skin. The black man shook his head like a hound dog coming up out of a creek.

"I reckon," she nodded. The Negro woman, lighter than Jedwick, was not wholly at ease. Her husband was in the village getting groceries. Roamin' niggers . . .

"Yas ma'am," Jedwick said, and dipped into the barrel.

The woman dried her hands on her apron. "Y'all f'om round hyeah?"

Jedwick stared at her a moment. "I ain't f'om hyeah," he murmured between immense gulps, "nor neither I ain't gonna stay hyeah. Whereat I git to Alexandria?"

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"Right smart piece yonder."

"How fur?"

She speculated. "Eight-twelve mile."

Jedwick finished his water and looked at the blue and gold cauldron over his head. "Hot, ain't it?"

"Do git hot."

"Yo' man wuk in town?"

"No. He after groceries."

Jedwick glanced down the hill toward the little village. The view was empty.

She understood his movement.

He smiled. He had fine healthy teeth. She was aware of a frightened sensation in the pit of her stomach. Jedwick bent and rubbed his ankle as though that were an habitual gesture. The flaming orb in the sky shone down remorselessly. Something about the Negro's beautiful black arms hypnotized her. She stood poised, enchanted, like a statue: made to flee, but forever motionless. The midday silence was oppressive, like the sun. She waited.

"I ain't seed no woman fo' a long time," Jedwick said, almost in apology.

"He after groceries."

Closer to hers, his face was more strikingly handsome than ever. His lips were very cool, strangely. Perspiration came off on her mouth and cheeks . . .

Later he said, "Thank you sho' nuff fo' that there water, ma'am. Ain't they some law gin doin' much wawkin' thisyere state highways?"

"Is," she looked up at the stranger, embarrassed, "if them troopers ketches you."

Jedwick nodded and suddenly disappeared down the embankment. Couldn't trust the road from here in. Stick to the tracks.

He wrapped a long red handkerchief around his shoulders to keep his neck from frying, and stepped gingerly along the single-tracked roadbed, trying to pace the ties to his long swinging gait. Oughta lay these hyeah ties out even, so's a man could wawk. Wa'n't no cinder path like usual. Say ten mile. 'Bout fo' hours in thisyere sun. Should be makin' up a string o' boxes fo' Manhattan Junction in Alex some'rs round six.

He wanted after an hour to crawl under the shade of some green leafy trees. Lay out yo' legs an' sleep. Thoughts that came like hunger or dreams, unwanted; but they were only a whip-flick to sting the flesh of his determination. Gits me out o' the sun in one o' them boxes in Alex, yassuh! There I rests. He visualized a phrase: Jedwick escapes.

Waves of hypnotic steel-gray heat shimmered up off the two metal radiators that converged in the distance. His eyes began to burn. He thought it would be nice to be rich. He would buy a boat with a motor in it, all covered with a striped canvas canopy, and sail out of sight of land. There would be

a breeze off in the ocean. Nice gal, that there brown lady by the highway crossin'. Like a scared cottontail. She liked him. They all liked Jedwick. Lovin' ain't harmin' no gal, he thought.

Bugs. Chrissakes! Little gnats and fuzzy things and leg-squirming beetles popped up in front of him; some kind of a locust whanged with a flat noise on his chest, and he slapped it down. Flies and ticks smelled your sweat. A breath of wind floated lazily over the treetops, but died itself of the heat. Jedwick sighed.

Sighing wasn't natural to him. He thought he'd sing. He bugled a tentative air.

A slick-tawkin' man f'om Bumminham . . .

The plaintive lyric echoed magnificently between the banks of woods. Jedwick's cello-like bass rose through the dazzling, brain-sizzling heat to heaven, and he laughed about some dimly felt deliciousness in solitude's freedom. His voice took up the lilt.

A slick-tawkin' man f'om Bumminham
Come up my way, an' his name was Sam;
I pay no attention, ner I din give a damn,
Till he stoled my gal away.

He hummed the rest of the melody: it was too hot to think of the words.

A little garter snake, sunning itself under the vast ceiling of broiling light, was startled and jiggled off noisily into the brush. Maybe, he confided to the vanished reptile, maybe tomor' I gonna be in *New* York. Yassuh. Wonder how fur they is after me? Think they can ketch thisyere Jedwick? Yo' completely crazy. How fur I is to Alex, I wonder? Damn me! but it do git hot!

Three mile an hour, 'bout. 'Thout stoppin' I git me in them yards fo sundown. Yassuh. Sundown. Don't seem like ole sun ever gone go down.

I hates t' see
Thet evenin' sun go down . . .

Nossuh. Man said that jes crazy's that snake.

There was a shack directly around a bend, and the white man saw him first. "Where you going to, boy?"

He had a wrinkled skin and sandy gray hair and wore gray uniform pants.

"I goin' t' ask you fo' some water, has you got any?" Jedwick smiled brightly with his thick lips.

"Where you goin'?" the man repeated.

"Well, y'see, cap'n, well, suh, I'm goin' in t' the Districk. Yassuh. Dassit."

"Washin'ton? What you traipsin' up here for?"

"Don't like to wawk on the highway, cap'n, boss. 'S y'all got a little water?"

by Louis Paul

"Alexandria's along up hyeah. You makin' for one of them boxes?"

"Nossuh, nossuh! Ain't layin' over no place, cap'n, suh. Ole friend in town gonna ride me into the Districk."

"You must be runnin' away, boy," the man in the shack said, squinting lowered eyes at the big sweating Negro.

"Me? I ain't runnin' no place, suh, cap'n," he protested. "Why fo' I gonna run any place?"

The white man fetched up an iron pail and handed him a different dipper. "Too hot," he said, shaking his head, "to hit them ties 'less yo-all runnin' away. Why ain't you takin' a sleep in some cool place?"

"Me, suh? I gotta git in D. C. Yassuh. I got me friends in the Districk, suh."

The wrinkled man glanced down at Jedwick's right ankle.

"Goin' git me a job," Jedwick stammered uncertainly, "in—like, suh, now, a 'partment house. Dassit," he said. "Yassuh."

"Take all you want," the other said about the water; "they's a crick below here. Ain't my business where-at you're runnin' to."

"Nossuh, cap'n. I ain't runnin'."

"Matter o' fact, they's some empties makin' up in Alexandria about seven to-night. You going t' *New* York," he stated.

Jedwick was amazed. "How you figger that there, boss?"

"If'n I don't know a chain-gang nigger," he told Jedwick calmly, "I'll go and jump in that there crick."

The big Negro's face curled into a magnificent smile. "Come f'om thataway?"

"Been around," the man said expressionlessly.

"Yassuh," murmured Jedwick. He added, "Thank y'all fo' that water."

"Not 'tall."

"Thank y'all," he repeated.

The man drew himself in out of the heat. Jedwick started off toward Alexandria, but caught a phrase which he thought was the man calling him back—until he analyzed it.

"I want Colonel Saunders, yessum," he was saying, "the police chief in——"

Jedwick sauntered back, and the man in the shack stepped away from the phone when he saw him. His hand slipped into a drawer and the Negro saw a pearl butt come out. Jedwick muttered softly as he crashed over the flimsy table, rolling the white man backward out of his chair. He twisted, and leapt again. They bowled heavily through the door, rocking the flimsy shack. The leather-faced, wiry man struggled up almost successfully, but Jedwick got his feet on him. The black kicked scientifically, as a boxer uses his hands.

In a moment the white man lay still, his head battered. His shirt was torn

where his stomach had been gashed. Jedwick felt very sorry for him. How foolish the man had been. Jedwick hated to hurt anybody.

He stopped long enough to bundle the body inside the shack, take another drink and dip his face in the bucket of cool water. It seemed hotter in the sun than ever.

Now he dumped the pail empty and resumed his trek in the oily tropical sun's glare. In a few moments the water he had drunk sank through the pores of his skin and oozed out in driblets. If it's hotter down in Africa, he joked to himself, I'm glad my folks done been slaves. Yassuh.

Slaves.

At least it wasn't too hot to whistle. Instead of his bit of excoriation of a slick-tawkin' man from Bumminham the great black figure chanted a whistley refrain as he trudged on tirelessly toward his destination. He loped along, picking the ties carefully. The song was a monotonous, fugitive melody about a man named Joe, who

—Done his Susie wrong, yassuh,
But he love her all the same.

He seemed almost to skip along the ties to that repetitious lilt.

Jedwick was, as he saw the shacks of Alexandria's outskirts loom glaringly in the terrific blaze of afternoon, neither blithe nor desperate, neither coward nor cruel. He was escaping. A criminal—or any man—would. He felt very sorry for the gray-haired man, did he not? Of course. Glimpsing the freight-yards of Alexandria, Virginia, he lapsed into the weakness of a sigh again. Like when the cap'n blowed his whistle at sundown and yo' pick drapped outn yo' fingers . . . like when the las' sack o' cotton was drug down t' the baler, an'—, yassuh. He shook these memories off. Jedwick wasn't really a sighing man.

He hadn't eaten for forty hours. You travels light and fast and lives offn yo' flesh. But yo' gits hongry. Whereat you kin promote a vittle or that in Alex? Better crawl in one of them cars. They gonna trace that phone cawl. Find that wrinkled man an' they gonna be hell poppin' round Alex.

Down in behind the fence. That was the place. He saw a bum duck between two cars and hop over the coupling, coming toward him.

"Hi," he greeted this specimen.

"Know what time d'Junction empties goin' out t'night?" The bum screwed up a weather-scarred face.

"Yassuh. Seven."

"You eat?"

"No suh!"

"Where ya come in?"

Jedwick thumbed his hand back.

by Louis Paul

"Leggin'—you out in that there sun?"

"Sho nuff, likely, brother," Jedwick answered.

"Got a coupla hours," said the bum. "They's a jungle overn 'em weeds. Some liver here, an' haffa loaf o' breard."

Jedwick thanked the man from the North.

They toasted the liver. The bum, whose name was Sully, dug some whole coffee beans out of a bag, battered them on a rock, and had a can going. They split the "breard" and the big Negro was very grateful. After the meal Sully pulled a razor from a leather bag around his neck and began to shave a light beard. Jedwick, in payment for the bum's life-giving coffee, related the incidents of his story. The man shaving exhibited a great curiosity concerning the details of Jedwick's encounter with the brown up on the hill yonder. He chuckled, vicariously amused.

Jedwick added that he had killed the trackman.

Sully squinted. "You must be one o' dese tough black boys."

"Nossuh," said Jedwick, particular not to be misunderstood. "Whut else I gonna do?"

"Coulda flattened him, or tied him up." Sully put away his razor.

"Sho'. You figger out jes' whut to do. That man had a big gun. He gonna blow off my haid ifn I don't git him."

"Every man fer himself, sonny," the bum shrugged his shoulders. "You set?"

"Les go git stowed away fo some no-count railroad bull git rampagin' round."

They idled through the yard, trained soldiers expertly taking cover back of every bump in the topography. Jedwick pried a loose door. Sully was boosted half way up. A metallic voice startled them.

"What you guys doin'?"

Sully's wits left him and he stared up at the man blankly. Jedwick grinned with silly surprise. "We's jes' gonna ride in, suh."

"Oh, yer jist gonna ride in?"

"Yassuh," he said innocently.

"Just gonna ride in." The voice was pregnant with unpleasant suggestions.

Jedwick wrinkled his brow into a puzzled expression. "Yassuh, cap'n, boss. Ain't it aw right?"

"Ain't it aw right!" he mimicked, and spat. "Where you two bums from?"

"We, suh?"

"Who the hell y' think I'm talkin' to?"

"Yassuh. I got a fren in New York, boss," he explained. "He gits me a job in a big apartment house. Sully hyeah goin' to try to git a job too, cap'n."

"Well, maybe I don't know stiffs no more," the man said. "Don't you know you can't ride on no freight train?"

"Can't ride on no freight train?" Jedwick almost believed in this innocence himself. "Nossuh, boss, nossuh. Is thisyere a freight train? Look like they is all epty. I never know they is hahm in ridin' in epty car. Never would come in hyeah did we knows that, suh. Dassit." He was talkin fast—for his life. "Yassuh, boss, gentman, suh."

The train-bull shook himself impatiently. "Better take yourselfs outa here big and pronto," he said with positiveness, "or you'll be gittin' about sixty days apiece for vags."

" 'Scuse us, mister cap'n, boss, suh, yassuh," Jedwick murmured with elegant unctuousness, "we is goin'."

The Law swung himself up the side ladder and disappeared momentarily along the line of cars.

"You gittin' in?" the black man whispered to Sully coolly.

Sully backed away. "Not me!" he exclaimed hoarsely.

Jedwick shook a finger, said "Hi!" got his belly up on the platform, clipped the door to, and disappeared into the black interior.

He heard the bull coming back, tapping on each door. "Hey, you, come outa there!" He got to Jedwick's door and cried, "Hey, you, come outa there!" There was only silence inside. Footsteps crunched away along the gravel.

Jedwick lay motionless for an unconscionable time. At last the train gave three bone-rattling jerks that knocked him into another corner. The couplings shrieked, another gentle bump, and the train moved slowly out of the yards. The engineer's hoot-hoot sounded to Jedwick's ears like a wild pæan to freedom. The car was like a furnace, but of course he didn't care.

He crawled over to the door and lay with his head to the floor crack, afraid to push the thing ajar.

Wonder and excitement to freedom! The train rattled on, carriages hitting track-cracks with ever-increasing crescendo. Fool, anyone who risked life unnecessarily. That trackman. Why hadn't he let well enough alone? Dead now, and nothing gained. Never would *he* risk the quickness of life except in the defense of his own.

On into the night the bumping freight train sped. North. Where he could achieve that departure from the old and sink into the blissful anonymity of its millions, renascence, born again, with only dead memories to remind him of the past. Yassuh, he speculated. Dassit. Goin' git free in *New* York. But gotta watch out fo' that bull. Whereat I wonder is fust division stop on thisyere line? Some'rs 'long hyeah. He pried the door open a crack. The sun had set and blue darkness had fallen over the countryside that bobbed swiftly by his limited vision. A hot wind blew in his face.

Yassuh. Like sho' nuff git me a lettle shet-eye, can't takin' no chances. Bull goin' look in these hyeah cars fust crack outn the box do we make a

division stop. We git in the Junction mornin' sometime . . . then, nigger, you is free. Yassuh. Dassit—free! The thought made his brain spin airily. No more trouble for Jedwick!

Well, no more later; but just now the cars pulled up under brakes and came to a jerking halt. He shoved open the door and glanced out. Blackness. Tall brush alongside the cinder roadbed. Lucky. Jedwick was always lucky. He jumped down and squatted behind the weeds. Sure enough. The bull had a flash, and he peered into the recesses of every car. Another train, a passenger, thundered on past in the opposite direction. Jedwick waited until the freight train began to move, then he hopped out like a big rabbit scooting across an open space, and swung himself up into the car. That was all right. He was good for another hour.

That hour found him asleep. Fatigue fells all men. Jedwick fell asleep, woke when the train stopped again—which was too late. He was on his knees when the light flashed in.

"What the hell you doin' in there?" the bull shouted.

Jedwick, a thinking animal in danger, murmured in a much broader accent than his own, "Cain't po' man rahd in disyere train, yo' honah?"

"Comin' outa there?"

"Sho gwine come out, yassuh."

He jumped down, but squatted his great frame into a much smaller figure. The railroad bull clicked his light into Jedwick's face. "Say, ain't you the same nigger I chased in Alexandria?"

"Whut Alesandria?"

"Din I tell yer to stay outa them cars?"

"Me, yo' honah? Nossuh." Jedwick exhibited surprise.

"Hell I ain't!"

"Nossuh," Jedwick said gently but firmly.

"Where'd y' git on?"

"Bout a nour back yander, yo' honah, suh. Ah bo'd de train when de cyahs stoppin' sahd them there weeds. 'Scuse me, suh."

"Well," said the man, not exactly satisfied, "git on outa here. You can't ride in these here trains. An' I ketch y' ridin' again," he showed Jedwick an army Colt strapped to his trousers, "I'm gonna plug ya." He meant it. "I see you agin," the white man added, "you git it."

Jedwick hunched his shoulders. "I'se so'y, yo' honah. Ah gone git away f'om hyeah jes lahk y'all say. Gone right now." He started off toward the rear of the train. "Ain't meant nary hahm, suh," he murmured.

"See you stay 'way," the bull called after him.

When the freight train pulled out again Jedwick was on it. After the next stop the bull knew he was on it. It was a game of hide and seek. At each stop the Negro ran for cover in the weeds, and thanked the night for being

darker than the ace of spades. He saw the blue steel of a gun behind the flash as the detective prowled through the cars.

Jedwick wondered why the man wouldn't let well enough alone. Damn me! but people sho' huntin' trouble wid big guns. Why fo' ever body come messin' 'round me? What I wanna harm nobody fo'? They keeps messin' 'round stid leavin' me be, an' mo' trouble happen fo' you know it. That man goin' kill me ifn he ketches me, he thought, or I goin' try to kill him. Why anybody want kill someone else?

The bull wouldn't, of course, let well enough alone. He knew there was only one way to nab the black bastard—that was on the moving train. There was some danger in that, but the bull didn't consider danger. His job was to get that pernicky nigger the hell and gone off his train.

Crawling along the tops of the cars, he swung himself down over the one he suspected. He gently wedged it open and slipped in. Jedwick sat square in front of the door, his legs spread and tensed, waiting. The bull plopped between the black man's outstretched legs, and Jedwick caught him full in the face with a large but cunning heel. The man's pistol cracked against the side of the car, and the white bull's body dropped out like a sack of potatoes and hit the cinders with a thud. Jedwick sighed as at the completion of an unpleasant duty. Trouble, he thought philosophically; why people allus huntin' 'round fo' trouble?

The sunrise got pink in the east. He sized up the land about him. Wasn't but a few minutes out of the Junction. Better slip off before that cop was missed. Shortly the freight slowed. He hopped it from the ladder.

It was a mile or so to the highway. The sun was just blazing up properly. Another boiling day. A truck was the thing.

Free. Escape was almost certain now. They couldn't pin the railroad bull's accident on him. And Alabama would never get him if he reached New York. Of course he'd reach New York. One of those wonderful red vans came chugging up the highway. By God, this was luck! A colored chauffeur was at the wheel. Going right into the city. Jedwick's luck was an enchanted affair. When the truck approached he flicked his hand and smiled teethily. The driver jammed his brakes. Didn't he say his luck was magic?

"Sho' nice of you," he said as he skipped up on the seat. He sank into the leather cushion blissfully. "Yassuh."

"Goin' into New York?"

"Yassuh."

"Where you from?"

"Been bummin' my way up from the Districk," said Jedwick. "Ole feller goin' far as the las' town in a little Fo'd brang me thus far."

"I got a samwich I ain't et," said the driver. "You're perfectly welcome to it."

by Louis Paul

"Sho' nice of you," he repeated. He took the sandwich and swallowed it whole. "My name Jedwick," he grunted past the last mouthful.

At Canal and Sixth Avenue the driver said, "Like you to drop off here, buddy. I get caught ridin' anybody in, it's jes' too bad fo' me."

"Yassuh," said Jedwick gratefully. "Sho' nice of you." He dropped down and the truck turned up Sixth Avenue.

1935: *from Harper's Magazine*

THE WHITE HORSES OF VIENNA

by Kay Boyle, whose career as novelist and writer of short stories has been one of brilliant individualism. Her stories have appeared in the O. Henry Memorial Award series no fewer than eight times, the most recent being "Summer Evening," from The New Yorker, *in the 1950 volume. Of these eight appearances, two were first-prize winners: "The White Horses of Vienna," and the 1941 winner, "Defeat."*

At the age of seventeen Miss Boyle had written hundreds of poems, short stories, a novel, and an outline of history. As of 1950 she was the author of seventeen published books. Among these are Plagued by the Nightingales, Monday Night, Avalanche, Frenchman Must Die, *and* Smoking Mountain: Stories of Postwar Germany. *Her many fine stories of the foreign scene reflect the history of the troubled period of her residence abroad. (Miss Boyle has spent most of her life in Europe with her husband, who is a civilian member of the War Department.)*

The doctor often climbed the mountain at night, climbed up behind his own house hour after hour in the dark, and came back to bed long after his two children were asleep. At the end of June he sprained his knee coming down the mountain late. He wrenched it out of joint making his way down with the other men through the pines. They helped him into the house where his wife was waiting and writing letters by the stove, and the agony that he would not mention was marked upon his face.

His wife bound his leg with fresh, wet cloths all through the night, but in

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the morning the knee was hot with fever. It might be weeks before he could go about again, and there was nothing to do but write to the hospital in Vienna for a student doctor to come out and take over his patients for a time.

"I'll lie still for a fortnight or so," said the doctor, and he asked his wife to bring him the bits of green wood that he liked to whittle and his glazed papers and his fancy tag ends of stuff. He was going to busy himself making new personages for his theater, for he could not stay idle for half an hour. The June sun was strong at that height, and the doctor sat on the *liegestuhl* with his knee bared to the warm light, working like a well man and looking up now and again to the end of the valley where the mountains stood with the snow shining hard and diamond bright on their brows.

"You'll never sit still long enough for it to do you any good," said the doctor's wife sharply. She was quite a young, beautiful woman, in spite of her two growing sons and in spite of her husband's ageless, weathered flesh. She was burned from the wind and the snow in winter and burned from the sun at other times of year; she had straight, long, sunburned limbs, and her dark hair was cut short and pushed behind her ears. She had her nurse's degree from Vienna, and she helped her husband in whatever there was to do: the broken bones, the deaths, the births. He even did a bit of dentistry, too, when there was need, and she stood by in her nurse's blouse and mixed the cement and porcelain fillings and kept the instruments clean. Or at night, if they needed her, she climbed the mountain with him and the other men, carrying as well a knapsack of candles over her shoulders, climbing through the twig-broken and mossy silence in the dark.

The doctor had built their house himself with the trees cut down from their forest. The town lay in the high valley, and the doctor had built their house above it on the sloping mountainside. There was no real road leading to it; one had to get to him on foot or else on a horse. It was as if the doctor had chosen this place to build so that the village might leave him to himself unless the need were very great. He had come back to his own country after the years as a prisoner of war in Siberia and after the years of studying in other countries and the years of giving away as a gift his tenderness and knowledge as he went from one wild place to another. He had studied in cities, but he could not live for long in them. He had come back and bought a piece of land in the Tyrol with a pine forest sloping down it, and he built his house there, working throughout the summer months late into the evening with only his two sons and his wife to help him lift the squared, varnished beams into place.

Inside the log walls the doctor made a pure-white plaster wall and put his dark-stained bookshelves against it and hung his own paintings of Dalmatia and his drawings of the Siberian country. Everything was as neat and clean as wax, for the doctor was a savagely clean man. He had a coarse, reddish,

well-scrubbed skin through which the gold hairs sprang; they sprang out of his scalp, wavy and coarse, and out of his forearms and his muscular, heavy thighs. They would have sprung, too, round his mouth and along his jaw had he not shaved himself clean every morning. His face was as strong as rock, but such rains of tenderness washed over it that it seemed split apart with love: one side given to anguish, and the other to shelter for everyone else alive.

None of the places where he had been before, Paris or Moscow or Munich or Constantinople, had left an evil mark. None of the grand places or people had ever done to him what they can do. But because of his own strong, humble pride in himself, his shirt was always a white one and of fresh, clean linen no matter what sort of work he was doing. In the summer he wore the short leather trousers of the country, for he had peasants behind him and he liked to remember that it was so. But the woven stockings that ended just above his calves were perfectly white, and the nails of his broad, coarse hands were white. They were spotless, like the nails of a woman's hand.

The day the student doctor arrived from Vienna and walked up from the village the doctor and his wife were both out in the sun before the house. She had been hanging the children's shirts up on the line to dry, and she came round to the timber piazza, drying her hands in her dress. The doctor was hopping around on one leg like a great, golden, wounded bird; he was hopping from one place to another, holding his wrenched leg off the ground and seeking the bits of paper and stuff and wood and wire that he needed to make his dolls.

"Let me get the things for you," his wife cried out. "Why must you do everything for yourself? Why can't you let anyone help you?"

The doctor hopped across to the timber table in the sun and picked up the clown's cap he was making and fitted it on the head of the doll he held in his hand. When he turned round he saw the student doctor coming up the path. He stood still for a moment, with his leg still lifted up behind him, and then his face cleared of whatever was in it and he nodded.

"God greet you," he said quietly, and the young man stopped, too, where he was on the path and looked up at them. He was smiling in his long, dark, alien face, but his city shoes were foul with the soft mud of the mountainside after rain, and the sweat was standing out on his brow because he was not accustomed to the climb.

"Good-day," he said, as city people said it. The doctor and his wife stood looking down at him, and a little wave of pallor ran under the woman's skin.

The doctor had caught a very young fox in the spring, and it had now grown to live in the house with them without shyness or fear. The sound of their voices and the new human scent on the air brought it forth from the indoor dark of the house. It came out without haste, like a small, gentle dog,

with its soft, gray, gently lifted brush and its eyes blinking slowly at the sun. It went daintily down the path toward the stranger, holding its brush just out of the mud of the path and with the black bead of its nose smelling the new smell of this other man who had come.

The young doctor from Vienna leaned over to stroke it, and while his head was down the doctor's wife turned to her husband. She had seen the black, smooth hair on the young man's head and the arch of his nose and the quality of his skin. She could scarcely believe what she had seen, and she must look into her husband's face for confirmation of the truth. But her husband was still looking down the little space toward the stranger. The fox had raised the sharp point of his muzzle and licked the young doctor's hand.

"Is this a dog or a cat?" the young man called up, smiling.

"It's a fox," said the doctor, and his face was filled with compassion. The young man came up with his hat in his hand and said that his name was Heine and shook their hands, and the doctor gave no sign.

"You live quite a way from the village," said the student doctor, looking back the way he had come.

"You can see the snow mountains from here," said the doctor, and he showed the young man the sight of them at the far end of the valley. "You have to climb this high before you can see them," he said. "They're closed off from the valley."

This was the explanation of why they lived there, and the young man from the city stood looking a moment in silence at the far, gleaming crusts of the everlasting snows. He was thinking still of what he might say in answer when the doctor asked his wife to show Dr. Heine the room that would be his. Then the doctor sat down in the sun again and went on with the work he had been doing.

"What are we going to do?" said his wife's voice in a whisper behind him in a moment.

"What do you mean? About what?" said the doctor, speaking aloud. His crisp-haired head did not lift from his work, and the lines of patience and love were scarred deep in his cheeks as he whittled.

"About *him*," said the doctor's wife in hushed impatience.

"Send one of the boys down for his bag at the station," said the doctor. "Give him a drink of *apfelsaft* if he's thirsty."

"But don't you see, don't you see what he is?" asked his wife's wild whisper.

"He's Viennese," said the doctor, working.

"Yes, and he's Jewish," said his wife. "They must be mad to have sent him. They know how everyone feels."

"Perhaps they did it intentionally," said the doctor, working carefully with what he had in his hands. "But it wasn't a good thing for the young man's

sake. It's harder on him than us. If he works well I have no reason to send him back. We've waited three days for him. There are people sick in the village."

"Ah," breathed his wife in anger behind, "we shall have to sit at the table with him."

"They recommend him highly," said the doctor gently, "and he seems a very amiable young man."

"Ah," said his wife's disgusted whisper, "they all look amiable. Every one of them does."

Almost at once there was a tooth to be pulled, and the young wife was there in her white frock with the instruments ready for the new young man. She stood very close, casting sharp looks at Dr. Heine, watching his slender, delicate hands at work, seeing the dark, silky hairs that grew on the backs of them and the black hair brushed smooth on his head. Even the joints of his tall, elegant frame seemed to be oiled with some special, suave lubricant that was evil as the Orient to their clean, Nordic hearts. He had a pale skin, unused to the weather of mountain places, and his skull was lighted with bright, quick, ambitious eyes. But at lunch he had talked simply with them, although they were country people and ignorant as peasants for all he knew. He listened to everything the doctor had told him about the way he liked things done; in spite of his modern medical school and his Viennese hospitals, taking it all in with interest and respect.

"The doctor," said the young wife now, "always stands behind the patient to get at teeth like that."

She spoke in an undertone to Dr. Heine so that the peasant sitting there in the dentist chair with the cocaine slowly paralyzing his jaws might not overhear.

"Oh, yes. Thank you so much," said Dr. Heine with a smile, and he stepped behind the patient. "It's quite true. One can get a better grip that way."

But as he passed the doctor's wife the tail of his white coat brushed through the flame of the little sterilizing lamp on the table. Nobody noticed that Dr. Heine had caught fire until the tooth was out and the smell of burning cloth filled the clean, white room. They looked about for what might be smoldering in the place, and in another moment the doctor's wife saw that Dr. Heine was burning very brightly: the back of the white jacket was eaten nearly out, and the coat within it was flaming. He had even begun to feel the heat on his shirt when the doctor's wife picked up the strip of rug from the floor and flung it about him. She held it tight round him with her bare, strong arms, and the young man looked back over his shoulder at her and laughed.

"Now I shall lose my job," he said. "The doctor will never stand for me setting fire to myself the first day like this."

"It's my fault," said the doctor's wife, holding him fast still in her arms. "I should have had the lamp out of the way."

She began to beat his back softly with the palm of her hand, and when she carried the rug to the window, Dr. Heine went to the mirror and looked over his shoulder at the sight of his clothes all burned away.

"My new coat!" he said, laughing. But it must have been very hard to see the nice, gray flannel coat that he had bought to look presentable for his first place scalloped black to his shoulders where the fire had eaten its covert way.

"I should think I could put a piece in," said the doctor's wife, touching the good cloth that was left. And then she bit her lip suddenly and stood back, as if she had remembered the evil thing that stood between.

When they sat down to supper, the little fox settled himself on the doctor's good foot, for the wool of his stocking was a soft bed where the fox could dream a little while. They had soup and the thick, rosy-meated leg of a pig and salt potatoes, and the children listened to their father and Dr. Heine speaking of music and painting and books. The doctor's wife was cutting the meat and putting it on their plates. It was at the end of the meal that the young doctor began talking of the royal white horses in Vienna, still royal, he said, without any royalty left to bow their heads to, still shouldering into the arena with spirits a man would give his soul for, bending their knees in homage to the empty, canopied loge where royalty no longer sat. They came in, said Dr. Heine in his rich, eager voice, and danced their statuesque dances, their "Pas de Deux," their "Croupade," their "Capriole." They were very impatient of the walls round them and the bits in their soft mouths, and very vain of the things they had been taught to do. Whenever the applause broke out round them, said Dr. Heine, their nostrils opened wide as if a wind were blowing. They were actresses, with the deep, snowy breasts of prima donnas, these perfect stallions who knew to a breath the beauty of even their mockery of fright.

"There was a maharajah," said the young doctor, and the children and their father listened, and the young wife sat giving quick, unwilling glances at this man who had no blood nor knowledge of the land behind him, at this wanderer whose people had wandered from country to country and whose sons must wander, having no land to return to in the end. "There was a maharajah just last year," said Dr. Heine, "who went to the performance and fell in love with one of the horses. He saw it dancing and he wanted to buy it and take it back to India with him. No one else had ever taken a Lippizaner back to his country, and he wanted this special one, the best of them all, whose dance was like an angel flying. So the state agreed that he

could buy the horse, but for a tremendous amount of money. They needed the money badly enough, and the maharajah was a very rich man."

Oh, yes, thought the young mother bitterly, you would speak about money, you would come here and climb our mountain and poison my sons with the poison of money and greed! "But no matter how high the price was," said Dr. Heine, smiling because all their eyes were on him, "the maharajah agreed to pay it, provided that the man who rode the horse so beautifully came along as well. Oh, yes, the state would allow that too, but the maharajah would have to pay an enormous salary to the rider. He would take him into his employ as the stallion's keeper, and he would have to pay him a salary as big as our own President is paid," said Dr. Heine with a burst of laughter.

"And what then, what then?" said one of the boys as the student doctor paused to laugh. The whole family was listening, but the mother was filled with sorrow. These things are strange to us, she was thinking. They belong to more sophisticated people; we do not need them here. The Spanish Riding School, the gentlemen of Vienna, they were as alien as foreign places.

"So it was arranged that the man who rode the horse so well should go along, too," said Dr. Heine. "It was finally arranged for a great deal of money," he said, and the mother gave him a look of fury. "But they had not counted on one thing. They had forgotten all about the little groom who had always cared for this special horse and who loved him better than anything else in the world. Ever since the horse had come from the stud farm in Styria the little groom had cared for him, and he believed that they would always be together; he believed that he would go wherever the horse went, just as he had always gone to Salzburg with the horse in the summer, and always come back to Vienna with it in the wintertime again."

"And so what, what happened?" asked the other boy.

"Well," said the student doctor, "the morning before the horse was to leave with the maharajah and the rider they found that the horse had a deep cut on his leg, just above the hoof in front. Nobody could explain how it had happened; but the horse was so wounded that he could not travel then, and the maharajah said that he could go on without him and that the trainer should bring the horse over in a few weeks when the cut had healed. They did not tell the maharajah that it might be that the horse could never dance so beautifully again. They had the money and they weren't going to give it back so easily," said Dr. Heine, and he laughed as if their shrewdness pleased his soul. "But when the cut had healed," he went on, "and the horse seemed well enough to be sent by the next boat, the trainer found the horse had a cut on the other hoof, exactly where the other wound had been. So the journey was postponed again, and again the state said nothing to the maharajah about the horse being so impaired that it was likely he could never fly

like an angel again. But in a few days the horse's blood was so poisoned from the wound that they had to destroy him."

They all waited breathless with pain a moment, and then the doctor's wife said bitterly:

"Even the money couldn't save him, could it?"

"No," said Dr. Heine, a little perplexed. "Of course it couldn't. And they never knew how the cuts had come there until the little groom committed suicide the same day the horse was destroyed. And then they knew that he had done it himself because he couldn't bear the horse to go away."

They were all sitting quietly there at the table, with the dishes and remnants of food still before them, when someone knocked at the outside door. One of the boys went out to open it, and he came back with the Heimwehr men following after him, the smooth little black-and-white cockades lying forward in their caps.

"God greet you," said the doctor quietly when he saw them.

"God greet you," said the Heimwehr men.

"There's a swastika fire burning on the mountain behind you," said the leader of the soldiers. They were not men of the village, but men brought from other parts of the country and billeted there as strangers to subdue the native people. "Show us the fastest way up there so we can see that it's put out."

"I'm afraid I can't do that," said the doctor, smiling. "You see, I have a bad leg."

"You can point out to us which way the path goes!" said the leader sharply.

"He can't move," said the doctor's wife, standing straight by her chair. "You have reports on everything. You must know very well that he is injured and has had a doctor come from Vienna to look after the sick until he can get round again."

"Yes," said the leader, "and we know very well that he wouldn't have been injured if he stayed home instead of climbing mountains at night."

"Look here," said the student doctor, speaking nervously and his face gone thin and white, "he can't move a step, you know."

"He'll have to move more than a step if they want him at the *Rathaus* again," said the Heimwehr leader. "There's never any peace as long as he's not locked up."

The young doctor said nothing after they had gone, but he sat quiet by the window, watching the fires burning on the mountains in the dark. They were blooming now on all the black, invisible crests, marvelously living flowers of fire springing out of the arid darkness, seemingly higher than any other things could grow. He felt himself sitting defenseless there by the window, surrounded by these strong, long-burning fires of faith. They were

all about him, inexplicable signals given from one mountain to another in some secret gathering of power that cast him and his people out, forever out upon the waters of despair.

The doctor's wife and the children had cleared the table, and the doctor was finishing his grasshopper underneath the light. He was busy wiring its wings to its body, and fastening the long, quivering antennæ in. The grasshopper was colored a deep, living green, and under him lay strong, green-glazed haunches for springing with his wires across the puppet stage. He was a monstrous animal in the doctor's hands, with his great, glassy, gold-veined wings lying smooth along his back.

"The whole country is ruined by the situation," said the student doctor, suddenly angry. "Everything is politics now. One can't meet people, have friends on any other basis. It's impossible to have casual conversations or abstract discussions any more. Who the devil lights these fires?"

"Some people light them because of their belief," said the doctor, working quietly, "and others travel round from place to place and make a living lighting them."

"Politics, politics," said the student doctor, "and one party as bad as another. You're much wiser to make your puppets, Herr Doktor. It takes one's mind off things, just as playing cards does. In Vienna we play cards, always play cards, no matter what is happening."

"There was a time for cards," said the doctor, working quietly with the grasshopper's wings. "I used to play cards in Siberia, waiting to be free. We were always waiting then for things to finish with and be over," he said. "There was nothing to do, so we did that. But now there is something else to do. One's hands are not tied."

He said no more, and in a little while the student doctor went upstairs to bed. He could hear the doctor's wife and the children still washing the dishes and tidying up, their voices clearly heard through the fresh planks of his newmade floor.

Usually in the evening the doctor played the marionette theater for his wife and children and for whatever friends wanted to come up the mountainside and see. He had made the theater himself, and now he had the new personages he had fashioned while nursing his twisted knee, and a week or two after the student doctor had come he told them at supper that he would give them a show that night.

"The Bürgermeister is coming up with his wife and their young sons," he said, "and the Apotheker and his nephews sent word that they'd drop in as well."

He moved the little fox from where it was sleeping on the wool sock on his foot, and he hopped on his one good leg across the room. Dr. Heine helped him carry the theater to the corner and set it up where the curtains

hung, and the doctor hopped, heavy and clean and birdlike, from side to side and behind and before to get the look of the light and see how the curtains drew and fell.

By eight o'clock they were all of them there and seated in the darkened room, the doctor's and the Bürgermeister's boys waiting breathless for the curtain to rise, and the Apotheker's nephews smoking in the dark.

"I think it's marvelous, your husband giving plays like this, keeping the artistic thing uppermost even with times as they are," said Dr. Heine quietly to the doctor's wife. "One gets so tired of the same question everywhere, anywhere one happens to be," he said, and she gave him a long, strange, bitter glance from the corners of her eyes.

"Yes," she said. "Yes. I suppose you do think a great deal of art."

"Yes, of course," said Dr. Heine, guilelessly. "Art and science, of course."

"Yes," said the doctor's wife, saying the words slowly and bitterly. "Yes. Art and science. What about people being hungry, what about this generation of young men who have never had work in their lives because the factories have never opened since the War? Where do they come in?"

"Well——" Dr. Heine began, and then the whispered dialogue ended. The curtain had been jerked aside, and a wonderful expectancy lay on the air.

The scene before them was quite a simple one: the monstrously handsome grasshopper was sitting in a field, presumably a field, for there were white linen-petaled, yellow-hearted daisies all round him. He was a great, gleaming beauty, and the people watching cried out with pleasure. The doctor's sons could scarcely wait until the flurry of delight had died and the talking had begun.

There were only two characters in the play, and they were the grasshopper and the clown. The clown came out on the stage and joined him after the grasshopper had done his elegant dance. The dance in itself was a masterpiece of grace and wit, with the music of Mozart playing on the gramophone behind. The children cried with laughter, and Dr. Heine shouted aloud, and the Bürgermeister shook with silent laughter. It lifted its legs so delicately and sprang with such precision this way and that through the ragged-petaled daisies of the field that it seemed to have a life of its own in its limbs, separate from and more sensitive than that given it by any human hand. Even the little fox sat watching in fascination, his bright, unwild eyes shining like points of fire in the dark.

"*Wunderbar, wunderschön!*" Dr. Heine called out. "It's really marvelous! He's as graceful as the white horses at Vienna, Herr Doktor. That step with the forelegs floating! It's extraordinary how you got it without ever seeing it done."

And then the little clown came out on the stage. He came through the daisies of the field, a small, dwarfed clown with a sword ten times too big

for him girded round his waist and tripping him at every step as he came. He was carrying a bunch of paper flowers and smiling, and there was something very obsequious about the little clown. There was something very *friseur* about him. He had no smell of the really open country or of the roots of things, while the grasshopper was a fine, green-armored animal, strong and perfectly equipped for the life he had to lead.

The clown had a round, human face, and he spoke in a faltering human voice, and the grasshopper was the superthing, speaking in the doctor's tender, ringing voice. Just the sound of the doctor's pure, loving voice released in all its power was enough to make the guilty and weak shake in their seats as if it were some accusation against them. It was a voice as ready for honest anger as it was for gentleness.

"Why do you carry artificial flowers?" the grasshopper asked, and the clown twisted and turned on his feet, so ridiculous in his stupidity that the children and all the others watching laughed aloud in the timber room. "Why do you carry artificial flowers?" the grasshopper persisted. "Don't you see that the world is full of real ones?"

"Oh, it's better I carry artificial ones," said the clown in the humorous accent of the country boor, and he tripped on his sword as he said it. "I'm on my way to my own funeral, *nicht?* I want the flowers to keep fresh until I get there."

Everyone laughed very loud at this, but after a little, as the conversation continued between the grasshopper and the clown, Dr. Heine found he was not laughing as loudly as before. It was now evident that the grasshopper, for no conceivable reason, was always addressed as "The Leader," and the humorous little clown was called "Chancellor" by the grasshopper for no reason at all. The Chancellor was quite the fool of the piece. The only thing he had to support him was a very ludicrous faith in the power of the Church. The Church was a wonderful thing, the clown kept saying, twisting his poor bouquet.

"The cities are full of churches," said The Leader, "but the country is full of God."

The Leader spoke with something entirely different in his voice: he had a wild and stirring power that sent the cold of wonder up and down one's spine. And whatever the argument was, the Chancellor always got the worst of it. The children cried aloud with laughter, for the Chancellor was so absurd, so eternally on his half-witted way to lay his bunch of paper flowers on his own or somebody else's grave, and The Leader was ready to waltz away at any moment with the power of stallion life that was leaping in his limbs.

"I believe in independence," the poor, humbly smiling little clown said, and then he tripped over his sword and fell flat among the daisies. The

Leader picked him up with his fragile, lovely forelegs and set him against the painting of the sky.

"Ow, *mein Gott*, the clouds are giving away!" cried the clown, and the grasshopper said gently:

"You are relying upon the heavens to support you. Are you afraid they are not strong enough?"

It was one evening in July, and the rain had just drawn off over the mountains. There was still the smell of it on the air, but the moon was shining strongly. The student doctor walked out before the house and watched the light bathing the dark valley, rising over the fertile slopes and the pine forests, running clear as milk above the timber line across the bare, bleached rock. The higher one went, the more terrible it became, he thought, and his heart shuddered within him. There were the rocks, seemingly as high as substance could go, but beyond that, even higher, hidden from the sight of the village people but clearly seen from the doctor's house, was the bend of the glacier, and beside it were the peaks of everlasting snow. He was lost in this wilderness of cold, lost in a warm month, and the thought turned his blood to ice. He wanted to be indoors, with the warmth of his own people, and the intellect speaking. He had had enough of the bare, northern speech of these others who moved higher and higher as the land moved.

It was then that he saw the little lights moving up from the valley, coming like little beacons of hope carried to him. People were moving up out of the moon-bathed valley, like a little search party come to seek for him in an alien land. He stood watching the slow, flickering movement of their advance, the lights they carried seen far below, a small necklace of men coming to him; and then the utter white-darkness spread unbroken as they entered the wooded places and their lamps were extinguished by the trees.

"Come to me," he was saying within himself, "come to me. I am a young man alone on a mountain."

The doctor and his wife were sitting at work by the table when Dr. Heine came quickly into the room and said:

"There're some men coming up. They're almost here now. They look to me like the Heimwehr come again."

The doctor's wife stood up and touched the side of the timber wall as if something in it would give her fortitude. Then she went to the door and opened it, and in a moment the Heimwehr men came in.

"God greet you," the doctor said as they gathered round the table.

"God greet you," said the Heimwehr leader. "You're wanted at the *Rathaus*," he said.

"My leg isn't good enough to walk on yet," said the doctor. "How will you get me down?"

"We brought a stretcher along," said the Heimwehr leader. "We have it outside the door."

The doctor's wife went off to fetch his white wool jacket and to wake the two boys in their beds. Dr. Heine heard her saying:

"They're taking Father to prison again. Now you must come and kiss him. Neither of you is going to cry."

The men brought the stretcher just within the doorway, and the doctor hopped over it and lay down. He looked very comfortable there under the wool rug that his wife had laid over him.

"Look here," said Dr. Heine, "why do you have to come after a person at night like this? Do you think the Herr Doktor would try to run away from you? What are you up to? What's it all about?"

The Heimwehr leader looked him full in the eyes.

"They got Dollfuss this afternoon," he said. "They shot him down in Vienna. We're rounding them all up tonight. Nobody knows what will happen tomorrow."

"Ah, politics, politics again!" cried Dr. Heine, and he was wringing his hands like a woman about to cry. Suddenly he ran out the door after the stretcher and the men who were bearing the doctor away. He felt for the doctor's hand under the cover and he pressed it in his, and the doctor's hand closed over his in comfort. "What can I do? What can I do to help?" he said, and he was thinking of the pure-white horses of Vienna and of their waltz, like the grasshopper's dance across the stage. The doctor was smiling, his cheeks scarred with the marks of laughter in the light from the hurricane lamps that the men were carrying down.

"You can throw me peaches and chocolate from the street," said the doctor. "My wife will show you where we are. She's not a good shot. Her hand shakes too much when she tries. I missed all the oranges she threw me after the February slaughter."

"What do you like best?" Dr. Heine called down the mountain after him, and his own voice sounded small and senseless in the enormous night.

"Peaches," the doctor's voice called back from the stretcher. "We get so thirsty. . . ."

"I'll remember," said Dr. Heine, his voice calling after the descending lights. He was thinking in anguish of the snow-white horses, the Lippizaners, the relics of pride, the still unbroken vestiges of beauty bending their knees to the empty loge of royalty where there was no royalty any more.

1936: *from the Saturday Evening Post*

TOTAL STRANGER

by James Gould Cozzens, who won the second prize in the 1932 volume of the O. Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories *with his story "Farewell to Cuba" in addition to first prize in 1936. He was recognized as an author of promise at the youthful age of sixteen, when he made the* Atlantic Monthly, *but he became widely known to the reading public with the publication of* The Last Adam. *This book, when transferred to the screen, became a vehicle for Will Rogers. Others of his books include* Guard of Honor, The Just and the Unjust, Men and Brethren, *and* The Son of Perdition. *The aforementioned* Guard of Honor *won him a Pulitizer Prize for fiction in 1949. His controversial novel,* By Love Possessed, *won the Howells Medal of the American Academy of Arts and Letters in 1960.*

Clad in a long gray duster, wearing a soft gray cap, my father, who was short and strong, sat bolt upright. Stiffly, he held his gauntleted hands straight out on the wheel. The car jiggled scurrying along the narrow New England country road. Sometimes, indignant, my father drove faster. Then, to emphasize what he was saying, and for no other reason, he drove much slower. Though he was very fond of driving, he drove as badly as most people who had grown up before there were cars to drive.

"Well," I said, "I can't help it."

"Of course you can help it!" my father snorted, adding speed. His severe, dark mustache seemed to bristle a little. He had on tinted sunglasses, and he turned them on me.

"For heaven's sake, look what you're doing!" I cried. He looked just in time, but neither his dignity nor his train of thought was shaken. He continued: "Other boys help it, don't they?"

"If you'd just let me finish," I began elaborately. "If you'd just give me a chance to——"

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"Go on, go on," he said. "Only don't tell me you can't help it! I'm very tired of hearing——"

"Well, it's mostly Mr. Clifford," I said. "He has it in for me. And if you want to know why, it's because I'm not one of his gang of bootlickers, who hang around his study to bum some tea, every afternoon practically." As I spoke, I could really feel that I would spurn an invitation so dangerous to my independence. The fact that Mr. Clifford rarely spoke to me except to give me another hour's detention became a point in my favor. "So, to get back at me, he tells the Old Man——"

"Do you mean Doctor Holt?"

"Everyone calls him that. Why shouldn't I?"

"If you were a little more respectful, perhaps you wouldn't be in trouble all the time."

"I'm not in trouble all the time. I'm perfectly respectful. This year I won't be in the dormitory any more, so Snifty can't make up a lot of lies about me."

My father drove dashing past a farmhouse in a billow of dust and flurry of panic-struck chickens. "Nonsense!" he said. "Sheer nonsense! Doctor Holt wrote that after a long discussion in faculty meeting he was satisfied that your attitude——"

"Oh, my attitude!" I groaned. "For heaven's sake, a fellow's attitude! Of course, I don't let Snifty walk all over me. What do you think I am? That's what that means. It means that I'm not one of Snifty's little pets, hanging around to bum some tea."

"You explained about the tea before," my father said. "I don't feel that it quite covers the case. How about the other masters? Do they also expect you to come around and take tea with them? When they tell the headmaster that you make no effort to do your work, does that mean that they are getting back at you?"

I drew a deep breath in an effort to feel less uncomfortable. Though I was experienced in defending myself, and with my mother, could do it very successfully, there was a certain remote solemnity about my father which made me falter. From my standpoint, talking to my father was a risky business, since he was only interested in proved facts. From his standpoint, I had reason to know, my remarks would form nothing but a puerile exhibition of sorry nonsense. The result was that he avoided, as long as he could, these serious discussions, and I avoided, as long as I could, any discussions at all.

I said laboriously, "Well, I don't think they told him that. Not all of them. And I can prove it, because didn't I get promoted with my form? What did I really flunk, except maybe algebra? I suppose Mr. Blackburn was the one who said it." I nodded several times, as though it confirmed my darkest suspicions.

My father said frigidly, "In view of the fact that your grade for the year was forty-four, I wouldn't expect him to be exactly delighted with you."

"Well, I can tell you something about that," I said, ill at ease, but sufficiently portentous. "You can ask anyone. He's such a bum teacher that you don't learn anything in his courses. He can't even explain the simplest thing. Why, once he was working out a problem on the board, and I had to laugh, he couldn't get it himself. Until finally one of the fellows who is pretty good in math had to show him where he made a mistake even a first former wouldn't make. And that's how good he is."

My father said, "Now, I don't want any more argument. I simply want you to understand that this fall term will be your last chance. Doctor Holt is disgusted with you. I want you to think how your mother would feel if you disgrace her by being dropped at Christmas. I want you to stop breaking rules and wasting time."

He let the car slow down for emphasis. He gave me a look, at once penetrating and baffled. He could see no sense in breaking the simple, necessary rules of any organized society; and wasting time was worse than wrong, it was mad and dissolute. Time lost, he very well knew, can never be recovered. Left to himself, my father's sensible impulse would probably have been to give me a thrashing I'd remember. But this was out of the question, for my mother had long ago persuaded him that he, too, believed in reasoning with a child.

Looking at me, he must have found the results of reasoning as unimpressive as ever. He said, with restrained grimness, "And if you're sent home, don't imagine that you can go back to the academy. You'll go straight into the public school and stay there. So just remember that."

"Oh, I'll remember all right," I nodded significantly. I had not spent the last two years without, on a number of occasions, having to think seriously about what I'd do if I were expelled. I planned to approach a relative of mine connected with a steamship company and get a job on a boat.

"See that you do!" said my father. We looked at each other with mild antagonism. Though I was still full of arguments, I knew that none of them would get me anywhere, and I was, as always, a little alarmed and depressed by my father's demonstrable rightness about everything. In my position, I supposed that he would always do his lessons, never break any rules, and probably end up a prefect, with his rowing colors and a football letter—in fact, with everything that I would like, if only the first steps toward them did not seem so dull and difficult. Since they did, I was confirmed in my impression that it was impossible to please him. Since it was impossible, I had long been resolved not to care whether I pleased him or not. Practice had made not caring fairly easy.

As for my father, surely he viewed me with much the same resentful

astonishment. My mother was accustomed to tell him that he did not understand me. He must have been prepared to believe it; indeed, he must have wondered if he understood anything when he tried to reconcile such facts as my marks with such contentions as my mother's that I had a brilliant mind. At the moment he could doubtless think of nothing else to say, so he drove faster, as if he wanted to get away from the whole irksome matter; but suddenly the movement of the car was altered by a series of heavy, jolting bumps.

"Got a flat," I said with satisfaction and relief. "Didn't I tell you? Everybody knows those tires pick up nails. You can ask anybody."

My father edged the limping car to the side of the road. In those days you had to expect punctures if you drove any distance, so my father was not particularly put out. He may have been glad to get his mind off a discussion which was not proving very profitable. When we had changed the tire—we had demountable rims, which made it wonderfully easy, as though you were putting something over on a puncture—we were both in better spirits and could resume our normal, polite and distant attitudes. That is, what I said was noncommittal, but not impertinent; and what he said was perfunctory, but not hostile. We got into Sansbury at five o'clock, having covered one hundred and three miles, which passed at the time for a long, hard drive.

When my father drove me up to school, we always stopped at Sansbury. The hotel was not a good or comfortable one, but it was the only convenient place to break the journey. Sansbury was a fair-sized manufacturing town, and the hotel got enough business from traveling salesmen—who, of course, traveled by train—to operate in a shabby way something like a metropolitan hotel. It had a gloomy little lobby with rows of huge armchairs and three or four imitation-marble pillars. There were two surly bellboys, one about twelve, the other about fifty. The elevator, already an antique, was made to rise by pulling on a cable. In the dark dining room a few sad, patient, middle-aged waitresses distributed badly cooked food, much of it, for some reason, served in separate little dishes of the heaviest possible china. It was all awful.

But this is in retrospect. At the time I thought the hotel more pleasant than not. My father had the habit, half stoical, half insensitive, of making the best of anything there was. Though he acted with promptness and decision when it was in his power to change circumstances, he did not grumble when it wasn't. If the food was bad, favored by an excellent digestion, he ate it anyway. If his surroundings were gloomy and the company either boring to him or nonexistent, he did not fidget.

When he could find one of the novels at the moment seriously regarded, he would read it critically. When he couldn't, he would make notes on business affairs in a shorthand of his own invention which nobody else could

read. When he had no notes to make, he would retire, without fuss or regret, into whatever his thoughts were.

I had other ideas of entertainment. At home I was never allowed to go to the moving pictures, for my mother considered the films themselves silly and cheap, and the theaters likely to be infested with germs. Away from home, I could sometimes pester my father into taking me. As we moved down the main street of Sansbury—my father serenely terrorizing all the rest of the traffic—I was watching to see what was at the motion-picture theater. To my chagrin, it proved to be Annette Kellerman in *A Daughter of the Gods*, and I could be sure I wouldn't be taken to that.

The hotel garage was an old stable facing the kitchen wing across a yard of bare dirt forlornly stained with oil. My father halted in the middle of it and honked his horn until finally the fifty-year-old bellboy appeared, scowling. While my father had an argument with him over whether luggage left in the car would be safe, I got out. Not far away there stood another car. The hood was up, and a chauffeur in his shirt sleeves had extracted and spread out on a sheet of old canvas an amazing array of parts. The car itself was a big impressive landaulet with carriage lamps at the doorposts. I moved toward it and waited until the chauffeur noticed me.

"What's the trouble?" I inquired professionally.

Busy with a wrench, he grunted, "Cam shaft."

"Oh! How much 'll she do?"

"Hundred miles an hour."

"Ah, go on!"

"Beat it," he said. "I got no time."

My father called me, and, aggrieved, I turned away, for I felt sure that I had been treated with so little respect because I had been compelled to save my clothes by wearing for the trip an old knickerbocker suit and a gray cloth hat with the scarlet monogram of a summer camp I used to go to on it. Following the aged bellboy through the passage toward the lobby, I said to my father, "Well, I guess I'll go up and change."

My father said, "There's no necessity for that. Just see that you wash properly, and you can take a bath before you go to bed."

"I don't see how I can eat in a hotel, looking like this," I said. "I should think you'd want me to look halfway respectable. I——"

"Nonsense!" said my father. "If you wash your face and hands, you'll look perfectly all right."

The aged bellboy dumped the bags indignantly, and my father went up to the imitation-marble desk to register. The clerk turned the big book around and gave him a pen. I wanted to sign for myself, so I was standing close to him, watching him write in his quick, scratchy script, when suddenly the pen paused. He held his hand, frowning a little.

"Come on," I said, "I want to——"

"Now, you can just wait until I finish," he answered. When he had finished, he let me have the pen. To the clerk he said, "Curious coincidence! I used to know someone by that name." He stopped short, gave the clerk a cold, severe look, as though he meant to indicate that the fellow would be well advised to attend to his own business, and turned away.

The elevator was upstairs. While we stood listening to its creeping, creaky descent, my father said "Hm!" and shook his head several times. The lighted cage came into view. My father gazed at it a moment. Then he said "Hm!" again. It came shaking to a halt in front of us. The door opened, and a woman walked out. Her eyes went over us in a brief, impersonal glance. She took two steps, pulled up short, and looked at us again. Then, with a sort of gasp, she said, "Why, Will!"

My father seemed to have changed color a little, but he spoke with his ordinary equability: "How are you, May? I had an idea it might be you."

She came right up to him. She put her hand on his arm. "Will!" she repeated. "Well, now, honestly!" She gave his arm a quick squeeze, tapped it and dropped her hand. "Will, I can't believe it! Isn't it funny! You know, I never planned to stop here. If that wretched car hadn't broken down——"

I was looking at her with blank curiosity, and I saw at once that she was pretty—though not in the sense in which you applied pretty to a girl, exactly. In a confused way, she seemed to me to look more like a picture—the sort of woman who might appear on a completed jigsaw puzzle, or on the back of a pack of cards. Her skin had a creamy, powdered tone. Her eyes had a soft, gay shine which I knew from unconscious observation was not usual in a mature face. Her hair was just so. Very faint, yet very distinct, too, the smell of violets reached me. Although she was certainly not wearing anything resembling evening dress, and, in fact, had a hat on, something about her made me think of my mother when she was ready to go to one of the dances they called assemblies, or of the mothers of my friends who came to dinner looking not at all as they usually looked. I was so absorbed in this feeling of strangeness—I neither liked it nor disliked it; it simply bewildered me—that I didn't hear anything until my father said rather sharply, "John! Say how do you do to Mrs. Prentice!"

"I can't get over it!" she was saying. She broke into a kind of bubbling laughter. "Why, he's grown up, Will! Oh, dear, doesn't it make you feel queer?"

Ordinarily, I much resented that adult trick of talking about you as if you weren't there, but the grown-up was all right, and she looked at me without a trace of the customary patronage; as though, of course, I saw the joke too. She laughed again. I would not have had the faintest idea why, yet I was obliged to laugh in response.

She asked brightly, "Where's Hilda?"

My father answered, with slight constraint, that my mother was not with us, that he was just driving me up to school.

Mrs. Prentice said, "Oh, that's too bad. I'd so like to see her." She smiled at me again and said, "Will, I can't face that dreadful dining room. I was going to have something sent up. They've given me what must be the bridal suite." She laughed. "You should see it! Why don't we all have supper up there?"

"Capital!" my father said.

The word astonished me. I was more or less familiar with most of my father's expressions, and that certainly was not one of them. I thought it sounded funny, but Mrs. Prentice said, "Will, you haven't changed a bit! But then, you wouldn't. It comes from having such a wonderful disposition."

The aged bellboy had put our luggage in the elevator and shuffled his feet beside it, glowering at us. "Leave the supper to me," my father said. "I'll see if something fit to eat can be ordered. We'll be down in about half an hour."

In our room, my father gave the aged bellboy a quarter. It was more than a bellboy in a small-town hotel would ever expect to get, and so, more than my father would normally give, for he was very exact in money matters and considered lavishness not only wasteful but rather common, and especially bad for the recipient, since it made him dissatisfied when he was given what he really deserved. He said to me, "You can go in the bathroom first, and see that you wash your neck and ears. If you can get your blue suit out without unpacking everything else, change to that."

While I was splashing around I could hear him using the telephone. It did not work very well, but he must eventually have prevailed over it, for when I came out he had unpacked his shaving kit. With the strop hung on a clothes hook, he was whacking a razor up and down. Preoccupied, he sang, or rather grumbled, to himself, for he was completely tone-deaf: "I am the monarch of the sea, the ruler of the Queen's——"

The room where we found Mrs. Prentice was quite a big one, with a large dark-green carpet on the floor, and much carved furniture, upholstered where possible in green velvet of the color of the carpet. Long full glass curtains and green velvet drapes shrouded the windows, so the lights—in brass wall brackets and a wonderfully coiled and twisted chandelier—were on. There was also an oil painting in a great gold frame showing a group of red-trousered French soldiers defending a farmhouse against the Prussians—the type of art I liked most. It all seemed to me tasteful and impressive, but Mrs. Prentice said, "Try not to look at it!" She and my father both laughed.

"I don't know what we'll get," my father said. "I did what I could."

"Anything will do," she said. "Will, you're a godsend! I was expiring for a cocktail, but I hated to order one by myself."

I was startled. My father was not a drinking man. At home I could tell when certain people were coming to dinner, for a tray with glasses and a decanter of sherry would appear in the living room about the time I was going upstairs, and a bottle of sauterne would be put in the icebox.

My mother usually had a rehearsal after the table was set, to make sure that the maid remembered how wine was poured.

Sometimes, when I was at the tennis club, my father would bring me into the big room with the bar and we would both have lemonades. I had never actually seen him drink anything else, so I had an impression that drinking was unusual and unnecessary. I even felt that it was reprehensible, since I knew that the man who took care of the garden sometimes had to be spoken to about it.

To my astonishment, my father said, as though it were the most natural thing in the world, "Well, we can't let you expire, May. What 'll it be?"

She said, "I'd love a Clover Club, Will. Do you suppose they could make one?"

My father said, "We'll soon find out! But I think I'd better go down and superintend it myself. That bar looks the reverse of promising."

Left alone with Mrs. Prentice, my amazement kept me vaguely uncomfortable. I studied the exciting details of the fight for the farmhouse, but I was self-conscious, for I realized that she was looking at me. When I looked at her, she was lighting a gold-tipped cigarette which she had taken from a white cardboard box on the table. She seemed to understand something of my confusion. She said, "Many years ago your father and I were great friends, John. After I was married, I went to England to live—to London. I was there until my husband died, so we didn't see each other. That's why we were both so surprised."

I could not think of anything to say. Mrs. Prentice tried again. "You two must have wonderful times together," she said. "He's lots of fun, isn't he?"

Embarrassed, I inadvertently nodded; and thinking that she had found the right subject, she went on warmly, "He was always the most wonderful swimmer and tennis player, and a fine cyclist. I don't know how many cups he took for winning the century run."

Of course, I had often seen my father play tennis. He played it earnestly, about as well as a strong but short-legged amateur who didn't have much time for it could. He was a powerful swimmer, but he did not impress me particularly, even when he swam, as he was fond of doing, several miles; for he never employed anything but a measured, monotonous breast stroke which moved him through the water with unbending dignity. It was very boring to be in the boat accompanying him across some Maine lake. I had

no idea what a century run was, but I guessed it meant bicycling, so my confusion and amazement were all the greater. The fad for bicycling wasn't within my memory. I could as easily imagine my father playing tag or trading cigarette pictures as riding a bicycle.

Mrs. Prentice must have wondered what was wrong with me. She could see that I ought to be past the stage when overpowering shyness would be natural. She must have known, too, that she had a more than ordinary gift for attracting people and putting them at ease. No doubt, her failure with me mildly vexed and amused her.

She arose, saying, "Oh, I forgot! I have something." She swept into the room beyond. In a moment she came back with a box in her hands. I had stood up awkwardly when she stood up. She brought the box to me. It was very elaborate. A marvelous arrangement of candied fruits and chocolates filled it. I said, "Thank you very much." I took the smallest and plainest piece of chocolate I could see.

"You mustn't spoil your appetite, must you?" she said, her eyes twinkling, "You take what you want. We won't tell your father."

Her air of cordial conspiracy really warmed me. I tried to smile, but I didn't find myself any more articulate. I said again, "Thank you. This is really all I want."

"All right, John," she said. "We'll leave it on the desk there, in case you change your mind."

The door, which had stood ajar, swung open. In came my father, carrying a battered cocktail shaker wrapped in a napkin. He headed a procession made up of the young bellboy, with a folding table; the old bellboy, with a bunch of roses in a vase; and a worried-looking waitress, with a tray of silver and glasses and folded linen.

"Why, Will," Mrs. Prentice cried, "it's just like magic!"

My father said, "What it will be just like, I'm afraid, is the old Ocean House."

"Oh, oh!" Mrs. Prentice laughed. "The sailing parties! You know, I haven't thought of those—and those awful buffet suppers!"

"Very good," my father said, looking at the completed efforts of his procession. "Please try to see that the steak is rare and gets here hot. That's all."

He filled two glasses with pink liquid from the cocktail shaker. He brought one of them to Mrs. Prentice, and, lifting the other, said, "Well, May. Moonlight Bay!"

She looked at him, quick and intent. She began quizzically to smile. It seemed to me she blushed a little. "All right, Will," she said and drank.

They were both silent for an instant. Then, with a kind of energetic abruptness, she said, "Lottie Frazer! Oh, Will, do you know, I saw Lottie a month or two ago."

I sat quiet, recognizing adult conversation and knowing that it would be dull. I fixed my eyes on the battle picture. I tried to imagine myself behind the mottled stone wall with the French infantrymen, but constantly I heard Mrs. Prentice laugh. My father kept responding, but with an odd, light, good-humored inflection, as though he knew that she would laugh again as soon as he finished speaking. I could not make my mind stay on the usually engrossing business of thinking myself into a picture.

". . . you were simply furious," I heard Mrs. Prentice saying. "I didn't blame you."

My father said, "I guess I was."

"You said you'd break his neck."

They had my full attention, but I had missed whatever it was, for my father only responded, "Poor old Fred!" and looked thoughtfully at his glass. "So you're going back?"

Mrs. Prentice nodded. "This isn't really home to me. Becky and I are—well, I can hardly believe we're sisters. She disapproves of me so."

"I don't remember Becky ever approving of anything," my father said. "There's frankness for you."

"Oh, but she approved of you!" Mrs. Prentice looked at him a moment.

"I never knew it," said my father. "She had a strange way of showing it. I had the impression that she thought I was rather wild, and hanging would be too good——"

"Oh, Will, the things you never knew!" Mrs. Prentice shook her head. "And of course, the person Becky really couldn't abide was Joe. They never spoke to each other. Not even at the wedding." Mrs. Prentice gazed at me, but abstractedly, without expression. She started to look back to my father, stopped herself, gave me a quick little smile, and then looked back. My father was examining his glass.

"Ah, well," he said, " 'there is a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them——' "

Mrs. Prentice smiled. "Do you still write poetry?" she asked.

My father looked at her as though taken aback. "No," he said. He chuckled, but not with composure. "And what's more, I never did."

"Oh, but I think I could say some of it to you."

"Don't," said my father. "I'm afraid I was a very pretentious young man." At that moment, dinner arrived on two trays under a number of big metal covers.

I thought the dinner was good, and ate all that was offered me; yet eating seemed to form no more than a pleasant, hardly noticed undercurrent to my thoughts. From time to time I looked at the empty cocktail glasses or the great box of candied fruits and chocolates. I stole glances at Mrs. Prentice's

pretty, lively face. Those fragments of conversation repeated themselves to me.

Intently, vainly, I considered "century run," "Ocean House," "Moonlight Bay." I wondered about Fred, whose neck, it seemed, my father thought of breaking; about this Becky and what she approved of; and about the writing of poetry. My mother had done a good deal to acquaint me with poetry. She read things like "Adonais," the "Ode to a Nightingale," "The Hound of Heaven" to me; and though I did not care much for them, I knew enough about poets to know that my father had little in common with pictures of Shelley and Keats. I had never seen a picture of Francis Thompson, but I could well imagine.

Thus I had already all I could handle; and though talk went on during the meal, I hardly heard what they were saying. My attention wasn't taken until Mrs. Prentice, pouring coffee from a little pot, said something about the car.

My father accepted the small cup and answered, "I don't know that it's wise."

"But I've just got to," she said. "I can't make the boat unless——"

"Well, if you've got to, you've got to," my father said. "Are you sure he knows the roads? There are one or two places where you can easily make the wrong turn. I think I'd better get a map I have and mark it for you. It will only take a moment."

"Oh, Will," she said, "that would be such a help."

My father set his cup down and arose with decision. When we were alone, Mrs. Prentice got up too. As I had been taught to, I jumped nervously to my feet. She went and took the box from the desk and brought it to me again. "Thank you very much," I stammered. I found another small plain piece of chocolate. "I'm going to put the cover on," she said, "and you take it with you."

I made a feeble protesting sound. I was aware that I ought not to accept such a considerable present from a person I did not know, but I realized that, with it, I was bound to be very popular on my arrival—at least, until the evening school meeting, when anything left would have to be turned in.

She could see my painful indecision. She set the box down. She gave a clear warm laugh, extended a hand and touched me on the chin. "John, you're a funny boy!" she said. My mother had sometimes addressed those very words to me, but with an air of great regret; meaning that the way I had just spoken or acted, while not quite deserving punishment, saddened her. Mrs. Prentice's tone was delighted, as though the last thing she meant to do was reprove me. "You don't like strangers to bother you, do you?"

The touch of her hand so astonished me that I hadn't moved a muscle. "I didn't think you were, at first," she said, "but you are! You don't look very

much like him, but you can't imagine how exactly——" She broke into that delighted little laugh again. Without warning, she bent forward and kissed my cheek.

I was frightfully embarrassed. My instant reaction was a sense of deep outrage, for I thought that I had been made to look like a child and a fool. Collecting my wits took me a minute, however; and I found then that I was not angry at all. My first fear—that she might mean to imply that I was just a baby or a little boy—was too clearly unfounded. I was not sure just what she did mean, but part of it, I realized, was that I had pleased her somehow, that she had suddenly felt a liking for me, and that people she liked, she kissed.

I stood rigid, my face scarlet. She went on at once: "Will you do something for me, John? Run down and see if you can find my chauffeur. His name is Alex. Tell him to bring the car around as soon as he can. Would you do that?"

"Yes, Mrs. Prentice," I said.

I left the room quickly. It was only the second floor, so I found the stairs instead of waiting for the elevator. I went down slowly, gravely and bewildered, thinking of my father and how extraordinary it all was; how different he seemed, and yet I could see, too, that he really hadn't changed. What he said and did was new to me, but not new to him. Somehow it all fitted together. I could feel that.

I came into the lobby and went down the back passage and out to the yard. It was now lighted by an electric bulb in a tin shade over the stable door. A flow of thin light threw shadows upon the bare earth. The hood of the big landaulet was down in place, and the man was putting some things away. "Alex!" I said authoritatively.

He turned sharp, and I said, "Mrs. Prentice wants you to bring the car around at once." He continued to look at me a moment. Then he smiled broadly. He touched his cap and said, "Very good, sir."

When I got back upstairs, my father had returned. The old bellboy was taking out a couple of bags. After a moment Mrs. Prentice came from the other room with a coat on and a full veil pinned over her face and hat. "Thank you, John," she said to me. "Don't forget this." She nodded at the big box on the table. I blushed and took it.

"Aren't you going to thank Mrs. Prentice?" my father asked.

She said, "Oh, Will, he's thanked me already. Don't bother him."

"Bother him!" said my father. "He's not bothered. Why, I can remember my father saying to me, 'Step up here, sir, and I'll mend your manners!' And for less than not saying thank you. I'm slack, but I know my parental duties."

They both laughed, and I found myself laughing too. We all went out to the elevator.

In front of the hotel, at the bottom of the steps, the car stood. "Just see he follows the map," my father said. "You can't miss it." He looked at the sky. "Fine moonlight night! I wouldn't mind driving myself."

"Will," said Mrs. Prentice, "Will!" She took his hand in both of hers and squeezed it. "Oh, I hate to say good-by like this! Why, I've hardly seen you at all!"

"There," said my father. "It's wonderful to have seen you, May."

She turned her veiled face toward me. "Well, John! Have a grand time at school!"

I said, "Good-by, Mrs. Prentice. Thank you very much for the——"

The chauffeur held the door open, and my father helped her in. There was a thick click of the latch closing. The chauffeur went around to his seat. We stood on the pavement, waiting while he started the engine. The window was down a little, and I could hear Mrs. Prentice saying, "Good-by, good-by."

My father waved a hand, and the car drew away with a quiet, powerful drone. It passed, the sound fading, lights glinting on it, down the almost empty street.

"Well, that's that!" said my father. He looked at me at last and said, "I think you might send a post card to your mother to tell her we got here all right."

I was feeling strangely cheerful and obedient. I thought fleetingly of making a fuss about the movies, but I decided not to. At the newsstand inside, my father bought me a post card showing a covered bridge near the town. I took it to one of the small writing tables by the wall.

"Dear Mother," I wrote with the bad pen, "arrived here safely." I paused. My father had bought a paper and, putting on his glasses, had settled in one of the big chairs. He read with close, critical attention, light shining on his largely bald head, his mustache drawn down sternly. I had seen him reading like that a hundred times, but tonight he did not look quite the same to me. I thought of Mrs. Prentice a moment, but when I came to phrase it, I could not think of anything to say. Instead, I wrote: "We drove over this bridge." I paused again for some time, watching my father read, while I pondered. I wrote: "Father and I had a serious talk. Mean to do better at school——"

Unfortunately, I never did do much better at school. But that year and the years following, I would occasionally try to, for I thought it would please my father.

1937: *from the Saturday Evening Post*

THE DEVIL AND DANIEL WEBSTER

by Stephen Vincent Benét

It's a story they tell in the border country, where Massachusetts joins Vermont and New Hampshire.

Yes, Dan'l Webster's dead—or, at least, they buried him. But every time there's a thunderstorm around Marshfield, they say you can hear his rolling voice in the hollows of the sky. And they say that if you go to his grave and speak loud and clear, "Dan'l Webster—Dan'l Webster!" the ground 'll begin to shiver and the trees begin to shake. And after a while you'll hear a deep voice saying, "Neighbor, how stands the Union?" Then you better answer the Union stands as she stood, rock bottomed and copper sheathed, one and indivisible, or he's liable to rear right out of the ground. At least, that's what I was told when I was a youngster.

You see, for a while, he was the biggest man in the country. He never got to be President, but he was the biggest man. There were thousands that trusted in him right next to God Almighty, and they told stories about him and all the things that belonged to him that were like the stories of patriarchs and such. They said, when he stood up to speak, stars and stripes came right out in the sky, and once he spoke against a river and made it sink into the ground. They said, when he walked the woods with his fishing rod, Killall, the trout would jump out of the streams right into his pockets, for they knew it was no use putting up a fight against him; and, when he argued a case, he could turn on the harps of the blessed and the shaking of the earth underground. That was the kind of man he was, and his big farm up at Marshfield was suitable to him. The chickens he raised were all white meat down through the drumsticks, the cows were tended like children, and the big ram he called Goliath had horns with a curl like a morning-glory vine and could butt through an iron door. But Dan'l wasn't one of your gentle-

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men farmers; he knew all the ways of the land, and he'd be up by candlelight to see that the chores got done. A man with a mouth like a mastiff, a brow like a mountain and eyes like burning anthracite—that was Dan'l Webster in his prime. And the biggest case he argued never got written down in the books, for he argued it against the devil, nip and tuck and no holds barred. And this is the way I used to hear it told.

There was a man named Jabez Stone, lived at Cross Corners, New Hampshire. He wasn't a bad man to start with, but he was an unlucky man. If he planted corn, he got borers; if he planted potatoes, he got blight. He had good-enough land, but it didn't prosper him; he had a decent wife and children, but the more children he had, the less there was to feed them. If stones cropped up in his neighbor's field, boulders boiled up in his; if he had a horse with the spavins, he'd trade it for one with the staggers and give something extra. There's some folks bound to be like that, apparently. But one day Jabez Stone got sick of the whole business.

He'd been plowing that morning and he'd just broke the plowshare on a rock that he could have sworn hadn't been there yesterday. And, as he stood looking at the plowshare, the off horse began to cough—that ropy kind of cough that means sickness and horse doctors. There were two children down with the measles, his wife was ailing, and he had a whitlow on his thumb. It was about the last straw for Jabez Stone. "I vow," he said, and he looked around him kind of desperate, "I vow it's enough to make a man want to sell his soul to the devil! And I would, too, for two cents!"

Then he felt a kind of queerness come over him at having said what he'd said; though, naturally, being a New Hampshireman, he wouldn't take it back. But, all the same, when it got to be evening and, as far as he could see, no notice had been taken, he felt relieved in his mind, for he was a religious man. But notice is always taken, sooner or later, just like the Good Book says. And, sure enough, next day, about suppertime, a soft-spoken, dark-dressed stranger drove up in a handsome buggy and asked for Jabez Stone.

Well, Jabez told his family it was a lawyer, come to see him about a legacy. But he knew who it was. He didn't like the looks of the stranger, nor the way he smiled with his teeth. They were white teeth, and plentiful—some say they were filed to a point, but I wouldn't vouch for that. And he didn't like it when the dog took one look at the stranger and ran away howling, with his tail between his legs. But having passed his word, more or less, he stuck to it, and they went out behind the barn and made their bargain. Jabez Stone had to prick his finger to sign, and the stranger lent him a silver pin. The wound healed clean, but it left a little white scar.

After that, all of a sudden, things began to pick up and prosper for Jabez Stone. His cows got fat and his horses sleek, his crops were the envy of the neighborhood, and lightning might strike all over the valley, but it wouldn't

strike his barn. Pretty soon he was one of the prosperous people of the county; they asked him to stand for selectman, and he stood for it; there began to be talk of running him for state senate. All in all, you might say the Stone family was as happy and contented as cats in a dairy. And so they were, except for Jabez Stone.

He'd been contented enough the first few years. It's a great thing when bad luck turns; it drives most other things out of your head. True, every now and then, especially in rainy weather, the little white scar on his finger would give him a twinge. And once a year, punctual as clockwork, the stranger with the handsome buggy would come driving by. But the sixth year the stranger lighted, and, after that, his peace was over for Jabez Stone.

The stranger came up through the lower field, switching his boots with a cane—they were handsome black boots, but Jabez Stone never liked the look of them, particularly the toes. And, after he'd passed the time of day, he said, "Well, Mr. Stone, you're a hummer! It's a very pretty property you've got here, Mr. Stone."

"Well, some might favor it and others might not," said Jabez Stone, for he was a New Hampshireman.

"Oh, no need to decry your industry!" said the stranger, very easy, showing his teeth in a smile. "After all, we know what's been done, and it's been according to contract and specifications. So when—ahem—the mortgage falls due next year, you shouldn't have any regrets."

"Speaking of that mortgage, mister," said Jabez Stone, and he looked around for help to the earth and the sky, "I'm beginning to have one or two doubts about it."

"Doubts?" said the stranger not quite so pleasantly.

"Why, yes," said Jabez Stone. "This being the U.S.A. and me always having been a religious man." He cleared his throat and got bolder. "Yes sir," he said, "I'm beginning to have considerable doubts as to that mortgage holding in court."

"There's courts and courts," said the stranger, clicking his teeth. "Still, we might as well have a look at the original document." And he hauled out a big black pocketbook, full of papers. "Sherwin, Slater, Stevens, Stone," he muttered. "'I, Jabez Stone, for a term of seven years——' Oh, it's quite in order, I think."

But Jabez Stone wasn't listening, for he saw something else flutter out of the black pocketbook. It was something that looked like a moth, but it wasn't a moth. And as Jabez Stone stared at it, it seemed to speak to him in a small sort of piping voice, terrible small and thin, but terrible human. "Neighbor Stone!" it squeaked. "Neighbor Stone! Help me! For God's sake, help me!"

But before Jabez Stone could stir hand or foot, the stranger whipped out

a big bandanna handkerchief, caught the creature in it, just like a butterfly, and started tying up the ends of the bandanna.

"Sorry for the interruption," he said. "As I was saying——"

But Jabez Stone was shaking all over like a scared horse.

"That's Miser Stevens' voice!" he said in a croak. "And you've got him in your handkerchief!"

The stranger looked a little embarrassed.

"Yes, I really should have transferred him to the collecting box," he said with a simper, "but there were some rather unusual specimens there and I didn't want them crowded. Well, well, these little contretemps will occur."

"I don't know what you mean by contertan," said Jabez Stone, "but that was Miser Stevens' voice! And he ain't dead! You can't tell me he is! He was just as spry and mean as a woodchuck Tuesday!"

"In the midst of life . . ." said the stranger, kind of pious. "Listen!" Then a bell began to toll in the valley and Jabez Stone listened, with the sweat running down his face. For he knew it was tolled for Miser Stevens and that he was dead.

"These long-standing accounts," said the stranger with a sigh; "one really hates to close them. But business is business."

He still had the bandanna in his hand, and Jabez Stone felt sick as he saw the cloth struggle and flutter.

"Are they all as small as that?" he asked hoarsely.

"Small?" said the stranger. "Oh, I see what you mean. Why, they vary." He measured Jabez Stone with his eyes, and his teeth showed. "Don't worry, Mr. Stone," he said. "You'll go with a very good grade. I wouldn't trust you outside the collecting box. Now, a man like Dan'l Webster, of course—well, we'd have to build a special box for him, and even at that, I imagine the wing spread would astonish you. He'd certainly be a prize. I wish we could see our way clear to him. But, in your case, as I was saying——"

"Put that handkerchief away!" said Jabez Stone, and he began to beg and to pray. But the best he could get at the end was a three years' extension, with conditions.

But till you make a bargain like that, you've got no idea of how fast four years can run. By the last months of those years Jabez Stone's known all over the state and there's talk of running him for governor—and it's dust and ashes in his mouth. For every day, when he gets up, he thinks, "There's one more night gone," and every night, when he lies down, he thinks of the black pocketbook and the soul of Miser Stevens, and it makes him sick at heart. Till, finally, he can't bear it any longer, and, in the last days of the last year, he hitches up his horse and drives off to seek Dan'l Webster. For Dan'l was born in New Hampshire, only a few miles from Cross Corners, and it's well known that he has a particular soft spot for old neighbors.

by Stephen Vincent Benét

It was early in the morning when he got to Marshfield, but Dan'l was up already, talking Latin to the farm hands and wrestling with the ram, Goliath, and trying out a new trotter and working up speeches to make against John C. Calhoun. But when he heard a New Hampshireman had come to see him, he dropped everything else he was doing, for that was Dan'l's way. He gave Jabez Stone a breakfast that five men couldn't eat, went into the living history of every man and woman in Cross Corners, and finally asked him how he could serve him.

Jabez Stone allowed that it was a kind of mortgage case.

"Well, I haven't pleaded a mortgage case in a long time, and I don't generally plead now, except before the Supreme Court," said Dan'l, "but if I can, I'll help you."

"Then I've got hope for the first time in ten years," said Jabez Stone and told him the details.

Dan'l walked up and down as he listened, hands behind his back, now and then asking a question, now and then plunging his eyes at the floor, as if they'd bore through it like gimlets. When Jabez Stone had finished, Dan'l puffed out his cheeks and blew. Then he turned to Jabez Stone and a smile broke over his face like the sunrise over Monadnock.

"You've certainly given yourself the devil's own row to hoe, Neighbor Stone," he said, "but I'll take your case."

"You'll take it?" said Jabez Stone, hardly daring to believe.

"Yes," said Dan'l Webster. "I've got about seventy-five other things to do and the Missouri Compromise to straighten out, but I'll take your case. For if two New Hampshiremen aren't a match for the devil, we might as well give the country back to the Indians."

Then he shook Jabez Stone by the hand and said, "Did you come down here in a hurry?"

"Well, I admit I made time," said Jabez Stone.

"You'll go back faster," said Dan'l Webster, and he told 'em to hitch up Constitution and Constellation to the carriage. They were matched grays with one white forefoot, and they stepped like greased lightning.

Well, I won't describe how excited and pleased the whole Stone family was to have the great Dan'l Webster for a guest, when they finally got there. Jabez Stone had lost his hat on the way, blown off when they overtook a wind, but he didn't take much account of that. But after supper he sent the family off to bed, for he had most particular business with Mr. Webster. Mrs. Stone wanted them to sit in the front parlor, but Dan'l Webster knew front parlors and said he preferred the kitchen. So it was there they sat, waiting for the stranger, with a jug on the table between them and a bright fire on the hearth—the stranger being scheduled to show up on the stroke of midnight, according to specification.

Well, most men wouldn't have asked for better company than Dan'l Webster and a jug. But with every tick of the clock Jabez Stone got sadder and sadder. His eyes roved round, and though he sampled the jug you could see he couldn't taste it. Finally, on the stroke of 11:30 he reached over and grabbed Dan'l Webster by the arm.

"Mr. Webster, Mr. Webster!" he said, and his voice was shaking with fear and a desperate courage. "For God's sake, Mr. Webster, harness your horses and get away from this place while you can!"

"You've brought me a long way, neighbor, to tell me you don't like my company," said Dan'l Webster, quite peaceable, pulling at the jug.

"Miserable wretch that I am!" groaned Jabez Stone. "I've brought you a devilish way, and now I see my folly. Let him take me if he wills. I don't hanker after it, I must say, but I can stand it. But you're the Union's stay and New Hampshire's pride! He mustn't get you, Mr. Webster! He mustn't get you!"

Dan'l Webster looked at the distracted man, all gray and shaking in the firelight, and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"I'm obliged to you, Neighbor Stone," he said gently. "It's kindly thought of. But there's a jug on the table and a case in hand. And I never left a jug or a case half finished in my life."

And just at that moment there was a sharp rap on the door.

"Ah," said Dan'l Webster very coolly, "I thought your clock was a trifle slow, Neighbor Stone." He stepped to the door and opened it. "Come in!" he said.

The stranger came in—very dark and tall he looked in the firelight. He was carrying a box under his arm—a black japanned box with little air holes in the lid. At the sight of the box Jabez Stone gave a low cry and shrank into a corner of the room.

"Mr. Webster, I presume," said the stranger, very polite, but with his eyes glowing like a fox's deep in the woods.

"Attorney of record for Jabez Stone," said Dan'l Webster, but his eyes were glowing too. "Might I ask your name?"

"I've gone by a good many," said the stranger carelessly. "Perhaps Scratch will do for the evening. I'm often called that in these regions."

Then he sat down at the table and poured himself a drink from the jug. The liquor was cold in the jug, but it came steaming into the glass.

"And now," said the stranger, smiling and showing his teeth, "I shall call upon you, as a law-abiding citizen, to assist me in taking possession of my property."

Well, with that the argument began—and it went hot and heavy. At first Jabez Stone had a flicker of hope, but when he saw Dan'l Webster being forced back at point after point, he just sat scrunched in his corner, with

his eyes on that japanned box. For there wasn't any doubt as to the deed or the signature—that was the worst of it. Dan'l Webster twisted and turned and thumped his fist on the table, but he couldn't get away from that. He offered to compromise the case; the stranger wouldn't hear of it. He pointed out the property had increased in value, and state senators ought to be worth more; the stranger stuck to the letter of the law. He was a great lawyer, Dan'l Webster, but we know who's the King of Lawyers, as the Good Book tells us, and it seemed as if, for the first time, Dan'l Webster had met his match.

Finally, the stranger yawned a little. "Your spirited efforts on behalf of your client do you credit, Mr. Webster," he said, "but if you have no more arguments to adduce, I'm rather pressed for time . . ." and Jabez Stone shuddered.

Dan'l Webster's brow looked dark as a thundercloud.

"Pressed or not, you shall not have this man!" he thundered. "Mr. Stone is an American citizen, and no American citizen may be forced into the service of a foreign prince. We fought England for that in '12 and we'll fight all hell for it again!"

"Foreign?" said the stranger. "And who calls me a foreigner?"

"Well, I never yet heard of the dev—of your claiming American citizenship," said Dan'l Webster with surprise.

"And who with better right?" said the stranger with one of his terrible smiles. "When the first wrong was done to the first Indian, I was there. When the first slaver put out for the Congo, I stood on her deck. Am I not in your books and stories and beliefs, from the first settlements on? Am I not spoken of still in every church in New England? 'Tis true the North claims me for a Southerner and the South for a Northerner, but I am neither. I am merely an honest American like yourself—and of the best descent—for, to tell the truth, Mr. Webster, though I don't like to boast of it, my name is older in this country than yours."

"Aha!" said Dan'l Webster with the veins standing out in his forehead. "Then I stand on the Constitution! I demand a trial for my client!"

"The case is hardly one for an ordinary court," said the stranger, his eyes flickering. "And, indeed, the lateness of the hour——"

"Let it be any court you choose, so it is an American judge and an American jury!" said Dan'l Webster in his pride. "Let it be the quick or the dead; I'll abide the issue!"

"You have said it," said the stranger, and pointed his finger at the door. And with that, and all of a sudden, there was a rushing of wind outside and a noise of footsteps. They came, clear and distinct, through the night. And yet they were not like the footsteps of living men.

"In God's name, who comes by so late?" cried Jabez Stone in an ague of fear.

"The jury Mr. Webster demands," said the stranger, sipping at his boiling glass. "You must pardon the rough appearance of one or two; they will have come a long way."

And with that the fire burned blue and the door blew open and twelve men entered, one by one.

If Jabez Stone had been sick with terror before, he was blind with terror now. For there was Walter Butler, the loyalist, who spread fire and horror through the Mohawk Valley in the times of the Revolution; and there was Simon Girty, the renegade, who saw white men burned at the stake and whooped with the Indians to see them burn. His eyes were green, like a catamount's, and the stains on his hunting shirt did not come from the blood of the deer. King Philip was there, wild and proud as he had been in life, with the great gash in his head that gave him his death wound, and cruel Governor Dale, who broke men on the wheel. There was Morton of Merry Mount, who so vexed the Plymouth Colony, with his flushed, loose, handsome face and his hate of the godly. There was Teach, the bloody pirate, with his black beard curling on his breast. The Reverend John Smeet, with his strangler's hands and his Geneva gown, walked as daintily as he had to the gallows. The red print of the rope was still around his neck, but he carried a perfumed handkerchief in one hand. One and all, they came into the room with the fires of hell still upon them, and the stranger named their names and their deeds as they came, till the tale of twelve was told. Yet the stranger had told the truth—they had all played a part in America.

"Are you satisfied with the jury, Mr. Webster?" said the stranger mockingly, when they had taken their places.

The sweat stood upon Dan'l Webster's brow, but his voice was clear.

"Quite satisfied," he said. "Though I miss General Arnold from the company."

"Benedict Arnold is engaged upon other business," said the stranger with a glower. "Ah, you asked for a justice, I believe."

He pointed his finger once more, and a tall man, soberly clad in Puritan garb, with the burning gaze of the fanatic, stalked into the room and took his judge's place.

"Justice Hathorne is a jurist of experience," said the stranger. "He presided at certain witch trials once held in Salem. There were others who repented of the business later, but not he."

"Repent of such notable wonders and undertakings?" said the stern old justice. "Nay, hang them—hang them all!" And he muttered to himself in a way that struck ice into the soul of Jabez Stone.

Then the trial began, and, as you might expect, it didn't look anyways good for the defense. And Jabez Stone didn't make much of a witness in his own behalf. He took one look at Simon Girty and screeched, and they had to put him back in his corner in a kind of swoon.

It didn't halt the trial though; the trial went on, as trials do. Dan'l Webster had faced some hard juries and hanging judges in his time, but this was the hardest he'd ever faced, and he knew it. They sat there with a kind of glitter in their eyes, and the stranger's smooth voice went on and on. Every time he'd raise an objection, it 'd be "Objection sustained", but whenever Dan'l objected, it 'd be "Objection denied." Well, you couldn't expect fair play from a fellow like this Mr. Scratch.

It got to Dan'l in the end, and he began to heat, like iron in the forge. When he got up to speak he was going to flay that stranger with every trick known to the law, and the judge and jury too. He didn't care if it was contempt of court or what would happen to him for it. He didn't care any more what happened to Jabez Stone. He just got madder and madder, thinking of what he'd say. And yet, curiously enough, the more he thought about it, the less he was able to arrange his speech in his mind.

Till, finally, it was time for him to get up on his feet, and he did so, all ready to bust out with lightnings and denunciations. But before he started he looked over the judge and jury for a moment, such being his custom. And he noticed the glitter in their eyes was twice as strong as before, and they all leaned forward. Like hounds just before they get the fox, they looked, and the blue mist of evil in the room thickened as he watched them. Then he saw what he'd been about to do, and he wiped his forehead, as a man might who's just escaped falling into a pit in the dark.

For it was him they'd come for, not only Jabez Stone. He read it in the glitter of their eyes and in the way the stranger hid his mouth with one hand. And if he fought them with their own weapons, he'd fall into their power; he knew that, though he couldn't have told you how. It was his own anger and horror that burned in their eyes; and he'd have to wipe that out or the case was lost. He stood there for a moment, his black eyes burning like anthracite. And then he began to speak.

He started off in a low voice, though you could hear every word. They say he could call on the harps of the blessed when he chose. And this was just as simple and easy as a man could talk. But he didn't start out by condemning or reviling. He was talking about the things that make a country a country and a man a man.

And he began with the simple things that everybody's known and felt—the freshness of a fine morning when you're young, and the taste of food when you're hungry, and the new day that's every day when you're a child. He took them up and he turned them in his hands. They were good things for any man. But without freedom they sickened. And when he talked of those enslaved, and the sorrows of slavery, his voice got like a big bell. He talked of the early days of America and the men who had made those days. It wasn't a spread-eagle speech, but he made you see it. He admitted all the

wrong that had ever been done. But he showed how, out of the wrong and the right, the suffering and the starvations, something new had come. And everybody had played a part in it, even the traitors.

Then he turned to Jabez Stone and showed him as he was—an ordinary man who'd had hard luck and wanted to change it. And, because he'd wanted to change it, now he was going to be punished for all eternity. And yet there was good in Jabez Stone, and he showed that good. He was hard and mean, in some ways, but he was a man. There was sadness in being a man, but it was a proud thing too. And he showed what the pride of it was till you couldn't help feeling it. Yes, even in hell, if a man was a man, you'd know it. And he wasn't pleading for any one person any more, though his voice rang like an organ. He was telling the story and the failures and the endless journey of mankind. They got tricked and trapped and bamboozled, but it was a great journey. And no demon that was ever foaled could know the inwardness of it—it took a man to do that.

The fire began to die on the hearth and the wind before morning to blow. The light was getting gray in the room when Dan'l Webster finished. And his words came back at the end to New Hampshire ground, and the one spot of land that each man loves and clings to. He painted a picture of that, and to each one of that jury he spoke of things long forgotten. For his voice could search the heart, and that was his gift and his strength. And to one his voice was like the forest and its secrecy, and to another like the sea and the storms of the sea; and one heard the cry of his lost nation in it, and another saw a little harmless scene he hadn't remembered for years. But each saw something. And when Dan'l Webster finished he didn't know whether or not he'd saved Jabez Stone. But he knew he'd done a miracle. For the glitter was gone from the eyes of judge and jury, and, for the moment, they were men again, and knew they were men.

"The defense rests," said Dan'l Webster and stood there like a mountain. His ears were still ringing with his speech, and he didn't hear anything else till he heard Judge Hathorne say, "The jury will retire to consider its verdict."

Walter Butler rose in his place and his face had a dark, gay pride on it.

"The jury has considered its verdict," he said and looked the stranger full in the eye. "We find for the defendant, Jabez Stone."

With that, the smile left the stranger's face, but Walter Butler did not flinch.

"Perhaps 'tis not strictly in accordance with the evidence," he said, "but even the damned may salute the eloquence of Mr. Webster."

With that, the long crow of a rooster split the gray morning sky, and judge and jury were gone from the room like a puff of smoke and as if they had never been there. The stranger returned to Dan'l Webster, smiling wryly.

"Major Butler was always a bold man," he said. "I had not thought him quite so bold. Nevertheless, my congratulations, as between two gentlemen."

"I'll have that paper first, if you please," said Dan'l Webster, and he took it and tore it into four pieces. It was queerly warm to the touch. "And now," he said, "I'll have you!" and his hand came down like a bear trap on the stranger's arm. For he knew that once you bested anybody like Mr. Scratch in fair fight, his power on you was gone. And he could see that Mr. Scratch knew it too.

The stranger twisted and wriggled, but he couldn't get out of that grip. "Come, come, Mr. Webster," he said, smiling palely. "This sort of thing is ridic—ouch!—is ridiculous. If you're worried about the costs of the case, naturally, I'd be glad to pay——"

"And so you shall!" said Dan'l Webster, shaking him till his teeth rattled. "For you'll sit right down at that table and draw up a document, promising never to bother Jabez Stone nor his heirs or assigns nor any other New Hampshireman till doomsday! For any hades we want to raise in this state, we can raise ourselves, without assistance from strangers."

"Ouch!" said the stranger. "Ouch! Well, they never did run very big to the barrel, but—ouch!—I agree!"

So he sat down and drew up the document. But Dan'l Webster kept his hand on his coat collar all the time.

"And now may I go?" said the stranger, quite humble, when Dan'l 'd seen the document's in proper and legal form.

"Go?" said Dan'l, giving him another shake. "I'm still trying to figure out what I'll do with you. For you've settled the costs of the case, but you haven't settled with me. I think I'll take you back to Marshfield," he said, kind of reflective. "I've got a ram there named Goliath that can butt through an iron door. I'd kind of like to turn you loose in his field and see what he'd do."

Well, with that the stranger began to beg and to plead. And he begged and he pled so humble that finally Dan'l, who was naturally kindhearted, agreed to let him go. The stranger seemed terrible grateful for that and said, just to show they were friends, he'd tell Dan'l's fortune before leaving. So Dan'l agreed to that, though he didn't take much stock in fortune-tellers ordinarily. But, naturally, the stranger was a little different.

Well, he pried and he peered at the lines in Dan'l's hands. And he told him one thing and another that was quite remarkable. But they were all in the past.

"Yes, all that's true, and it happened," said Dan'l Webster. "But what's to come in the future?"

The stranger grinned, kind of happily, and shook his head.

"The future's not as you think it," he said. "It's dark. You have a great ambition, Mr. Webster."

"I have," said Dan'l firmly, for everybody knew he wanted to be President.

"It seems almost within your grasp," said the stranger, "but you will not attain it. Lesser men will be made President and you will be passed over."

"And, if I am, I'll still be Daniel Webster," said Dan'l. "Say on."

"You have two strong sons," said the stranger, shaking his head. "You look to found a line. But each will die in war and neither reach greatness."

"Live or die, they are still my sons," said Dan'l Webster. "Say on."

"You have made great speeches," said the stranger. "You will make more."

"Ah," said Dan'l Webster.

"But the last great speech you make will turn many of your own against you," said the stranger. "They will call you Ichabod; they will call you by other names. Even in New England some will say you have turned your coat and sold your country, and their voices will be loud against you till you die."

"So it is an honest speech, it does not matter what men say," said Dan'l Webster. Then he looked at the stranger and their glances locked.

"One question," he said. "I have fought for the Union all my life. Will I see that fight won against those who would tear it apart?"

"Not while you live," said the stranger grimly, "but it will be won. And after you are dead, there are thousands who will fight for your cause, because of words that you spoke."

"Why, then, you long-barreled, slab-sided, lantern-jawed, fortune-telling note shaver," said Dan'l Webster with a great roar of laughter, "be off with you to your own place before I put my mark on you! For, by the thirteen original colonies, I'd go to the Pit itself to save the Union!"

And with that he drew back his foot for a kick that would have stunned a horse. It was only the tip of his shoe that caught the stranger, but he went flying out of the door with his collecting box under his arm.

"And now," said Dan'l Webster, seeing Jabez Stone beginning to rouse from his swoon, "let's see what's left in the jug, for it's dry work talking all night. I hope there's pie for breakfast, Neighbor Stone."

But they say that whenever the devil comes near Marshfield, even now, he gives it a wide berth. And he hasn't been seen in the state of New Hampshire from that day to this. I'm not talking about Massachusetts or Vermont.

1938: *from Harper's Magazine*

THE HAPPIEST MAN ON EARTH

by Albert Maltz, who has been singularly successful in expressing, both in plays and stories, the impact of economic conditions on the worker. He was born in Brooklyn in 1908 and graduated from Columbia in 1930. After attending the Yale School of Drama he wrote the controversial play Merry-Go-Round *in collaboration with George Sklar. This was followed by* Peace on Earth *with George Sklar, and* The Black Pit, *both produced by the Theatre Union. He also won the contest for one-act plays instituted by the New Theatre League with* Private Hicks. *The versatile Mr. Maltz has been successful in several media—the short story, the novel, as a writer for the films, and as a frequent contributor to leading magazines, including* Scribner's, Harper's, Southern Review. *His contributions to the movie world include* This Gun for Hire, Destination Tokyo, The Naked City, *and* The House I Live In, *which received a special award from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences. Two of his more recent novels are* The Cross and the Arrow *and* The Journey of Simon McKeever.

Jesse felt ready to weep. He had been sitting in the shanty waiting for Tom to appear, grateful for the chance to rest his injured foot, quietly, joyously anticipating the moment when Tom would say, "Why, of course, Jesse, you can start whenever you're ready!"

For two weeks he had been pushing himself, from Kansas City, Missouri, to Tulsa, Oklahoma, through nights of rain and a week of scorching sun, without sleep or a decent meal, sustained by the vision of that one moment. And then Tom had come into the office. He had come in quickly, holding a sheaf of papers in his hand; he had glanced at Jesse only casually, it was true—but long enough. He had not known him. He had turned away. . . . And Tom Brackett was his brother-in-law.

Was it his clothes? Jesse knew he looked terrible. He had tried to spruce

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up at a drinking fountain in the park, but even that had gone badly; in his excitement he had cut himself shaving, an ugly gash down the side of his cheek. And nothing could get the red gumbo dust out of his suit even though he had slapped himself till both arms were worn out. . . . Or was it just that he *had* changed so much?

True, they hadn't seen each other for five years; but Tom looked five years older, that was all. He was still Tom. God! was *he* so different?

Brackett finished his telephone call. He leaned back in his swivel chair and glanced over at Jesse with small, clear blue eyes that were suspicious and unfriendly. He was a heavy, paunchy man of forty-five, auburn-haired, rather dour-looking; his face was meaty, his features pronounced and fearful, his nose somewhat bulbous and reddish-hued at the tip. He looked like a solid, decent, capable businessman who was commander of his local branch of the American Legion—which he was. He surveyed Jesse with cold indifference, manifestly unwilling to spend time on him. Even the way he chewed his toothpick seemed contemptuous to Jesse.

"Yes?" Brackett said suddenly. "What do you want?"

His voice was decent enough, Jesse admitted. He had expected it to be worse. He moved up to the wooden counter that partitioned the shanty. He thrust a hand nervously through his tangled hair.

"I guess you don't recognize me, Tom," he said falteringly, "I'm Jesse Fulton."

"Huh?" Brackett said. That was all.

"Yes, I am, and Ella sends you her love."

Brackett rose and walked over to the counter until they were face to face. He surveyed Fulton incredulously, trying to measure the resemblance to his brother-in-law as he remembered him. This man was tall, about thirty. That fitted! He had straight good features and a lank erect body. That was right too. But the face was too gaunt, the body too spiny under the baggy clothes for him to be sure. His brother-in-law had been a solid, strong young man with muscle and beef to him. It was like looking at a faded, badly taken photograph and trying to recognize the subject: the resemblance was there but the difference was tremendous. He searched the eyes. They at least seemed definitely familiar, gray, with a curiously shy but decent look in them. He had liked that about Fulton.

Jesse stood quiet. Inside he was seething. Brackett was like a man examining a piece of broken-down horseflesh; there was a look of pure pity in his eyes. It made Jesse furious. He knew he wasn't as far gone as all that.

"Yes, I believe you are," Brackett said finally, "but you sure have changed."

"By God, it's five years, ain't it?" Jesse said resentfully. "You only saw me a couple of times anyway." Then, to himself, with his lips locked to-

gether, in mingled vehemence and shame, What if I have changed? Don't everybody? I ain't no corpse.

"You was solid-looking," Brackett continued softly, in the same tone of incredulous wonder. "You lost weight, I guess?"

Jesse kept silent. He needed Brackett too much to risk antagonizing him. But it was only by deliberate effort that he could keep from boiling over. The pause lengthened, became painful. Brackett flushed. "Jiminy Christmas, excuse me," he burst out in apology. He jerked the counter up. "Come in. Take a seat. Good God, boy"—he grasped Jesse's hand and shook it—"I *am* glad to see you; don't think anything else! You just looked so peaked."

"It's all right," Jesse murmured. He sat down, thrusting his hand through his curly, tangled hair.

"Why are you limping?"

"I stepped on a stone; it jagged a hole through my shoe." Jesse pulled his feet back under the chair. He was ashamed of his shoes. They had come from the relief originally, and two weeks on the road had about finished them. All morning, with a kind of delicious, foolish solemnity, he had been vowing to himself that before anything else, before even a suit of clothes, he was going to buy himself a brand-new strong pair of shoes.

Brackett kept his eyes off Jesse's feet. He knew what was bothering the boy and it filled his heart with pity. The whole thing was appalling. He had never seen anyone who looked more down and out. His sister had been writing to him every week, but she hadn't told him they were as badly off as this.

"Well now; listen," Brackett began, "tell me things. How's Ella?"

"Oh, she's pretty good," Jesse replied absently. He had a soft, pleasing, rather shy voice that went with his soft gray eyes. He was worrying over how to get started.

"And the kids?"

"Oh, they're fine. . . . Well, you know," Jesse added, becoming more attentive, "the young one has to wear a brace. He can't run around, you know. But he's smart. He draws pictures and he does things, you know."

"Yes," Brackett said. "That's good." He hesitated. There was a moment's silence. Jesse fidgeted in his chair. Now that the time had arrived, he felt awkward. Brackett leaned forward and put his hand on Jesse's knee. "Ella didn't tell me things were so bad for you, Jesse. I might have helped."

"Well, goodness," Jesse returned softly, "you been having your own troubles, ain't you?"

"Yes." Brackett leaned back. His ruddy face became mournful and darkly bitter. "You know I lost my hardware shop?"

"Well sure, of course," Jesse answered, surprised. "You wrote us. That's what I mean."

"I forgot," Brackett said. "I keep on being surprised over it myself. Not that it was worth much," he added bitterly. "It was running downhill for three years. I guess I just wanted it because it was mine." He laughed pointlessly, without mirth. "Well, tell me about yourself," he asked. "What happened to the job you had?"

Jesse burst out abruptly, with agitation, "Let it wait, Tom, I got something on my mind."

"It ain't you and Ella?" Brackett interrupted anxiously.

"Why no!" Jesse sat back. "Why however did you come to think that? Why Ella and me——" He stopped, laughing. "Why, Tom, I'm just crazy about Ella. Why she's just wonderful. She's just my whole life, Tom."

"Excuse me. Forget it." Brackett chuckled uncomfortably, turned away. The naked intensity of the youth's burst of love had upset him. It made him wish savagely that he could do something for them. They were both too decent to have had it so hard. Ella was like this boy too, shy and a little soft.

"Tom, listen," Jesse said, "I come here on purpose." He thrust his hand through his hair. "I want you to help me."

"Damn it, boy," Brackett groaned. He had been expecting this. "I can't much. I only get thirty-five a week and I'm damn grateful for it."

"Sure, I know," Jesse emphasized excitedly. He was feeling once again the wild, delicious agitation that had possessed him in the early hours of the morning. "I know you can't help us with money! But we met a man who works for you! He was in our city! He said you could give me a job!"

"Who said?"

"Oh, why didn't you tell me?" Jesse burst out reproachfully. "Why as soon as I heard it I started out. For two weeks now I been pushing ahead like crazy."

Brackett groaned aloud. "You come walking from Kansas City in two weeks so I could give you a job?"

"Sure, Tom, of course. What else could I do?"

"God Almighty, there ain't no jobs, Jesse! It's a slack season. And you don't know this oil business. It's special. I got my Legion friends here but they couldn't do nothing now. Don't you think I'd ask for you as soon as there was a chance?"

Jesse felt stunned. The hope of the last two weeks seemed rolling up into a ball of agony in his stomach. Then, frantically, he cried, "But listen, this man said *you* could hire! He *told* me! He drives trucks for you! He said you *always* need men!"

"Oh! . . . You mean *my* department?" Brackett said in a low voice.

"*Yes*, Tom. That's it!"

"Oh no, you don't want to work in my department," Brackett told him in the same low voice. "You don't know what it is."

"Yes, I do," Jesse insisted. "He told me all about it, Tom. You're a dispatcher, ain't you? You send the dynamite trucks out?"

"Who was the man, Jesse?"

"Everett, Everett, I think."

"Egbert? Man about my size?" Brackett asked slowly.

"Yes, Egbert. He wasn't a phony, was he?"

Brackett laughed. For the second time his laughter was curiously without mirth. "No, he wasn't a phony." Then, in a changed voice: "Jiminy, boy, you should have asked me before you trekked all the way down here."

"Oh, I didn't want to," Jesse explained with naïve cunning. "I knew you'd say no. He told me it was risky work, Tom. But I don't care."

Brackett locked his fingers together. His solid, meaty face became very hard. "I'm going to say no anyway, Jesse."

Jesse cried out. It had not occurred to him that Brackett would not agree. It had seemed as though reaching Tulsa were the only problem he had to face. "Oh no," he begged, "you can't. Ain't there any jobs, Tom?"

"Sure, there's jobs. There's even Egbert's job if you want it."

"He's quit?"

"He's dead!"

"Oh!"

"On the job, Jesse. Last night if you want to know."

"Oh!" . . . Then, "I don't care!"

"Now you listen to me," Brackett said. "I'll tell you a few things that you should have asked before you started out. It ain't dynamite you drive. They don't use anything as safe as dynamite in drilling oil wells. They wish they could, but they can't. It's nitroglycerin! Soup!"

"But I know," Jesse told him reassuringly. "He advised me, Tom. You don't have to think I don't know."

"Shut up a minute," Brackett ordered angrily. "Listen! You just have to *look* at this soup, see? You just *cough* loud and it blows! You know how they transport it? In a can that's shaped like this, see, like a fan? That's to give room for compartments, because each compartment has to be lined with rubber. That's the only way you can even *think* of handling it."

"Listen, Tom——"

"Now wait a minute, Jesse. For God's sake just put your mind to this. I know you had your heart set on a job, but you've got to understand. This stuff goes only in special trucks! At night! They got to follow a special route. They can't go through any city! If they lay over, it's got to be in a special garage! Don't you see what that means? Don't that tell you how dangerous it is?"

"I'll drive careful," Jesse said. "I know how to handle a truck. I'll drive slow."

Brackett groaned. "Do you think Egbert didn't drive careful or know how to handle a truck?"

"Tom," Jesse said earnestly, "you can't scare me. I got my mind fixed on only one thing: Egbert said he was getting a dollar a mile. He was making five to six hundred dollars a month for half a month's work, he said. Can I get the same?"

"Sure, you can get the same," Brackett told him savagely. "A dollar a mile. It's easy. But why do you think the company has to pay so much? It's easy —until you run over a stone that your headlights didn't pick out, like Egbert did. Or get a blowout! Or get something in your eye, so the wheel twists and you jar the truck! Or any other God damn thing that nobody ever knows! We can't ask Egbert what happened to him. There's no truck to give any evidence. There's no corpse. There's nothing! Maybe tomorrow somebody 'll find a piece of twisted steel way off in a cornfield. But we never find the driver. Not even a fingernail. All we know is that he don't come in on schedule. Then we wait for the police to call us. You know what happened last night? Something went wrong on a bridge. Maybe Egbert was nervous. Maybe he brushed the side with his fender. Only there's no bridge any more. No truck. No Egbert. Do you understand now? That's what you get for your God damn dollar a mile!"

There was a moment of silence. Jesse sat twiting his long thin hands. His mouth was sagging open, his face was agonized. Then he shut his eyes and spoke softly. "I don't care about that, Tom. You told me. Now you got to be good to me and give me the job."

Brackett slapped the palm of his hand down on his desk. "No!"

"Listen, Tom," Jesse said softly, "you just don't understand." He opened his eyes. They were filled with tears. They made Brackett turn away. "Just look at me, Tom. Don't that tell you enough? What did you think of me when you first saw me? You thought: 'Why don't that bum go away and stop panhandling?' Didn't you, Tom? Tom, I just can't live like this any more. I got to be able to walk down the street with my head up."

"You're crazy," Brackett muttered. "Every year there's one out of five drivers gets killed. That's the average. What's worth that?"

"Is my life worth anything now? We're just starving at home, Tom. They ain't put us back on relief yet."

"Then you should have told me," Brackett exclaimed harshly. "It's your own damn fault. A man has no right to have false pride when his family ain't eating. I'll borrow some money and we'll telegraph it to Ella. Then you go home and get back on relief."

"And then what?"

"And then wait, God damn it! You're no old man. You got no right to throw your life away. Sometime you'll get a job."

"No!" Jesse jumped up. "No. I believed that too. But I don't now," he cried passionately. "I ain't getting a job no more than you're getting your hardware store back. I lost my skill, Tom. Linotyping is skilled work. I'm rusty now. I've been six years on relief. The only work I've had is pick and shovel. When I got that job this spring I was supposed to be an A-1 man. But I wasn't. And they got new machines now. As soon as the slack started they let me out."

"So what?" Brackett said harshly. "Ain't there other jobs?"

"How do I know?" Jesse replied. "There ain't been one for six years. I'd even be afraid to take one now. It's been too hard waiting so many weeks to get back on relief."

"Well you got to have some courage," Brackett shouted. "You've got to keep up hope."

"I got all the courage you want," Jesse retorted vehemently, "but no, I ain't got no hope. The hope was dried up in me in six years' waiting. You're the only hope I got."

"You're crazy," Brackett muttered. "I won't do it. For God's sake think of Ella for a minute."

"Don't you *know* I'm thinking about her?" Jesse asked softly. He plucked at Brackett's sleeve. "That's what decided me, Tom." His voice became muted into a hushed, pained whisper. "The night Egbert was at our house I looked at Ella like I'd seen her for the first time. *She ain't pretty any more, Tom!*" Brackett jerked his head and moved away. Jesse followed him, taking a deep, sobbing breath. "Don't that tell you, Tom? Ella was like a little doll or something, you remember. I couldn't walk down the street without somebody turning to look at her. She ain't twenty-nine yet, Tom, and she ain't pretty no more."

Brackett sat down with his shoulders hunched up wearily. He gripped his hands together and sat leaning forward, staring at the floor.

Jesse stood over him, his gaunt face flushed with emotion, almost unpleasant in its look of pleading and bitter humility. "I ain't done right for Ella, Tom. Ella deserved better. This is the only chance I see in my whole life to do something for her. I've just been a failure."

"Don't talk nonsense," Brackett commented without rancor. "You ain't a failure. No more than me. There's millions of men in the identical situation. It's just the depression, or the recession, or the God damn New Deal, or . . . !" He swore and lapsed into silence.

"Oh no," Jesse corrected him in a knowing, sorrowful tone, "those things maybe excuse other men. But not me. It was up to me to do better. This is my own fault!"

"Oh, beans!" Brackett said. "It's more sun spots than it's you!"

Jesse's face turned an unhealthy mottled red. It looked swollen. "Well I

don't care," he cried wildly. "I don't care! You got to give me this! I got to lift my head up. I went through one stretch of hell but I can't go through another. You want me to keep looking at my little boy's legs and tell myself if I had a job he wouldn't be like that? Every time he walks he says to me, 'I got soft bones from the rickets and you give it to me because you didn't feed me right.' Jesus Christ, Tom, you think I'm going to sit there and watch him like that another six years?"

Brackett leaped to his feet. "So what if you do?" he shouted. "You say you're thinking about Ella. How's she going to like it when you get killed?"

"Maybe I won't," Jesse pleaded. "I've got to have some luck sometime."

"That's what they all think," Brackett replied scornfully. "When you take this job your luck is a question mark. The only thing certain is that sooner or later you get killed."

"Okay then," Jesse shouted back. "Then I do! But meanwhile I got something, don't I? I can buy a pair of shoes. Look at me! I can buy a suit that don't say 'Relief' by the way it fits. I can smoke cigarettes. I can buy some candy for the kids. I can eat some myself. Yes, by God, I want to eat some candy. I want a glass of beer once a day. I want Ella dressed up. I want her to eat meat three times a week, four times maybe. I want to take my family to the movies."

Brackett sat down. "Oh, shut up," he said wearily.

"No," Jesse told him softly, passionately, "you can't get rid of me. Listen, Tom," he pleaded, "I got it all figured out. On six hundred a month look how much I can save! If I last only three months, look how much it is—a thousand dollars—more! And maybe I'll last longer. Maybe a couple years. I can fix Ella up for life!"

"You said it," Brackett interposed. "I suppose you think she'll enjoy living when you're on a job like that?"

"I got it all figured out," Jesse answered excitedly. "She don't know, see? I tell her I make only forty. You put the rest in a bank account for her, Tom."

"Oh, shut up," Brackett said. "You think you'll be happy? Every minute, waking and sleeping, you'll be wondering if tomorrow you'll be dead. And the worst days will be your days off, when you're not driving. They have to give you every other day free to get your nerve back. And you lay around the house eating your heart out. That's how happy you'll be."

Jesse laughed. "I'll be happy! Don't you worry, I'll be so happy, I'll be singing. Lord God, Tom, I'm going to feel *proud* of myself for the first time in seven years!"

"Oh, shut up, shut up," Brackett said.

The little shanty became silent. After a moment Jesse whispered: "You got to, Tom. You got to. You got to."

Again there was silence. Brackett raised both hands to his head, pressing the palms against his temples.

"Tom, Tom——" Jesse said.

Brackett sighed. "Oh, God damn it," he said finally, "all right, I'll take you on, God help me." His voice was low, hoarse, infinitely weary. "If you're ready to drive tonight, you can drive tonight."

Jesse didn't answer. He couldn't. Brackett looked up. The tears were running down Jesse's face. He was swallowing and trying to speak, but only making an absurd, gasping noise.

"I'll send a wire to Ella," Brackett said in the same hoarse, weary voice. "I'll tell her you got a job, and you'll send her fare in a couple of days. You'll have some money then—that is, if you last the week out, you jackass!"

Jesse only nodded. His heart felt so close to bursting that he pressed both hands against it, as though to hold it locked within his breast.

"Come back here at six o'clock," Brackett said. "Here's some money. Eat a good meal."

"Thanks," Jesse whispered.

"Wait a minute," Brackett said. "Here's my address." He wrote it on a piece of paper. "Take any car going that way. Ask the conductor where to get off. Take a bath and get some sleep."

"Thanks," Jesse said. "Thanks, Tom."

"Oh, get out of here," Brackett said.

"Tom."

"What?"

"I just——" Jesse stopped. Brackett saw his face. The eyes were still glistening with tears, but the gaunt face was shining now with a kind of fierce radiance.

Brackett turned away. "I'm busy," he said.

Jesse went out. The wet film blinded him but the whole world seemed to have turned golden. He limped slowly, with the blood pounding his temples and a wild, incommunicable joy in his heart. "I'm the happiest man in the world," he whispered to himself. "I'm the happiest man on the whole earth."

Brackett sat watching till finally Jesse turned the corner of the alley and disappeared. Then he hunched himself over, with his head in his hands. His heart was beating painfully, like something old and clogged. He listened to it as it beat. He sat in desperate tranquillity, gripping his head in his hands.

1939: *from Harper's Magazine*

BARN BURNING

by William Faulkner, who has been the recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize for Literature, 1949, and has appeared frequently in the O. Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories. *"Barn Burning," which appears here, was the first-prize story for 1939; Mr. Faulkner won another first prize in 1949 with "A Courtship." He is also represented in the 1931, 1932, 1934, 1936, 1940, 1941, 1942, 1956, and 1957 volumes of this series. Most of his many novels and collections of short stories are linked in one way or another with the legendary history of the imaginary county of Yoknapatawpha and its county seat, Jefferson. His books include* The Sound and the Fury; As I Lay Dying; Sanctuary; Absalom, Absalom; Intruder in the Dust; Light in August; Requiem for a Nun; A Fable; The Hamlet, *and his last book,* The Reivers. *The world mourned his death in 1962.*

The store in which the Justice of the Peace's court was sitting smelled of cheese. The boy, crouched on his nail keg at the back of the crowded room, knew he smelled cheese, and more: from where he sat he could see the ranked shelves close-packed with the solid, squat, dynamic shapes of tin cans whose labels his stomach read, not from the lettering which meant nothing to his mind but from the scarlet devils and the silver curve of fish—this, the cheese which he knew he smelled and the hermetic meat which his intestines believed he smelled coming in intermittent gusts momentary and brief between the other constant one, the smell and sense just a little of fear because mostly of despair and grief, the old fierce pull of blood. He could not see the table where the Justice sat and before which his father and his father's enemy (*our enemy,* he thought in that despair; *ourn! mine and hisn both! He's my father!*) stood, but he could hear them, the two of them that is, because his father had said no word yet:

"But what proof have you, Mr. Harris?"

"I told you. The hog got into my corn. I caught it up and sent it back

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to him. He had no fence that would hold it. I told him so, warned him. The next time I put the hog in my pen. When he came to get it I gave him enough wire to patch up his pen. The next time I put the hog up and kept it. I rode down to his house and saw the wire I gave him still rolled onto the spool in his yard. I told him he could have the hog when he paid me a dollar pound fee. That evening a nigger came with the dollar and got the hog. He was a strange nigger. He said, 'He say to tell you wood and hay kin burn.' I said, 'What?' 'That whut he say to tell you,' the nigger said. 'Wood and hay kin burn.' That night my barn burned. I got the stock out but I lost the barn."

"Where is the nigger? Have you got him?"

"He was a strange nigger, I tell you. I don't know what became of him."

"But that's not proof. Don't you see that's not proof?"

"Get that boy up here. He knows." For a moment the boy thought too that the man meant his older brother until Harris said, "Not him. The little one. The boy"; and crouching, small for his age, small and wiry like his father, in patched and faded jeans even too small for him, with straight, uncombed, brown hair and eyes gray and wild as storm scud, he saw the men between himself and the table part and become a lane of grim faces, at the end of which he saw the Justice, a shabby, collarless, graying man in spectacles, beckoning him. He felt no floor under his bare feet; he seemed to walk beneath the palpable weight of the grim turning faces. His father, stiff in his black Sunday coat donned not for the trial but for the moving, did not even look at him. *He aims for me to lie,* he thought, again with that frantic grief and despair. *And I will have to do hit.*

"What's your name, boy?" the Justice said.

"Colonel Sartoris Snopes," the boy whispered.

"Hey?" the Justice said. "Talk louder. Colonel Sartoris? I reckon anybody named for Colonel Sartoris in this country can't help but tell the truth, can they?" The boy said nothing. *Enemy! Enemy!* he thought; for a moment he could not even see, could not see that the Justice's face was kindly nor discern that his voice was troubled when he spoke to the man named Harris: "Do you want me to question this boy?" But he could hear, and during those subsequent long seconds while there was absolutely no sound in the crowded little room save that of quiet and intent breathing, it was as if he had swung outward at the end of a grapevine, over a ravine, and at the top of the swing had been caught in a prolonged instant of mesmerized gravity, weightless in time.

"No!" Harris said violently, explosively. "Damnation! Send him out of here!" Now time, the fluid world, rushed beneath him again, the voices coming to him again through the smell of cheese and sealed meat, the fear and despair and the old grief of blood:

"This case is closed. I can't find against you, Snopes, but I can give you advice. Leave this country and don't come back to it."

His father spoke for the first time, his voice cold and harsh, level, without emphasis: "I aim to. I don't figure to stay in a country among people who——" He said something unprintable and vile, addressed to no one.

"That'll do," the Justice said. "Take your wagon and get out of this country before dark. Case dismissed."

His father turned, and he followed the stiff black coat, the wiry figure walking a little stiffly from where a Confederate provost's man's musket ball had taken him in the heel on a stolen horse thirty years ago, followed the two backs now, since his older brother had appeared from somewhere in the crowd, no taller than the father but thicker, chewing tobacco steadily, between the two lines of grim-faced men and out of the store and across the worn gallery and down the sagging steps and among the dogs and half-grown boys in the mild May dust, where as he passed a voice hissed:

"Barn burner!"

Again he could not see, whirling; there was a face in a red haze, moonlike, bigger than the full moon, the owner of it half again his size, he leaping in the red haze toward the face, feeling no blow, feeling no shock when his head struck the earth, scrabbling up and leaping again, feeling no blow this time either and tasting no blood, scrabbling up to see the other boy in full flight and himself already leaping into pursuit as his father's hand jerked him back, the harsh, cold voice speaking above him: "Go get in the wagon."

It stood in a grove of locusts and mulberries across the road. His two hulking sisters in their Sunday dresses and his mother and her sister in calico and sunbonnets were already in it, sitting on and among the sorry residue of the dozen and more movings which even the boy could remember—the battered stove, the broken beds and chairs, the clock inlaid with mother-of-pearl, which would not run, stopped at some fourteen minutes past two o'clock of a dead and forgotten day and time, which had been his mother's dowry. She was crying, though when she saw him she drew her sleeve across her face and began to descend from the wagon. "Get back," the father said.

"He's hurt. I got to get some water and wash his——"

"Get back in the wagon," his father said. He got in too, over the tail gate. His father mounted to the seat where the older brother already sat and struck the gaunt mules two savage blows with the peeled willow, but without heat. It was not even sadistic; it was exactly that same quality which in later years would cause his descendants to overrun the engine before putting a motorcar into motion, striking and reining back in the same movement. The wagon went on, the store with its quiet crowd of grimly watching men dropped behind; a curve in the road hid it. *Forever,* he thought. *Maybe he's*

done satisfied now, now that he has . . . stopping himself, not to say it aloud even to himself. His mother's hand touched his shoulder.

"Does hit hurt?" she said.

"Naw," he said. "Hit don't hurt. Lemme be."

"Can't you wipe some of the blood off before hit dries?"

"I'll wash tonight," he said. "Lemme be, I tell you."

The wagon went on. He did not know where they were going. None of them ever did or ever asked, because it was always somewhere, always a house of sorts waiting for them a day or two days or even three days away. Likely his father had already arranged to make a crop on another farm before he . . . Again he had to stop himself. He (the father) always did. There was something about his wolf-like independence and even courage when the advantage was at least neutral which impressed strangers, as if they got from his latent ravening ferocity not so much a sense of dependability as a feeling that his ferocious conviction in the rightness of his own actions would be of advantage to all whose interest lay with his.

That night they camped in a grove of oaks and beeches where a spring ran. The nights were still cool and they had a fire against it, of a rail lifted from a near-by fence and cut into lengths—a small fire, neat, niggard almost, a shrewd fire; such fires were his father's habit and custom always, even in freezing weather. Older, the boy might have remarked this and wondered why not a big one; why should not a man who had not only seen the waste and extravagance of war, but who had in his blood an inherent voracious prodigality with material not his own, have burned everything in sight? Then he might have gone a step farther and thought that that was the reason: that niggard blaze was the living fruit of nights passed during those four years in the woods hiding from all men, blue or gray, with his strings of horses (captured horses, he called them). And older still, he might have divined the true reason: that the element of fire spoke to some deep mainspring of his father's being, as the element of steel or of powder spoke to other men, as the one weapon for the preservation of integrity, else breath were not worth the breathing, and hence to be regarded with respect and used with discretion.

But he did not think this now and he had seen those same niggard blazes all his life. He merely ate his supper beside it and was already half asleep over his iron plate when his father called him, and once more he followed the stiff back, the stiff and ruthless limp, up the slope and onto the starlit road where, turning, he could see his father against the stars but without face or depth—a shape black, flat and bloodless as though cut from tin in the iron folds of the frockcoat which had not been made for him, the voice harsh like tin and without heat like tin:

"You were fixing to tell them. You would have told him." He didn't an-

swer. His father struck him with the flat of his hand on the side of the head, hard but without heat, exactly as he had struck the two mules at the store, exactly as he would strike either of them with any stick in order to kill a horsefly, his voice still without heat or anger: "You're getting to be a man. You got to learn. You got to learn to stick to your own blood or you ain't going to have any blood to stick to you. Do you think either of them, any man there this morning, would? Don't you know all they wanted was a chance to get at me because they knew I had them beat? Eh?" Later, twenty years later, he was to tell himself, "If I had said they wanted only truth, justice, he would have hit me again." But now he said nothing. He was not crying. He just stood there. "Answer me," his father said.

"Yes," he whispered. His father turned.

"Get on to bed. We'll be there tomorrow."

Tomorrow they were there. In the early afternoon the wagon stopped before a paintless two-room house identical almost with the dozen others it had stopped before even in the boy's ten years, and again, as on the other dozen occasions, his mother and aunt got down and began to unload the wagon, although his two sisters and his father and brother had not moved.

"Likely hit ain't fitten for hawgs," one of the sisters said.

"Nevertheless, fit it will and you'll hog it and like it," his father said. "Get out of them chairs and help your ma unload."

The two sisters got down, big, bovine, in a flutter of cheap ribbons; one of them drew from the jumbled wagon bed a battered lantern, the other a worn broom. His father handed the reins to the older son and began to climb stiffly over the wheel. "When they get unloaded, take the team to the barn and feed them." Then he said, and at first the boy thought he was still speaking to his brother: "Come with me."

"Me?" he said.

"Yes," his father said. "You."

"Abner," his mother said. His father paused and looked back—the harsh level stare beneath the shaggy, graying, irascible brows.

"I reckon I'll have a word with the man that aims to begin tomorrow owning me body and soul for the next eight months."

They went back up the road. A week ago—or before last night, that is—he would have asked where they were going, but not now. His father had struck him before last night but never before had he paused afterward to explain why; it was as if the blow and the following calm outrageous voice still rang, repercussed, divulging nothing to him save the terrible handicap of being young, the light weight of his few years, just heavy enough to prevent his soaring free of the world as it seemed to be ordered but not heavy enough to keep him footed solid in it, to resist it and try to change the course of its events.

Presently he could see the grove of oaks and cedars and the other flowering trees and shrubs where the house would be, though not the house yet. They walked beside a fence massed with honeysuckle and Cherokee roses and came to a gate swinging open between two brick pillars, and now, beyond a sweep of drive, he saw the house for the first time and at that instant he forgot his father and the terror and despair both, and even when he remembered his father again (who had not stopped) the terror and despair did not return. Because, for all the twelve movings, they had sojourned until now in a poor country, a land of small farms and fields and houses, and he had never seen a house like this before. *Hit's big as a courthouse,* he thought quietly, with a surge of peace and joy whose reason he could not have thought into words, being too young for that: *They are safe from him. People whose lives are a part of this peace and dignity are beyond his touch; he no more to them than a buzzing wasp, capable of stinging for a little moment but that's all; the spell of this peace and dignity rendering even the barns and stable and cribs which belong to it impervious to the puny flames he might contrive* . . . this, the peace and joy, ebbing for an instant as he looked again at the stiff black back, the stiff and implacable limp of the figure which was not dwarfed by the house, for the reason that it had never looked big anywhere and which now, against this serene columned backdrop, had more than ever that impervious quality of something cut ruthlessly from tin, depthless, as though, sidewise to the sun, it would cast no shadow. Watching him, the boy remarked the absolutely undeviating course which his father held and saw the stiff foot come squarely down in a pile of fresh droppings where a horse had stood in the drive and which his father could have avoided by a simple change of stride. But it ebbed only for a moment, though he could not have thought this into words either, walking on in the spell of the house, which he could even want but without envy, without sorrow, certainly never with that ravening and jealous rage which unknown to him walked in the ironlike black coat before him: *Maybe he will feel it too. Maybe it will even change him now from what maybe he couldn't help but be.*

They crossed the portico. Now he could hear his father's stiff foot as it came down on the boards with clocklike finality, a sound out of all proportion to the displacement of the body it bore and which was not dwarfed either by the white door before it, as though it had attained to a sort of vicious and ravening minimum not to be dwarfed by anything—the flat, wide, black hat, the formal coat of broadcloth which had once been black but which had now that friction-glazed greenish cast of the bodies of old houseflies, the lifted sleeve which was too large, the lifted hand like a curled claw. The door opened so promptly that the boy knew the Negro must have been watching them all the time, an old man with neat grizzled hair, in a linen jacket, who stood barring the door with his body, saying, "Wipe

yo foots, white man, fo you come in here. Major ain't home nohow."

"Get out of my way, nigger," his father said, without heat too, flinging the door back and the Negro also and entering, his hat still on his head. And now the boy saw the prints of the stiff foot on the doorjamb and saw them appear on the pale rug behind the machinelike deliberation of the foot which seemed to bear (or transmit) twice the weight which the body compassed. The Negro was shouting "Miss Lula! Miss Lula!" somewhere behind them; then the boy, deluged as though by a warm wave by a suave turn of carpeted stair and a pendant glitter of chandeliers and a mute gleam of gold frames, heard the swift feet and saw her too, a lady—perhaps he had never seen her like before either—in a gray smooth gown with lace at the throat and an apron tied at the waist and the sleeves turned back, wiping cake or biscuit dough from her hands with a towel as she came up the hall, looking not at his father at all but at the tracks on the blond rug with an expression of incredulous amazement.

"I tried," the Negro cried. "I tole him to——"

"Will you please go away?" she said in a shaking voice. "Major de Spain is not at home. Will you please go away?"

His father had not spoken again. He did not speak again. He did not even look at her. He just stood stiff in the center of the rug, in his hat, the shaggy iron-gray brows twitching slightly above the pebble-colored eyes as he appeared to examine the house with brief deliberation. Then with the same deliberation he turned; the boy watched him pivot on the good leg and saw the stiff foot drag round the arc of the turning, leaving a final long and fading smear. His father never looked at it, he never once looked down at the rug. The Negro held the door. It closed behind them, upon the hysteric and indistinguishable woman-wail. His father stopped at the top of the steps and scraped his boot clean on the edge of it. At the gate he stopped again. He stood for a moment, planted stiffly on the stiff foot, looking back at the house. "Pretty and white, ain't it?" he said. "That's sweat. Nigger sweat. Maybe it ain't white enough yet to suit him. Maybe he wants to mix some white sweat with it."

Two hours later the boy was chopping wood behind the house within which his mother and aunt and the two sisters (the mother and aunt, not the two girls, he knew that; even at this distance and muffled by walls the flat loud voices of the two girls emanated an incorrigible idle inertia) were setting up the stove to prepare a meal, when he heard the hooves and saw the linen-clad man on a fine sorrel mare, whom he recognized even before he saw the rolled rug in front of the Negro youth following on a fat bay carriage horse—a suffused, angry face vanishing, still at full gallop, beyond the corner of the house where his father and brother were sitting in the two tilted chairs; and a moment later, almost before he could have put the ax

down, he heard the hooves again and watched the sorrel mare go back out of the yard, already galloping again. Then his father began to shout one of the sisters' names, who presently emerged backward from the kitchen door, dragging the rolled rug along the ground by one end while the other sister walked behind it.

"If you ain't going to tote, go on and set up the washpot," the first said.

"You, Sarty!" the second shouted. "Set up the washpot!" His father appeared at the door, framed against that shabbiness as he had been against that other bland perfection, impervious to either, the mother's anxious face at his shoulder.

"Go on," the father said. "Pick it up." The two sisters stooped, broad, lethargic; stooping, they presented an incredible expanse of pale cloth and a flutter of tawdry ribbons.

"If I thought enough of a rug to have to git hit all the way from France I wouldn't keep hit where folks coming in would have to tromp on hit," the first said. They raised the rug.

"Abner," the mother said. "Let me do it."

"You go back and git dinner," his father said. "I'll tend to this."

From the woodpile through the rest of the afternoon the boy watched them, the rug spread flat in the dust beside the bubbling washpot, the two sisters stooping over it with that profound and lethargic reluctance, while the father stood over them in turn, implacable and grim, driving them though never raising his voice again. He could smell the harsh homemade lye they were using; he saw his mother come to the door once and look toward them with an expression not anxious now but very like despair; he saw his father turn, and he fell to with the ax and saw from the corner of his eye his father raise from the ground a flattish fragment of field stone and examine it and return to the pot, and this time his mother actually spoke: "Abner. Abner. Please don't. Please, Abner."

Then he was done too. It was dusk; the whippoorwills had already begun. He could smell coffee from the room where they would presently eat the cold food remaining from the midafternoon meal, though when he entered the house he realized they were having coffee again, probably, because there was a fire on the hearth, before which the rug now lay spread over the backs of the two chairs. The tracks of his father's foot were gone. Where they had been were now long water-cloudy scoriations resembling the sporadic course of a lilliputian mowing machine.

It still hung there while they ate the cold food and then went to bed, scattered without order or claim up and down the two rooms; his mother in one bed, where his father would later lie, the older brother in the other, himself, the aunt and the two sisters on pallets on the floor. But his father was not in bed yet. The last thing the boy remembered was the depthless

harsh silhouette of the hat and coat bending over the rug, and it seemed to him that he had not even closed his eyes when the silhouette was standing over him, the fire almost dead behind it, the stiff foot prodding him awake. "Catch up the mule," his father said.

When he returned with the mule his father was standing in the black door, the rolled rug over his shoulder. "Ain't you going to ride?" he said.

"No. Give me your foot."

He bent his knee into his father's hand; the wiry, surprising power flowed smoothly, rising, he rising with it, onto the mule's bare back (they had owned a saddle once; the boy could remember it though not when or where), and with the same effortlessness his father swung the rug up and in front of him. Now in the starlight they retraced the afternoon's path, up the dusty road rife with honeysuckle, through the gate and up the black tunnel of the drive to the lightless house, where he sat on the mule and felt the rough warp of the rug drag across his thighs and vanish.

"Don't you want me to help?" he whispered. His father did not answer, and now he heard again that stiff foot striking the hollow portico with that wooden and clocklike deliberation, that outrageous overstatement of the weight it carried. The rug, hunched, not flung (the boy could tell that even in the darkness), from his father's shoulder, struck the angle of wall and floor with a sound unbelievably loud, thunderous, then the foot again, unhurried and enormous; a light came on in the house and the boy sat, tense, breathing steadily and quietly and just a little fast, though the foot itself did not increase its beat at all, descending the steps now; now the boy could see him.

"Don't you want to ride now?" he whispered. "We kin both ride now." The light within the house altering now, flaring up and sinking. *He's coming down the stairs now*, he thought. He had already ridden the mule up beside the horse block; presently his father was up behind him and he doubled the reins over and slashed the mule across the neck, but before the animal could begin to trot the hard thin arm came round him, the hard knotted hand jerking the mule back to a walk.

In the first red rays of the sun they were in the lot, putting plow gear on the mules. This time the sorrel mare was in the lot before he heard it at all, the rider collarless and even bareheaded, trembling, speaking in a shaking voice as the woman in the house had done, his father merely looking up once before stooping again to the hame he was buckling, so that the man on the mare spoke to his stooping back:

"You must realize you have ruined that rug. Wasn't there anybody here, any of your women——" He ceased, shaking, the boy watching him, the older brother leaning now in the stable door, chewing, blinking slowly and steadily at nothing apparently. "It cost a hundred dollars. But you never had

a hundred dollars. You never will. So I'm going to charge you twenty bushels of corn against your crop. I'll add it in your contract and when you come to the commissary you can sign it. That won't keep Mrs. de Spain quiet but maybe it will teach you to wipe your feet off before you enter her house again."

Then he was gone. The boy looked at his father, who still had not spoken or even looked up again, who was now adjusting the loggerhead in the hame.

"Pap," he said. His father looked at him—the inscrutable face, the shaggy brows beneath which the gray eyes glinted coldly. Suddenly the boy went toward him, fast, stopping as suddenly. "You done the best you could!" he cried. "If he wanted hit done different why didn't he wait and tell you how? He won't git no twenty bushels! He won't git none! We'll gether hit and hide hit! I kin watch——"

"Did you put the cutter back in that straight stock like I told you?"

"No sir," he said.

"Then go do it."

That was Wednesday. During the rest of that week he worked steadily, at what was within his scope and some which was beyond it, with an industry that did not need to be driven nor even commanded twice; he had this from his mother, with the difference that some at least of what he did he liked to do, such as splitting wood with the half-size ax which his mother and aunt had earned, or saved money somehow, to present him with at Christmas. In company with the two older women (and on one afternoon, even one of the sisters), he built pens for the shoat and the cow which were a part of his father's contract with the landlord, and one afternoon, his father being absent, gone somewhere on one of the mules, he went to the field.

They were running a middle buster now, his brother holding the plow straight while he handled the reins, and walking beside the straining mule, the rich black soil shearing cool and damp against his bare ankles, he thought: *Maybe this is the end of it. Maybe even that twenty bushels that seems hard to have to pay for just a rug will be a cheap price for him to stop forever and always from being what he used to be;* thinking, dreaming now, so that his brother had to speak sharply to him to mind the mule: *Maybe he even won't collect the twenty bushels. Maybe it will all add up and balance and vanish—corn, rug, fire; the terror and grief, the being pulled two ways like between two teams of horses—gone, done with forever and ever.*

Then it was Saturday; he looked up from beneath the mule he was harnessing and saw his father in the black coat and hat. "Not that," his father said. "The wagon gear." And then, two hours later, sitting in the wagon bed behind his father and brother on the seat, the wagon accomplished a final curve, and he saw the weathered paintless store with its tattered tobacco- and

patent-medicine posters and the tethered wagons and saddle animals below the gallery. He mounted the gnawed steps behind his father and brother, and there again was the lane of quiet, watching faces for the three of them to walk through. He saw the man in spectacles sitting at the plank table and he did not need to be told this was a Justice of the Peace; he sent one glare of fierce, exultant, partisan defiance at the man in collar and cravat now, whom he had seen but twice before in his life, and that on a galloping horse, who now wore on his face an expression not of rage but of amazed unbelief which the boy could not have known was at the incredible circumstance of being sued by one of his own tenants, and came and stood against his father and cried at the Justice: "He ain't done it! He ain't burnt——"

"Go back to the wagon," his father said.

"Burnt?" the Justice said. "Do I understand this rug was burned too?"

"Does anybody here claim it was?" his father said. "Go back to the wagon." But he did not, he merely retreated to the rear of the room, crowded as that other had been, but not to sit down this time, instead, to stand pressing among the motionless bodies, listening to the voices:

"And you claim twenty bushels of corn is too high for the damage you did to the rug?"

"He brought the rug to me and said he wanted the tracks washed out of it. I washed the tracks out and took the rug back to him."

"But you didn't carry the rug back to him in the same condition it was in before you made the tracks on it."

His father did not answer, and now for perhaps half a minute there was no sound at all save that of breathing, the faint, steady suspiration of complete and intent listening.

"You decline to answer that, Mr. Snopes?" Again his father did not answer. "I'm going to find against you, Mr. Snopes. I'm going to find that you were responsible for the injury to Major de Spain's rug and hold you liable for it. But twenty bushels of corn seems a little high for a man in your circumstances to have to pay. Major de Spain claims it cost a hundred dollars. October corn will be worth about fifty cents. I figure that if Major de Spain can stand a ninety-five dollar loss on something he paid cash for, you can stand a five-dollar loss you haven't earned yet. I hold you in damages to Major de Spain to the amount of ten bushels of corn over and above your contract with him, to be paid to him out of your crop at gathering time. Court adjourned."

It had taken no time hardly, the morning was but half begun. He thought they would return home and perhaps back to the field, since they were late, far behind all other farmers. But instead his father passed on behind the wagon, merely indicating with his hand for the older brother to follow with it, and crossed the road toward the blacksmith shop opposite, pressing on

after his father, overtaking him, speaking, whispering up at the harsh, calm face beneath the weathered hat: "He won't git no ten bushels neither. He won't git one. We'll . . ." until his father glanced for an instant down at him, the face absolutely calm, the grizzled eyebrows tangled above the cold eyes, the voice almost pleasant, almost gentle:

"You think so? Well, we'll wait till October anyway."

The matter of the wagon—the setting of a spoke or two and the tightening of the tires—did not take long neither, the business of the tires accomplished by driving the wagon into the spring branch behind the shop and letting it stand there, the mules nuzzling into the water from time to time, and the boy on the seat with the idle reins, looking up the slope and through the sooty tunnel of the shed where the slow hammer rang and where his father sat on an upended cypress bolt, easily, either talking or listening, still sitting there when the boy brought the dripping wagon up out of the branch and halted it before the door.

"Take them on to the shade and hitch," his father said. He did so and returned. His father and the smith and a third man squatting on his heels inside the door were talking, about crops and animals; the boy, squatting too in the ammoniac dust and hoof parings and scales of rust, heard his father tell a long and unhurried story out of the time before the birth of the older brother even when he had been a professional horsetrader. And then his father came up beside him where he stood before a tattered last year's circus poster on the other side of the store, gazing rapt and quiet at the scarlet horses, the incredible poisings and convolutions of tulle and tights and the painted leers of comedians, and said, "It's time to eat."

But not at home. Squatting beside his brother against the front wall, he watched his father emerge from the store and produce from a paper sack a segment of cheese and divide it carefully and deliberately into three with his pocketknife and produce crackers from the same sack. They all three squatted on the gallery and ate slowly, without talking; then, in the store again, they drank from a tin dipper tepid water smelling of the cedar bucket and of living beech trees. And still they did not go home. It was a horse lot this time, a tall rail fence upon and along which men stood and sat and out of which one by one horses were led, to be walked and trotted and then cantered back and forth along the road while the slow swapping and buying went on and the sun began to slant westward, they—the three of them—watching and listening; the older brother with his muddy eyes and his steady, inevitable tobacco, the father commenting now and then on certain of the animals, to no one in particular.

It was after sundown when they reached home. They ate supper by lamplight, then, sitting on the doorstep, the boy watched the night fully accomplish, listening to the whippoorwills and the frogs, when he heard his

mother's voice: "Abner! No! No! Oh, God. Oh, God. Abner!" and he rose, whirled and saw the altered light through the door where a candle stub now burned in a bottle neck on the table and his father, still in the hat and coat, at once formal and burlesque as though dressed carefully for some shabby and ceremonial violence, emptying the reservoir of the lamp back into the five-gallon kerosene can from which it had been filled, while the mother tugged at his arm until he shifted the lamp to the other hand and flung her back, not savagely or viciously, just hard, into the wall, her hands flung out against the wall for balance, her mouth open and in her face the same quality of hopeless despair as had been in her voice. Then his father saw him standing in the door.

"Go to the barn and get that can of oil we were oiling the wagon with," he said. The boy did not move. Then he could speak.

"What . . ." he cried. "What are you——"

"Go get that oil," his father said. "Go."

Then he was moving, running, outside the house, toward the stable: this the old habit, the old blood which he had not been permitted to choose for himself, which had been bequeathed him willy-nilly and which had run for so long (and who knew where, battening on what of outrage and savagery and lust) before it came to him. *I could keep on,* he thought. *I could run on and on and never look back, never need to see his face again. Only I can't. I can't,* the rusted can in his hand now, the liquid sploshing in it as he ran back to the house and into it, into the sound of his mother's weeping in the next room, and handed the can to his father.

"Ain't you going to even send a nigger?" he cried. "At least you sent a nigger before!"

This time his father didn't strike him. The hand came even faster than the blow had, the same hand which had set the can on the table with almost excruciating care flashing from the can toward him, too quick for him to follow it, gripping him by the back of his shirt and on to tiptoe before he had seen it quit the can, the face stooping at him in breathless and frozen ferocity, the cold, dead voice speaking over him to the older brother who leaned against the table, chewing with that steady, curious, sidewise motion of cows:

"Empty the can into the big one and go on. I'll catch up with you."

"Better tie him up to the bedpost," the brother said.

"Do like I told you," the father said. Then the boy was moving, his bunched shirt and the hard bony hand between his shoulder blades, his toes just touching the floor, across the room and into the other one, past the sisters sitting with spread heavy thighs in the two chairs over the cold hearth, and to where his mother and aunt sat side by side on the bed, the aunt's arms about his mother's shoulders.

"Hold him," the father said. The aunt made a startled movement. "Not you," the father said. "Lennie. Take hold of him. I want to see you do it." His mother took him by the wrist. "You'll hold him better than that. If he gets loose don't you know what he is going to do? He will go up yonder." He jerked his head toward the road. "Maybe I'd better tie him."

"I'll hold him," his mother whispered.

"See you do then." Then his father was gone, the stiff foot heavy and measured upon the boards, ceasing at last.

Then he began to struggle. His mother caught him in both arms, he jerking and wrenching at them. He would be stronger in the end, he knew that. But he had no time to wait for it. "Lemme go!" he cried. "I don't want to have to hit you!"

"Let him go!" the aunt said. "If he don't go, before God, I am going up there myself!"

"Don't you see I can't?" his mother cried. "Sarty! Sarty! No! No! Help me, Lizzie!"

Then he was free. His aunt grasped at him but it was too late. He whirled, running, his mother stumbled forward onto her knees behind him, crying to the nearer sister: "Catch him, Net! Catch him!" But that was too late too, the sister (the sisters were twins, born at the same time, yet either of them now gave the impression of being, encompassing as much living meat and volume and weight as any other two of the family) not yet having begun to rise from the chair, her head, face alone merely turned, presenting to him in the flying instant an astonishing expanse of young female features untroubled by any surprise even, wearing only an expression of bovine interest. Then he was out of the room, out of the house, in the mild dust of the starlit road and the heavy rifeness of honeysuckle, the pale ribbon unspooling with terrific slowness under his running feet, reaching the gate at last and turning in, running, his heart and lungs drumming, on up the drive toward the lighted house, the lighted door. He did not knock, he burst in, sobbing for breath, incapable for the moment of speech; he saw the astonished face of the Negro in the linen jacket without knowing when the Negro had appeared.

"De Spain!" he cried, panted. "Wher's——" Then he saw the white man, too, emerging from a white door down the hall. "Barn!" he cried. "Barn!"

"What?" the white man said. "Barn?"

"Yes!" the boy cried. "Barn!"

"Catch him!" the white man shouted.

But it was too late this time too. The Negro grasped his shirt, but the entire sleeve, rotten with washing, carried away, and he was out that door, too, and in the drive again, and had actually never ceased to run even while he was screaming into the white man's face.

Behind him the white man was shouting, "My horse! Fetch my horse!" and he thought for an instant of cutting across the park and climbing the fence into the road, but he did not know the park nor how high the vine-massed fence might be and he dared not risk it. So he ran on down the drive, blood and breath roaring; presently he was in the road again though he could not see it. He could not hear either: the galloping mare was almost upon him before he heard her, and even then he held his course, as if the very urgency of his wild grief and need must in a moment more find him wings, waiting until the ultimate instant to hurl himself aside and into the weed-choked roadside ditch as the horse thundered past and on, for an instant in furious silhouette against the stars, the tranquil early summer night sky which, even before the shape of the horse and rider vanished, stained abruptly and violently upward: a long, swirling roar, incredible and soundless, blotting the stars, and he springing up and into the road again, running again, knowing it was too late, yet still running even after he heard the shot and, an instant later, two shots, pausing now without knowing he had ceased to run, crying "Pap! Pap!" running again before he knew he had begun to run, stumbling, tripping over something and scrabbling up again without ceasing to run, looking backward over his shoulder at the glare as he got up, running on among the invisible trees, panting, sobbing, "Father! Father!"

At midnight he was sitting on the crest of a hill. He did not know it was midnight and he did not know how far he had come. But there was no glare behind him now and he sat now, his back toward what he had called home for four days anyhow, his face toward the dark woods which he would enter when breath was strong again, small, shaking steadily in the chill darkness, hugging himself into the remainder of his thin, rotten shirt, the grief and despair now no longer terror and fear but just grief and despair. *Father. My father,* he thought. "He was brave!" he cried suddenly, aloud but not loud, no more than a whisper: "He was! He was in the war! He was in Colonel Sartoris' cav'ry!" not knowing that his father had gone to that war a private in the fine old European sense, wearing no uniform, admitting the authority of and giving fidelity to no man or army or flag, going to war as Malbrouck himself did: for booty—it meant nothing and less than nothing to him if it were enemy booty or his own.

The slow constellations wheeled on. It would be dawn and then sunup after a while and he would be hungry. But that would be tomorrow and now he was only cold, and walking would cure that. His breathing was easier now and he decided to get up and go on, and then he found that he had been asleep because he knew it was almost dawn, the night almost over. He could tell that from the whippoorwills. They were everywhere now among the dark trees below him, constant and inflectioned and ceaseless, so that, as the instant for giving over to the day birds drew nearer and nearer, there

by William Faulkner

was no interval at all between them. He got up. He was a little stiff, but walking would cure that, too, as it would the cold, and soon there would be the sun. He went on down the hill, toward the dark woods within which the liquid silver voices of the birds called unceasing—the rapid and urgent beating of the urgent and quiring heart of the late spring night. He did not look back.

1940: *from the Saturday Evening Post*

FREEDOM'S A HARD-BOUGHT THING

by Stephen Vincent Benét

A long time ago, in times gone by, in slavery times, there was a man named Cue. I want you to think about him. I've got a reason. He got born like the cotton in the boll or the rabbit in the pea patch. There wasn't any fine doings when he got born, but his mammy was glad to have him. Yes. He didn't get born in the Big House, or the overseer's house, or anyplace where the bearing was easy or the work light. No, Lord. He came out of his mammy in a field hand's cabin one sharp winter, and about the first thing he remembered was his mammy's face and the taste of a piece of bacon rind and the light and shine of the pitch-pine fire up the chimney. Well, now, he got born and there he was.

His daddy worked in the fields and his mammy worked in the fields when she wasn't bearing. They were slaves; they chopped the cotton and hoed the corn. They heard the horn blow before the light came and the horn blow that meant the day's work was done. His daddy was a strong man—strong in his back and his arms. The white folks called him Cuffee. His mammy was a good woman, yes, Lord. The white folks called her Sarah, and she was gentle with her hands and gentle with her voice. She had a voice like the river going by in the night, and at night when she wasn't too tired she'd sing songs to little Cue. Some had foreign words in them—African words. She couldn't remember what some of them meant, but they'd come to her down out of time.

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Now, how am I going to describe and explain about that time when that time's gone? The white folks lived in the Big House and they had many to tend on them. Old Marster, he lived there like Pharaoh and Solomon, mighty splendid and fine. He had his flocks and his herds, his butler and his baker; his fields ran from the river to the woods and back again. He'd ride around the fields each day on his big horse, Black Billy, just like thunder and lightning, and evenings he'd sit at his table and drink his wine. Man, that was a sight to see, with all the silver knives and the silver forks, the glass decanters, and the gentlemen and ladies from all over. It was a sight to see. When Cue was young, it seemed to him that Old Marster must own the whole world, right up to the edge of the sky. You can't blame him for thinking that.

There were things that changed on the plantation, but it didn't change. There were bad times and good times. There was the time young Marse Edward got bit by the snake, and the time Big Rambo ran away and they caught him with the dogs and brought him back. There was a swivel-eyed overseer that beat folks too much, and then there was Mr. Wade, and he wasn't so bad. There was hog-killing time and Christmas and springtime and summertime. Cue didn't wonder about it or why things happened that way; he didn't expect it to be different. A bee in a hive don't ask you how there come to be a hive in the beginning. Cue grew up strong; he grew up smart with his hands. They put him in the blacksmith shop to help Daddy Jake; he didn't like it, at first, because Daddy Jake was mighty cross tempered. Then he got to like the work; he learned to forge iron and shape it; he learned to shoe a horse and tire a wagon wheel, and everything a blacksmith does. One time they let him shoe Black Billy, and he shod him light and tight and Old Marster praised him in front of Mr. Wade. He was strong; he was black as night; he was proud of his back and his arms.

Now, he might have stayed that way—yes, he might. He heard freedom talk, now and then, but he didn't pay much mind to it. He wasn't a talker or a preacher; he was Cue and he worked in the blacksmith shop. He didn't want to be a field hand, but he didn't want to be a house servant either. He'd rather be Cue than poor white trash or owned by poor white trash. That's the way he felt; I'm obliged to tell the truth about that way.

Then there was a sickness came and his mammy and his daddy died of it. Old Miss got the doctor for them, but they died just the same. After that, Cue felt lonesome.

He felt lonesome and troubled in his mind. He'd seen his daddy and his mammy put in the ground and new slaves come to take their cabin. He didn't repine about that, because he knew things had to be that way. But when he went to bed at night in the loft over the blacksmith shop, he'd keep thinking about his mammy and his daddy—how strong his daddy was and the songs that his mammy sang. They'd worked all their lives and had children,

though he was the only one left, but the only place of their own they had was the place in the burying ground. And yet they'd been good and faithful servants, because Old Marster said so, with his hat off, when he buried them. The Big House stayed, and the cotton and the corn, but Cue's mammy and daddy were gone like last year's crop. It made Cue wonder and trouble.

He began to take notice of things he'd never noticed. When the horn blew in the morning for the hands to go to the fields, he'd wonder who started blowing that horn in the first place. It wasn't like thunder and lightning; somebody had started it. When he heard Old Marster say, when he was talking to a friend, "This damned epidemic! It's cost me eight prime field hands and the best-trained butler in the state. I'd rather have lost the Flyaway colt than Old Isaac," Cue put that down in his mind and pondered it. Old Marster didn't mean it mean, and he'd sat up with Old Isaac all night before he died. But Isaac and Cue and the Flyaway colt, they all belonged to Old Marster and he owned them, hide and hair. He owned them, like money in his pockets. Well, Cue had known that all his life, but because he was troubled now, it gave him a queer feeling.

Well, now, he was shoeing a horse for young Marster Shepley one day, and he shod it light and tight. And when he was through he made a stirrup for young Marster Shepley, and young Marster Shepley mounted and threw him a silver bit with a laughing word. That shouldn't have bothered Cue, because gentlemen sometimes did that. And Old Marster wasn't mean; he didn't object. But all night Cue kept feeling the print of young Marster Shepley's heel in his hands. And yet he liked young Marster Shepley. He couldn't explain it at all.

Finally Cue decided he must be conjured. He didn't know who had done it or why they'd done it. But he knew what he had to do. He had to go see Aunt Rachel.

Aunt Rachel was an old, old woman, and she lived in a cabin by herself with her granddaughter Sukey. She'd seen Old Marster's father and his father, and the tale went she'd seen George Washington with his hair all white, and General Lafayette in his gold-plated suit of clothes that the king of France gave him to fight in. Some folks said she was a conjure and some folks said she wasn't, but everybody on the plantation treated her mighty respectful, because, if she put her eye on you, she mightn't take it off. Well, his mammy had been friends with Aunt Rachel, so Cue went to see her.

She was sitting alone in her cabin by the low light of a fire. There was a pot on the fire, and now and then you could hear it bubble and chunk, like a bullfrog chunking in the swamp, but that was the only sound. Cue made his obleegances to her and asked her about the misery in her back. Then he gave her a chicken he happened to bring along. It was a black rooster, and she seemed pleased to get it. She took it in her thin black hands and it

fluttered and clucked a minute. So she drew a chalk line from its beak along a board, and then it stayed still and frozen. Well, Cue had seen that trick done before. But it was different, seeing it done in Aunt Rachel's cabin, with the big pot chunking on the fire. It made him feel uneasy and he jingled the bit in his pocket for company.

After a while the old woman spoke. "Well, Son Cue," said she, "that's a fine young rooster you've brought me. What else did you bring me, Son Cue?"

"I brought you trouble," said Cue in a husky voice, because that was all he could think of to say.

She nodded her head as if she'd expected that. "They mostly brings me trouble," she said. "They mostly brings trouble to Aunt Rachel. What kind of trouble, Son Cue? Man trouble or woman trouble?"

"It's my trouble," said Cue, and he told her the best way he could. When he'd finished, the pot on the fire gave a bubble and a croak, and the old woman took a long spoon and stirred it.

"Well, Son Cue, son of Cuffee, son of Shango," she said, "You've got a big trouble for sure."

"Is it going to kill me dead?" said Cue.

"I can't tell you right about that," said Aunt Rachel. "I could give you lies and prescriptions. Maybe I would, to some folks. But your granddaddy Shango was a powerful man. It took three men to put the irons on him, and I saw the irons break his heart. I won't lie to you, Son Cue. You've got a sickness."

"Is it a bad sickness?" said Cue.

"It's a sickness in your blood," said Aunt Rachel. "It's a sickness in your liver and your veins. Your daddy never had it that I knows of—he took after his mammy's side. But his daddy was a Corromantee, and they is bold and free, and you takes after him. It's the freedom sickness, Son Cue."

"The freedom sickness?" said Cue.

"The freedom sickness," said the old woman, and her little eyes glittered like sparks. "Some they break and some they tame down," she said, "and some is neither to be tamed or broken. Don't I know the signs and the sorrow—me that come through the middle passage on the slavery ship and seen my folks scattered like sand? Ain't I seen it coming, Lord—O Lord, ain't I seen it coming?"

"What's coming?" said Cue.

"A darkness in the sky and a cloud with a sword in it," said the old woman, stirring the pot, "because they hold our people and they hold our people."

Cue began to tremble. "I don't want to get whipped," he said. "I never been whipped—not hard."

"They whipped your granddaddy Shango till the blood ran twinkling down his back," said the old woman, "but some you can't break or tame."

"I don't want to be chased by dogs," said Cue. "I don't want to hear the dogs belling and the paterollers after me."

The old woman stirred the pot.

"Old Marster, he's a good marster," said Cue. "I don't want to do him no harm. I don't want no trouble or projecting to get me into trouble."

The old woman stirred the pot and stirred the pot.

"O God, I want to be free," said Cue. "I just ache and hone to be free. How I going to be free, Aunt Rachel?"

"There's a road that runs underground," said the old woman. "I never seen it, but I knows of it. There's a railroad train that runs, sparking and snorting, underground through the earth. At least that's what they tell me. But I wouldn't know for sure," and she looked at Cue.

Cue looked back at her bold enough, for he'd heard about the Underground Railroad himself—just mentions and whispers. But he knew there wasn't any use asking the old woman what she wouldn't tell.

"How I going to find that road, Aunt Rachel?" he said.

"You look at the rabbit in the brier and you see what he do," said the old woman. "You look at the owl in the woods and you see what he do. You look at the star in the sky and you see what she do. Then you come back and talk to me. Now I'm going to eat, because I'm hungry."

That was all the words she'd say to him that night; but when Cue went back to his loft her words kept boiling around in his mind. All night he could hear that train of railroad cars, snorting and sparking underground through the earth. So, next morning, he ran away.

He didn't run far or fast. How could he? He'd never been more than twenty miles from the plantation in his life; he didn't know the roads or the ways. He ran off before the horn, and Mr. Wade caught him before sundown. Now, wasn't he a stupid man, that Cue?

When they brought him back Mr. Wade left him off light, because he was a good boy and never run away before. All the same, he got ten, and ten laid over the ten. Yellow Joe, the head driver, laid them on. The first time the whip cut into him it was just like a fire on Cue's skin, and he didn't see how he could stand it. Then he got to a place where he could.

After it was over Aunt Rachel crope up to his loft and had her granddaughter Sukey put salve on his back. Sukey, she was sixteen, and golden skinned and pretty as a peach on a peach tree. She worked in the Big House and he never expected her to do a thing like that.

"I'm mighty obliged," he said, though he kept thinking it was Aunt Rachel got him into trouble and he didn't feel as obliged as he might.

"Is that all you've got to say to me, Son Cue?" said Aunt Rachel, looking

down at him. "I told you to watch three things. Did you watch them?"

"No'm," said Cue. "I run off in the woods just like I was a wild turkey. I won't never do that no more."

"You're right, Son Cue," said the old woman. "Freedom's a hard-bought thing. So, now you've been whipped, I reckon you'll give it up."

"I been whipped," said Cue, "but there's a road running underground. You told me so. I been whipped but I ain't beaten."

"Now you're learning a thing to remember," said Aunt Rachel, and went away. But Sukey stayed behind for a while and cooked Cue's supper. He never expected her to do a thing like that, but he liked it when she did.

When his back got healed they put him with the field gang for a while. But then there was blacksmith work that needed to be done and they put him back in the blacksmith shop. And things went on for a long time just the way they had before. But there was a difference in Cue. It was like he'd lived up till now with his ears and his eyes sealed over. And now he began to open his eyes and his ears.

He looked at the rabbit in the brier and he saw it could hide. He looked at the owl in the woods and he saw it went soft through the night. He looked at the star in the sky and he saw she pointed north. Then he began to figure.

He couldn't figure things fast, so he had to figure things slow. He figure the owl and the rabbit got wisdom the white folks don't know about. But he figure the white folks got wisdom he don't know about. They got reading and writing wisdom, and it seem mighty powerful. He ask Aunt Rachel if that's so, and she say it's so.

That's how come he learned to read and write. He ain't supposed to. But Sukey, she learned some of that wisdom, along with the young misses, and she teach him out of a little book she tote from the Big House. The little book, it's all about bats and rats and cats, and Cue figure whoever wrote it must be sort of touched in the head not to write about things folks would want to know, instead of all those trifling animals. But he put himself to it and he learn. It almost bust his head, but he learn. It's a proud day for him when he write his name, "Cue," in the dust with the end of a stick and Sukey tell him that's right.

Now he began to hear the first rumblings of that train running underground—that train that's the Underground Railroad. Oh, children, remember the names of Levi Coffin and John Hansen! Remember the Quaker saints that hid the fugitive! Remember the names of all those that helped set our people free!

There's a word dropped here and a word dropped there and a word that's passed around. Nobody know where the word come from or where it goes, but it's there. There's many a word spoken in the quarters that the Big House never hears about. There's a heap said in front of the fire that never

flies up the chimney. There's a name you tell to the grapevine that the grapevine don't tell back.

There was a white man, one day, came by selling maps and pictures. The quality folks, they looked at his maps and pictures and he talked with them mighty pleasant and respectful. But while Cue was tightening a bolt on his wagon he dropped a word and a word. The word he said made that underground train come nearer.

Cue meet the man one night, all alone, in the woods. He's a quiet man with a thin face. He hold his life in his hands every day he walk about but he don't make nothing of that. Cue's seen bold folks and bodacious folks, but it's the first time he's seen a man bold that way. It make him proud to be a man. The man ask Cue questions and Cue give him answers. While he's seeing that man Cue don't just think about himself any more. He think about all his people that's in trouble.

The man say something to him; he say, "No man own the earth. It's too big for one man." He say, "No man own another man; that's too big a thing too." Cue think about those words and ponder them. But when he gets back to his loft, the courage drains out of him and he sits on his straw tick, staring at the wall. That's the time the darkness comes to him and the shadow falls on him.

He aches and he hones for freedom, but he aches and he hones for Sukey too. And Long Ti's cabin is empty, and it's a good cabin. All he's got to do is to go to Old Marster and take Sukey with him. Old Marster don't approve to mix the field hand with the house servant, but Cue's different; Cue's a blacksmith. He can see the way Sukey would look, coming back to her in the evening. He can see the way she'd be in the morning before the horn. He can see all that. It ain't freedom, but it's what he's used to. And the other way's long and hard and lonesome and strange.

"O Lord, why you put this burden on a man like me?" say Cue. Then he listen a long time for the Lord to tell him, and it seem to him, at last, that he get an answer. The answer ain't in any words, but it's a feeling in his heart.

So when the time come and the plan ripe and they get to the boat on the river and they see there's one too many for the boat, Cue know the answer. He don't have to hear the quiet white man say, "There's one too many for the boat." He just pitch Sukey into it before he can think too hard. He don't say a word or a groan. He know it's that way and there's bound to be a reason for it. He stand on the bank in the dark and see the boat pull away, like Israel's children. Then he hear the shouts and the shot. He know what he's bound to do then, and the reason for it. He know it's the paterollers, and he show himself. When he get back to the plantation he's worn and tired. But the paterollers, they've chased him instead of the boat.

He creep by Aunt Rachel's cabin and he see the fire at her window. So he scratch at the door and go in. And there she is, sitting by the fire, all hunched up and little.

"You looks poorly, Son Cue," she say when he come in, though she don't take her eye off the pot.

"I'm poorly, Aunt Rachel," he say. "I'm sick and sorry and distressed."

"What's the mud on your jeans, Son Cue?" she say, and the pot, it bubble and croak.

"That's the mud of the swamp where I hid from the paterollers," he say.

"What's the hole in your leg, Son Cue?" she say, and the pot, it croak and bubble.

"That's the hole from the shot they shot at me," say Cue. "The blood most nearly dried, but it make me lame. But Israel's children, they's safe."

"They's across the river?" say the old woman.

"They's across the river," say Cue. "They ain't room for no more in the boat. But Sukey, she's across."

"And what will you do now, Son Cue?" say the old woman. "For that was your chance and your time, and you give it up for another. And tomorrow morning Mr. Wade, he'll see that hole in your leg and he'll ask questions. It's a heavy burden you've laid on yourself, Son Cue."

"It's a heavy burden," say Cue, "and I wish I was shut of it. I never asked to take no such burden. But freedom's a hard-bought thing."

The old woman stand up sudden, and for once she look straight and tall. "Now bless the Lord!" she say. "Bless the Lord and praise him! I come with my mammy in the slavery ship—I come through the middle passage. There ain't many that remember that, these days, or care about it. There ain't many that remember the red flag that witched us on board or how we used to be free. Many thousands gone, and the thousands of many thousands that lived and died in slavery. But I remember. I remember them all. Then they took me into the Big House—me that was a Mandingo and a witch woman—and the way I live in the Big House, that's between me and my Lord. If I done wrong, I done paid for it—I paid for it with weeping and sorrow. That's before Old Miss' time and I help raise up Old Miss. They sell my daughter to the South and my son to the West, but I raise up Old Miss and tend on her. I ain't going to repine of that. I count the hairs on Old Miss' head when she's young, and she turn to me, weak and helpless. And for that there'll be a kindness between me and the Big House—a kindness that folks will remember. But my children's children shall be free."

"You do this to me," say Cue, and he look at her, and he look dangerous. "You do this to me, old woman," he say, and his breath come harsh in his throat, and his hands twitch.

"Yes," she say, and look him straight in the eyes. "I do to you what I

never even do for my own. I do it for your grandaddy Shango, that never turn to me in the light of the fire. He turn to that soft Eboe woman, and I have to see it. He roar like a lion in the chains, and I have to see that. So, when you come, I try you and I test you, to see if you fit to follow after him. And because you fit to follow after him, I put freedom in your heart, Son Cue."

"I never going to be free," say Cue, and look at his hands. "I done broke all the rules. They bound to sell me now."

"You'll be sold and sold again," say the old woman. "You'll know the chains and the whip. I can't help that. You'll suffer for your people and with your people. But while one man's got freedom in his heart, his children bound to know the tale."

She put the lid on the pot and it stop bubbling.

"Now I come to the end of my road," she say, "but the tale don't stop there. The tale go backward to Africa and it go forward, like clouds and fire. It go, laughing and grieving forever, through the earth and the air and the waters—my people's tale."

Then she drop her hands in her lap and Cue creep out of the cabin. He know then he's bound to be a witness, and it make him feel cold and hot. He know then he's bound to be a witness and tell that tale. O Lord, it's hard to be a witness, and Cue know that. But it help him in the days to come.

Now, when he get sold, that's when Cue feel the iron in his heart. Before that, and all his life, he despise bad servants and bad marsters. He live where the marster's good; he don't take much mind of other places. He's a slave, but he's Cue, the blacksmith, and Old Marster and Old Miss, they tend to him. Now he know the iron in his heart and what it's like to be a slave.

He know that on the rice fields in the hot sun. He know that, working all day for a handful of corn. He know the bad marsters and the cruel overseers. He know the bite of the whip and the gall of the iron on the ankle. Yes, Lord, he know tribulation. He know his own tribulation and the tribulation of his people. But all the time, somehow, he keep freedom in his heart. Freedom mighty hard to root out when it's in the heart.

He don't know the day or the year, and he forget, half the time, there ever was a gal named Sukey. All he don't forget is the noise of the train in his ears, the train snorting and sparking underground. He think about it at nights till he dream it carry him away. Then he wake up with the horn. He feel ready to die then, but he don't die. He live through the whip and the chain; he live through the iron and the fire. And finally he get away.

When he get away he ain't like the Cue he used to be—not even back at Old Marster's place. He hide in the woods like a rabbit; he slip through the night like an owl. He go cold and hungry, but the star keep shining over him

and he keep his eyes on the star. They set the dogs after him and he hear the dogs belling and yipping through the woods.

He's scared when he hear the dogs, but he ain't scared like he used to be. He ain't more scared than any man. He kill the big dog in the clearing—the big dog with the big voice—and he do it with his naked hands. He cross water three times after that to kill the scent, and he go on.

He got nothing to help him—no, Lord—but he got a star. The star shine in the sky and the star shine—the star point north with its shining. You put that star in the sky, O Lord; you put it for the prisoned and the humble. You put it there—you ain't never going to blink it out.

He hungry and he eat green corn and cowpeas. He thirsty and he drink swamp water. One time he lie two days in the swamp, too puny to get up on his feet, and he know they hunting around him. He think that's the end of Cue. But after two days he lift his head and his hand. He kill a snake with a stone, and after he's cut out the poison bag, he eat the snake to strengthen him, and go on.

He don't know what the day is when he come to the wide, cold river. The river yellow and foaming, and Cue can't swim. But he hide like a crawdad on the bank; he make himself a little raft with two logs. He know this time's the last time and he's obliged to drown. But he put out on the raft and it drift him to the freedom side. He mighty weak by then.

He mighty weak, but he careful. He know tales of Billy Shea, the slave catcher; he remember those tales. He slide into the town by night, like a shadow, like a ghost. He beg broken victuals at a door; the woman give them to him, but she look at him suspicious. He make up a tale to tell her but he don't think she believe the tale. In the gutter he find a newspaper; he pick it up and look at the notices. There's a notice about a runaway man named Cue. He look at it and it make the heart beat in his breast.

He patient; he mighty careful. He leave that town behind. He got the name of another town, Cincinnati, and a man's name in that town. He don't know where it is; he have to ask his way, but he do it mighty careful. One time he ask a yellow man directions; he don't like the look on the yellow man's face. He remember Aunt Rachel; he tell the yellow man he conjure his liver out if the yellow man tell him wrong. Then the yellow man scared and tell him right. He don't hurt the yellow man; he don't blame him for not wanting trouble. But he make the yellow man change pants with him because his pants mighty ragged.

He patient; he very careful. When he get to the place he been told about he look all about that place. It's a big house; it don't look right. He creep around to the back—he creep and he crawl. He look in a window; he see white folks eating their supper. They just look like any white folks. He expect them to look different. He feel mighty bad. All the same, he rap at

the window the way he been told. They don't nobody pay attention and he just about to go away. Then the white man get up from the table and open the back door a crack. Cue breathe in the darkness.

"God bless the stranger the Lord sends us," say the white man in a low, clear voice, and Cue run to him and stumble, and the white man catch him. He look up and it's a white man, but he ain't like thunder and lightning.

He take Cue and wash his wounds and bind them up. He feed him and hide him under the floor of the house. He ask him his name and where he's from. Then he send him on. O Lord, remember thy tried servant, Asaph Brown! Remember his name!

They send him from there in a wagon, and he's hidden in the straw at the bottom. They send him from the next place in a closed cart with six others, and they can't say a word all night. One time a tollkeeper ask them what's in the wagon, and the driver say, "Southern calico," and the tollkeeper laugh. Cue always recollect that.

One time they get to big water—so big it look like the ocean. They cross that water in a boat; they get to the other side. When they get to the other side they sing and pray, and white folks look on, curious. But Cue don't even feel happy; he just feel he want to sleep.

He sleep like he never sleep before—not for days and years. When he wake up he wonder; he hardly recollect where he is. He lying in the loft of a barn. Ain't nobody around him. He get up and go out in the air. It's a fine sunny day.

He get up and go out. He say to himself, *I'm free,* but it don't take hold yet. He say to himself, *this is Canada and I'm free,* but it don't take hold. Then he start to walk down the street.

The first white man he meet on the street, he scrunch up in himself and start to run across the street. But the white man don't pay him any mind. Then he know.

He say to himself in his mind, *I'm free. My name's Cue—John H. Cue. I got a strong back and strong arms. I got freedom in my heart. I got a first name and a last name and a middle name. I never had them all before.*

He say to himself, *My name's Cue—John H. Cue. I got a name and a tale to tell. I got a hammer to swing. I got a tale to tell my people. I got recollection. I call my first son 'John Freedom Cue.' I call my first daughter 'Come-Out-of-the-Lion's-Mouth.'*

Then he walk down the street, and he pass a blacksmith shop. The blacksmith, he's an old man and he lift the hammer heavy. Cue look in that shop and smile.

He pass on; he go his way. And soon enough he see a girl like a peach tree —a girl named Sukey—walking free down the street.

1941: *from The New Yorker*

DEFEAT

by Kay Boyle

Toward the end of June that year and through July there was a sort of uncertain pause, an undetermined suspension that might properly be called neither an armistice nor a peace, and it lasted until the men began coming back from where they were. They came at intervals, trickling down from the north in twos or threes, or even one by one, some of them prisoners who had escaped and others merely a part of that individual retreat in which the sole destination was home. They had exchanged their uniforms for something else as they came along—corduroys, or workmen's blue, or whatever people might have given them in secret to get away in—bearded, singularly and shabbily outfitted men getting down from a bus or off a train without so much as a knapsack in their hands and all with the same bewildered, scarcely discrepant story to tell. Once they had reached the precincts of familiarity, they stood there a moment where the vehicle had left them, maybe trying to button the jacket that didn't fit them or set the neck or shoulders right, like men who have been waiting in a courtroom and have finally heard their names called and stand up to take the oath and mount the witness stand. You could see them getting the words ready—revising the very quality of truth—and the look in their eyes, and then someone coming out of the post office or crossing the station square in the heat would recognize them and go toward them with a hand out, and the testimony would begin.

They had found their way back from different places, by different means, some on bicycle, some by bus, some over the mountains on foot, coming home to the Alpes-Maritimes from Rennes, or from Clermont-Ferrand, or from Lyons, or from any part of France, and looking as incongruous to modern defeat as survivors of the Confederate army might have looked, transplanted to this year and place (with their spurs still on and their soft-brimmed, dust-whitened hats), limping wanly back, half dazed and not yet

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having managed to get the story of what happened straight. Only, this time, they were the men of that tragically unarmed and undirected force which had been the French army once but was no longer, returning to what orators might call reconstruction but which they knew could never be the same.

Wherever they came from, they had identical evidence to give: that the German ranks had advanced bareheaded, in short-sleeved summer shirts—young, blond-haired men with their arms linked, row on row, and their trousers immaculately creased, having slept all night in hotel beds and their stomachs full, advancing singing and falling singing before the puny coughing of the French machine guns. That is, the first line of them might fall, and part of the second, possibly, but never more, for just then the French ammunition would suddenly expire and the bright-haired, blond demigods would march on singing across their dead. Then would follow all the glittering display: the rust-proof tanks and guns, the chromiumed electric kitchens, the crematoriums. Legends or truth, the stories became indistinguishable in the mouths of the Frenchmen who returned—that the Germans were dressed as if for tennis that summer, with nothing but a tune to carry in their heads, while the French crawled out from under lorries where they'd slept maybe every night for a week, going to meet them like crippled, encumbered miners emerging from the pit of a warfare fifty years interred, with thirty-five kilos of kit and a change of shoes and a tin helmet left over from 1914 breaking them in two as they met the brilliantly nickeled Nazi dawn. They said their superiors were the first to run; they said their ammunition had been sabotaged; they said the ambulances had been transformed into accommodations for the officers' lady friends; they said "*Nous avons été vendus*" or "*On nous a vendu*" over and over, until you could have made a popular song of it—the words and the music of defeat. After their testimony was given, some of them added (not the young but those who had fought before) in grave, part-embittered, part-vainglorious voices, "I'm ashamed to be a Frenchman" or "I'm ashamed of being French today," and then gravely took their places with the others.

There was one man, though, who didn't say any of these things, probably because he had something else on his mind. He was a dark, short, rather gracefully made man, not thirty yet, with hot, handsome eyes and a cleft chin. Even when he came back without his uniform and without the victory, a certain air of responsibility, of authority, remained because he had been the chauffeur of the mail bus before the war. He didn't sit talking in the *bistro* about what he had seen and where he had been, but he got the black beard off his face as quickly as he could, and bought a pair of new shoes, and went back to work in stubborn-lipped, youthful, almost violent pride. Except one night he did tell the story; he told it only once, about two months after he got back, and not to his own people or the people of the village but, as if

by chance, to two commercial travelers for rival fruit-juice firms who were just beginning to circulate again from town to town in the Unoccupied Zone. They sat at the Café Central together, the three of them, drinking wine, talking about the anachronism of horse-and-mule-drawn cannon in Flanders and the beasts running amok under the enemy planes, and saying how they had all believed that the French line was going to hold somewhere, that it wasn't going to break.

"At first we thought it would hold at the Oise," one of the traveling men said. "We kept on retreating, saying the new front must be at the Oise, and believing it, too, and then, when we dropped below the Oise, we kept saying it would hold at the Marne, and believing it, and then we thought it would be the Seine, and even when we were south of Paris we kept on believing about some kind of a line holding on the Loire. . . ."

"I still don't know why we stopped retreating," said the other commercial traveler. He sat looking soberly at his glass. "We can't talk about the Italians any more. I still don't see why we didn't retreat right down to Senegal. I don't see what stopped us," he said. Then the quiet-mouthed little bus driver began telling them about what had happened to him on the fourteenth of July.

He had been told, he said, that in some of the cities the enemy hadn't taken, or had withdrawn from, processions formed on the fourteenth and passed through the streets in silence, the flagstaffs they carried draped with black and their heads bowed. In some of the villages, the mayor, dressed in mourning, laid a wreath on the monument to the last war's dead while the peasants kneeled about him in the square.

"I was in Pontcharra on the fourteenth," said one of the traveling salesmen, "and when the mayor put the wreath down and the bugle called out like that for the dead, all the peasants uncovered themselves, but the military didn't even stand at attention."

"By that time none of the privates were saluting their officers in the street anywhere you went," said the other salesman, but the bus driver didn't pay any attention to what they said. He went on telling them that he'd been taken prisoner near Rennes on the seventeenth of June, and that there he saw the tracts the Boche planes had showered down the week before. The tracts said, "Frenchmen, prepare your coffins! Frenchwomen, get out your ball dresses! We're going to dance the soles off your shoes on the fourteenth of July!" He told the commercial travelers exactly what use they made of the tracts in the public places there. He was more than three weeks in the prison camp, he said, and on the night of the twelfth of July he and a *copain* made their escape. They went in uniform, on borrowed bicycles. They kept to the main road all night, wheeling along as free and unmolested in the dark as two young men cycling home from a dance, with their hearts light, and the

stars out over them, and the night air mild. At dawn they took to the side roads, and toward eight o'clock of the new day the saw a house standing alone, a little in advance of the village that lay ahead.

"We'll ask there," the bus driver had said, and they pushed their cycles in off the road and laid them down behind a tree. The house, they could see then, was the schoolhouse, with a sign for "*Filles*" over one door and for "*Garçons*" over the other. The *copain* said there would be nobody there, but the bus driver had seen a woman come to the window and look at them, and he walked up to the door.

The desks were empty because of what had happened and the time of year, but the bus driver said he knew it must have been the schoolmistress who was standing in the middle of the room between the benches, a young woman with fair, wavy hair, eying them fearlessly and even sharply as they came. The bus driver and his *copain* said good morning, and they saw at once the lengths of three-colored stuff in her hands and the work she had been doing. They looked around them and saw four French flags clustered in each corner of the classroom and great loops of bunting that were draped along three sides of the room. The first thing the bus driver thought was that she ought to be warned, she ought to be told, and then, when he looked at her face again, he knew she knew as much as or more than they.

"You ought to keep the door locked," he had said, and the schoolmistress looked at him almost in contempt.

"I don't care who comes in," she said, and she went on folding the bunting into the lengths she wanted to cut it to drape across the farthest wall.

"So the village is occupied?" the bus driver said.

"Yes," she said, but she began cutting the tricolor bunting.

"There's one thing," said the *copain*, looking a little bleakly at the two others. "If you give yourself up, at least you don't get shot."

The schoolmistress had put her scissors down and said to the bus driver, "You'll have to get rid of your uniforms before there's any chance of you getting through." She glanced around the classroom as though the demands of action had suddenly made it strange to her.

"Take them off and put them in the cupboard there," she had said, "and cover yourselves with this stuff while you wait," and she heaped the blue and white and red lengths upon the desks. "In case they might come in," she said. She took her hat and *filet* off the hook as she said, "I'll come back with other clothes for you."

"If there would be any way of getting something to eat," the bus driver had said, and because he asked this, the tide of courage seemed to rise even higher in her.

"Yes," she said. "I'll bring back food for you."

"And a bottle of *pinard*," said the *copain*, but he didn't say it very loud.

When she was gone, they took their uniforms off and wrapped the bunting around themselves, doing it for her and modesty's sake, and then they sat down at the first form's desks, swathed to their beards in red, white, and blue. Even if the Boches had walked into the schoolhouse then, there probably wasn't any military regulation made to deal with what they would have found, the bus driver had said to his *copain*—just two Frenchmen in their underwear sitting quietly inside the colors of their country's flag. But whether he said the other thing to the teacher as soon as she brought the bread and sausage and wine and the scraps of other men's clothing back, he didn't know. Sometimes, when he thought of it afterward, he wasn't quite sure he had ever got the actual words out, but then he remembered the look on her face as she stood by the tree where the bicycles had lain and watched them pedaling toward the village just ahead, and he knew he must have said it. He knew he must have wiped the sausage grease and the wine off his mouth with the back of his hand and said, "A country isn't defeated as long as its women aren't," or "until its women are," or "As long as the women of a country aren't defeated, it doesn't matter if its army is"—something like that, perhaps saying it just before they shook hands with her and cycled away.

That was the morning of the thirteenth, and the bus driver told how they rode all day in the heat, two what-might-have-been-peasants cycling, slowly hour after hour across the hushed, summery, sunny land. The war was over for them, for this country the war was over; there was no sound or look of it in the meadows or the trees or grain. The war was finished, but the farmhouse they stopped at that evening would not take them in.

"Have you got your bread tickets with you?" the peasant said, and even the white-haired sows behind his legs eyed them narrowly with greed.

"We're prisoners escaped. We've got a bit of money," the bus driver said. "We'll pay for our soup, and maybe you'll let us sleep in the loft."

"And when the Boches come in for the milk they'll shoot me and the family for having taken you in!" the peasant said, and the bus driver stood looking at him bitterly a moment before he began to swear. When he had called the man the names he wanted to, he said, "Look here, we were soldiers—perhaps you haven't got that yet? We haven't been demobilized; we were taken prisoner, we escaped. We were fighting a little war up there."

"If you'd fought it better, the Boches wouldn't have got this far," the peasant said. He said it in cunning and triumph, and then he closed the door.

They slept the night at the next farm (the bus driver told the commercial travelers), eating soup and bread and drinking red wine in the kitchen, and when they had paid for it they were shown up to the loft. But they were not offered the side on which the hay lay; the farmer was thinking of next winter

and he told them they could lie down just as well on the boards. They slept heavily and well, and it was very light when they woke in the morning, and so that day, the day of the fourteenth, they did not get far. By six that night they were only another hundred kilometers on, and then the *copain's* tire went flat. But a little town stood just ahead and they pushed their bicycles toward it through the summer evening, and down its wide, treeless street. They hadn't seen the uniform yet, but they knew the Germans must be there. Even on the square in the heart of town they saw no sign, but still there was that unnatural quiet, that familiar uneasiness on the air, so they pushed their wheels through the open doors of a big garage, past the dry and padlocked gas pumps, and stood them up against the inside wall. There, in the garage's half-security and semi-dark, they looked around them; twenty or more cars stood one beside the other, halted as if forever because of the lack of fluid to flow through their veins. Overhead the glass panes of the roof were still painted blue; the military and staff cars parked in the shadowy silence still bore their green-and-khaki camouflage. The war was over, everything had stopped, and out beyond the wide-open automobile doorway they saw the dance platform that had been erected in the square, and the dark, leafy branches twined on its upright beams and balustrade, and the idle people standing looking. There were no flags up, only this rather dismal atmosphere of preparation, and it was then the bus driver and his *copain* had remembered it was the fourteenth.

"It's a national holiday and we haven't had a drink yet," the *copain* said. He stood there in the garage with his hands in the pockets of the trousers that didn't belong to him, staring bleakly out across the square. Even when two German soldiers who were putting electric wiring up in the dance pavilion came into view his face did not alter. He simply went on saying, "We haven't had the *apéritif* all day."

The bus driver took a packet of cigarettes out of his jacket pocket and put one savagely on his lip. As he lit it, he looked in hot, bitter virulence out to where the Germans were hanging strings of bulbs among the fresh, dark leaves.

" 'Frenchmen, prepare your coffins!' " he had said, and then he gave a laugh. "They've made only one mistake so far, just one," he said, and as he talked the cigarette jerked up and down in fury on his lip. "They've got the dance floor and the decorations all right, and they've probably got the music, and maybe the refreshments too. So far so good," he said. "But they haven't got the partners. That's what's going to be funny. That's what's going to be really funny."

The bus driver sat there in the Café Central telling it to the two commercial travelers, perhaps because he had had more to drink than usual, telling them the story, or perhaps because it had been weighing long enough heavy

on his heart. He told them about the dinner the garage owner gave him and his *copain:* civet and fried potatoes and salad and four kinds of cheese and armagnac with the coffee. He said they could scarcely get it all down and that then their host opened a bottle of champagne for them. That's the kind of man the garage owner was. And during the dinner or afterward, with the wine inside of him, it seems the bus driver had said it again. He had said something about as long as the women of a nation weren't defeated the rest of it didn't matter, and just as he said it the music struck up in the dance pavilion outside.

The place the garage owner offered them for the night was just above the garage itself, a sort of storeroom, with three windows overlooking the square. First he repaired the *copain's* tire for him, and behind him on the wall as he worked they read the newspaper cutting he had pinned up, perhaps in some spirit of derision. It exhorted all Frenchmen to accept quietly and without protest the new regulations concerning the circulation of private and public vehicles.

"Without protest!" the garage owner had said, taking the dripping red tube out of the basin of water and pinching the leak between his finger and thumb. "I'll have to close the place up, and they ask me to do it without protest." He stood rubbing sandpaper gently around where the imperceptible hole in the rubber was. "We weren't ready for war and yet we declared it just the same," he said, "and now we've asked for peace and we aren't ready for that, either." When he had finished with the tire he showed them up the stairs.

"I'll keep the light off," he said, "in case it might give them the idea of coming up and having a look," but there was no need for any light, for the illumination of the dance pavilion in the square shone in through the windows and lit the rows of storage batteries and the cases of spare parts and spark plugs. From outside they heard the music playing—the exact waltz time and the quick, entirely martial version of swing.

"Somebody ought to tell them they're wasting their time," the bus driver had said, jerking one shoulder toward the windows. He could have burst out laughing at the sight of them, he explained, some with white gloves on even, waiting out there to the strains of music for what wasn't going to come.

The garage owner shook out the potato sacks of waste on the floor and gave them the sacks to lie down on, and then he took one look out the window at the square and grinned and said good night and went downstairs. The *copain* was tired and he lay down at once on the soft rags on the floor and drew a blanket up over him, but the bus driver had stood a while at one side of the window, watching the thing below. A little group of townspeople was standing around the platform where the variously colored lights hung, and the band was playing in one corner of the pavilion underneath the leaves. No one was dancing, but the German soldiers were hanging around in

expectation, some standing on the steps of the platform and some leaning on the garnished rails.

"For a little while there wasn't a woman anywhere," the bus driver told the commercial travelers. "There was this crowd of people from the town, perhaps thirty or forty of them looking on, and maybe some others further back in the dark where you couldn't see them, but that was all." And then he stopped talking.

"And then what happened?" said one of the traveling men after a moment, and the bus driver sat looking in silence at his glass.

"They had a big, long table spread out with things to eat on it," he said in a minute, and he didn't look up. "They had fruit tarts, it looked like, and sweet chocolate, and bottles of lemonade and beer. They had as much as you wanted of everything," he said. "And perhaps once you got near enough to start eating and drinking, then the other thing just followed naturally afterward—or that's the way I worked it out," he said. "Or maybe, if you've had a dress a long time that you wanted to wear and you hadn't had the chance of putting it on and showing it off because all the men were away—I mean if you were a woman. I worked it out that maybe the time comes when you want to put it on so badly that you put it on just the same whatever's happened, or maybe, if you're one kind of a woman, any kind of a uniform looks all right to you after a certain time. The music was good, it was first class," he said, but he didn't look up. "And here was all this food spread out, and the corks popping off the bottles, and the lads in uniform, great, big fellows, handing out chocolates to all the girls. . . ."

The three of them sat at the table without talking for a while after the bus driver's voice had ceased, and then one of the traveling men said, "Well, that was just one town."

"Yes, that was just one town," said the bus driver, and when he picked up his glass to drink, something as crazy as tears was standing in his eyes.

1942: *from Harper's Magazine*

THE WIDE NET

by Eudora Welty, who is a familiar name to the O. Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories *series. Miss Welty, twice a first-prize winner (see also "Livvie*

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Is Back," 1943), produced a second-prize winner ("A Worn Path," 1941) and is also represented in the 1939 volume with "Petrified Man," from the Southern Review. *Her first story appeared in* Manuscript *in 1936. Her first book,* A Curtain of Green, *was published in 1941; a collection of short stories appeared in 1943 under the title of* The Wide Net. *She is also the author of* Delta Wedding, The Golden Apples, The Ponder Heart *(for which she was awarded the Howells Medal in 1955), and* The Bride of Innisfallen.

Miss Welty is a native of Jackson, Mississippi. She attended Mississippi State College for Women, and received her Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Wisconsin. In 1942 she was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship for a project to write a series of short stories centering around the Natchez Trace.

William Wallace Jamieson's wife Hazel was going to have a baby. But this was October, and it was six months away, and she acted exactly as though it would be tomorrow. When he came in the room she would not speak to him but would look as straight at nothing as she could, with her eyes glowing. If he only touched her she stuck out her tongue or ran round the table. So one night he went out with two of the boys down the road and stayed out all night. But that was the worst thing yet, because when he came home in the early morning Hazel had vanished. He went through the house not believing his eyes, balancing with both hands out, his yellow cowlick rising on end, and then he turned the kitchen inside out looking for her, but it did no good. Then when he got back to the front room he saw she had left him a little letter in an envelope. That was doing something behind someone's back. He took out the letter, pushed it open, held it out at a distance from his eyes. . . . After one look he was scared to read the exact words, and he crushed the whole thing in his hand instantly, but what it had said was that she could not put up with him after that and was going to the river to drown herself.

"Drown herself . . . but she's in mortal fear of the water!"

He ran out front, his face red like the red of the picked cottonfield he ran over, and down in the road he gave a loud shout for Virgil Thomas, who was just going in his own house, to come out again. He had almost got in, he had one foot inside the door.

They met halfway between the farms, under the shade tree.

"Haven't you had enough of the night?" asked Virgil. There they were, their pants all covered with the dust and dew, and they had had to carry the third man home flat between them.

"I've lost Hazel, she's vanished, she went to drown herself."

"Why, that ain't like Hazel," said Virgil.

William Wallace reached out and shook him. "You heard me. Don't you know we have to drag the river?"

"Right this minute?"

"You ain't got nothing to do till spring."

"Let me go set foot inside the house and speak to my mother and tell her a story and I'll come back."

"This will take the wide net," said William Wallace. His eyebrows gathered, and he was talking to himself.

"How come Hazel to go and do that way?" asked Virgil as they started out.

William Wallace said, "I reckon she got lonesome."

"That don't argue—drown herself for getting lonesome. My mother gets lonesome."

"Well," said William Wallace. "It argues for Hazel."

"How long is it now since you and her was married?"

"Why, it's been a year."

"It don't seem that long to me. A year!"

"It was this time last year. It seems longer," said William Wallace, breaking a stick off a tree in surprise. They walked along, kicking at the flowers on the road's edge. "I remember the day I seen her first and that seems a long time ago. She was coming along the road holding a little frying-size chicken from her grandma under her arm, and she had it real quiet. I spoke to her with nice manners. We knowed each other's names, being bound to, just didn't know each other to speak to.

"I says, 'Where are you taking the fryer?' and she says, 'Mind your manners,' and I kept on till after while she says, 'If you want to walk me home take littler steps.' So I didn't lose time. It was just four miles across the field and full of blackberries, and from the top of the hill there was Dover below, looking sizable-like and clean, spread out between the two churches like that. When we got down I says to her, 'What kind of water's in this well?' and she says, 'The best water in the world.' So I drew a bucket and took out a dipper and she drank and I drank. I didn't think it was that remarkable, but I didn't tell her."

"What happened that night?" asked Virgil.

"We ate the chicken," said William Wallace, "and it was tender. Of course that wasn't all they had. The night I was trying their table out it sure had good things to eat from one end to the other. Her mama and papa sat at the head and foot and we was face to face with each other across it with, I remember, a pat of butter between. They had real sweet butter with a tree drawed down it, elegant-like. Her mama eats like a man. I had brought her a

whole hatful of berries and she didn't even pass them to her husband. Hazel, she would leap up and take a pitcher of new milk and fill up the glasses. I had heard how they couldn't have a singing at the church without a fight over her."

"Oh, she's a pretty girl, all right," said Virgil. "It's a pity for the ones like her to grow old and get like their mothers."

"Another thing will be that her mother will get wind of this and come after me," said William Wallace.

"Her mother will eat you alive," said Virgil.

"She's just been watching her chance," said William Wallace. "Why did I think I could stay out all night?"

"Just something come over you."

"First it was just a carnival at Carthage, and I had to let them guess my weight . . . and after that . . ."

"It was nice to be sitting on your neck in a ditch singing," prompted Virgil, "there in the moonlight. And playing on the harmonica like you can play."

"Even if Hazel did sit home knowing I was drunk, that wouldn't kill her," said William Wallace. "What she knows ain't ever killed her yet. . . . She's smart, too, for a girl," he said.

"She's a lot smarter than her cousins in Beula," said Virgil. "And especially Edna Earle, that never did get to be what you'd call a heavy thinker. Edna Earle could sit and ponder all day on how the little tail of the 'C' got through the 'L' in a Coca-Cola sign."

"Hazel *is* smart," said William Wallace. They walked on. "You ought to see her pantry shelf—it looks like a hundred jars when you open the door. I don't see how she could turn around and jump in the river."

"It's a woman's trick."

"I always behaved before. Till the one night—last night."

"Yes, but the one night," said Virgil. "And she was waiting to take advantage."

"She jumped in the river because she was scared to death of the water and that was to make it worse," he said. "She remembered how I used to have to pick her up and carry her over the oak-log bridge, how she'd shut her eyes and make a deadweight and hold me round the neck, just for a little creek. I don't see how she brought herself to jump."

"Jumped backward," said Virgil. "Didn't look."

When they turned off it was still early in the pink and green fields. The fumes of morning, sweet and bitter, sprang up where they walked. The insects ticked softly, their strength in reserve; butterflies chopped the air, going to the east, and the birds flew carelessly and sang by fits and starts, not the way they did in the evening, in sustained and drowsy songs.

by Eudora Welty

"It is a pretty *day* for sure," said William Wallace. "It's a pretty *day* for it."

"I don't see a sign of her ever going along here," said Virgil.

"Well," said William Wallace, "she wouldn't have dropped anything. I never saw a girl to leave less signs of where she's been."

"Not even a plum seed," said Virgil, kicking the grass.

In the grove it was so quiet that once William Wallace gave a jump, as if he could almost hear a sound of himself wondering where she had gone. A descent of energy came down on him in the thick of the woods and he ran at a rabbit and caught it in his hands.

"Rabbit . . . rabbit . . ." He acted as if he wanted to take it off to himself and hold it up and talk to it. He laid a palm against its pushing heart. "Now . . . there now . . ."

"Let her go, William Wallace, let her go." Virgil, chewing on an elderberry whistle he had just made, stood at his shoulder. "What do you want with a live rabbit?"

William Wallace squatted down and set the rabbit on the ground but held it under his hand. It was a little, old, brown rabbit. It did not try to move. "See there?"

"Let her go."

"She can go if she wants to, but she don't want to."

Gently he lifted his hand. The round eye was shining at him sideways in the green gloom.

"Anybody can freeze a rabbit that wants to," said Virgil. Suddenly he gave a far-reaching blast on the whistle, and the rabbit went in a streak. "Was you out catching cottontails or was you out catching your wife?" he said, taking the turn to the open fields. "I come along to keep you on the track."

"Who'll we get now?" They stood on top of a hill and William Wallace looked critically over the countryside. "Any of the Malones?"

"I was always scared of the Malones," said Virgil. "Too many *of* them."

"This is my day with the net, and they would have to watch out," said William Wallace. "I reckon some Malones and the Doyles will be enough. The six Doyles and their dogs, and you and me, and two little nigger boys is enough, with just a few Malones."

"That ought to be enough," said Virgil, "no matter what."

"I'll bring the Malones and you bring the Doyles," said William Wallace, and they separated at the spring.

When William Wallace came back, with a string of Malones just showing behind him on the hilltop, he found Virgil with the two little Rippen boys waiting behind him, solemn little towheads. As soon as he walked up, Grady, the one in front, lifted his hand, as if to signal silence and caution to his brother Brucie, panting merrily and untrustworthily behind him.

Brucie bent readily under William Wallace's hand pat and gave him a dreamy look out of the tops of his round eyes, which were pure green-and-white, like clover tops. William Wallace gave him a nickel. Grady hung his head; his white hair lay in a little tail in the nape of his neck.

"Let's let them come," said Virgil.

"Well, they can come then, but if we keep letting everybody come it is going to be too many," said William Wallace.

"They'll appreciate it, those little old boys," said Virgil. Brucie held up at arm's length a long red thread with a bent pin tied on the end; and a look of helpless and intense interest gathered Grady's face like a drawstring; his eyes, one bright with a sty, shone pleadingly under his white bangs, and he snapped his jaw and tried to speak. . . . "Their papa was drowned in the Pearl River," said Virgil.

There was a shout from the gully.

"Here come all the Malones," cried William Wallace. "I asked four of them would they come, but the rest of the family invited themselves."

"Did you ever see a time when they didn't?" said Virgil "And yonder from the other direction comes the Doyles, still with biscuit crumbs on their cheeks, I bet, now it's nothing to do but eat, as their mother said."

"If two little niggers would come along now, or one big nigger," said William Wallace. And the words were hardly out of his mouth when two little Negro boys came along, going somewhere, one behind the other, stepping high and gay in their overalls, as though they waded through honeydew to the waist.

"Come here, boys. What's your names?"

"Sam and Robbie Bell."

"Come along with us, we're going to drag the river."

"You hear that, Robbie Bell?" said Sam.

They smiled.

The Doyles came noiselessly, their dogs made all the fuss. The Malones, eight giants with great long black eyelashes, were already stamping the ground and pawing one another, ready to go. Everybody went up together to see Doc.

Old Doc owned the wide net. He had a house on top of the hill and he sat and looked out from a rocker on the front porch.

"Climb the hill and come in!" he began to intone across the valley. "Harvest's over . . . slipped up on everybody . . . cotton's picked, gone to the gin . . . hay cut . . . molasses made around here. . . . Big explosion's over, supervisors elected, some pleased, some not. . . . We're hearing talk of war!"

When they got closer he was saying, "Many's been saved at revival, twenty-two last Sunday, including a Doyle, ought to counted two. Hope

they'll be a blessing to Dover community besides a shining star in Heaven. Now what?" he asked, for they had arrived and stood gathered in front of the steps.

"If nobody else is using your wide net could we use it?" asked William Wallace.

"You just used it a month ago," said Doc. "It ain't your turn."

Virgil jogged William Wallace's arm and cleared his throat. "This time is kind of special," he said. "We got reason to think William Wallace's wife Hazel is in the river, drowned."

"What reason have you got to think she's in the river drowned?" asked Doc. He took out his old pipe. "I'm asking the husband."

"Because she's not in the house," said William Wallace.

"Vanished?" and he knocked out the pipe.

"Plumb vanished."

"Of course a thousand things could have happened to her," said Doc, and he lighted the pipe.

"Hand him up the letter, William Wallace," said Virgil. "We can't wait around till Doomsday for the net while Doc sits back thinkin'."

"I tore it up, right at the first," said William Wallace. "But I know it by heart. It said she was going to jump straight in the Pearl River and that I'd be sorry."

"Where do you come in, Virgil?" asked Doc.

"I was in the same place William Wallace sat on his neck in, all night, and done as much as he done, and come home the same time."

"You-all were out cuttin' up, so Lady Hazel has to jump in the river, is that it? Cause and effect. Anybody want to argue with me? Where do these others come in, Doyles, Malones, and what not?"

"Doc is the smartest man around," said William Wallace, turning to the stolidly waiting Doyles, "but it sure takes time."

"These are the ones that's collected to drag the river for her," said Virgil.

"Of course I am not going on record to say so soon that *I* think she's drowned," Doc said, blowing out blue smoke.

"Do you think . . ." William Wallace went up a step, and his hands both went into fists. "Do you think she was *carried off*?"

"Now that's the way to argue, see it from all sides," said Doc promptly. "But who by?"

Some Malone whistled, but not so you could tell which one.

"There's no booger around the Dover section that goes around carrying off young girls that's married," stated Doc.

"She was always scared of the gypsies," William Wallace turned scarlet. "She'd sure turn her ring around on her finger if she passed one, and look

in the other direction so they couldn't see she was pretty and carry her off. They come in the end of summer."

"Yes, there are the gypsies, kidnapers since the world began. But was it to be you that would pay the grand ransom?" asked Doc. He pointed his finger. They all laughed then at how clever old Doc was and clapped William Wallace on the back. But that turned into a scuffle and they fell to the ground.

"Stop it, or you can't have the net," said Doc. "You're scaring my wife's chickens."

"It's time we was gone," said William Wallace.

The big barking dogs jumped to lean their front paws on the men's chests.

"My advice remains, Let well enough alone," said Doc. "Whatever this mysterious event will turn out to be, it has kept one woman from talking awhile. However, Lady Hazel is the prettiest girl in Mississippi, a golden-haired girl; you've never seen a prettier one and you never will." He got to his feet with the nimbleness that was always his surprise and said, "I'll come along with you."

The path they always followed was the Old Natchez Trace. It took them through the deep woods and led them out down below on the Pearl River, where they could begin dragging it upstream to a point near Dover. They walked in silence round William Wallace, not letting him carry anything, but the net dragged heavily and the buckets were full of clatter in a place so dim and still.

Once they went through a forest of cucumber trees and came up on a high ridge. Grady and Brucie who were running ahead all the way stopped in their tracks; a whistle had blown, and far down and far away a long freight train was passing. It seemed like a little festival procession, moving with the slowness of ignorance or a dream, from distance to distance, the tiny pink and gray cars like secret boxes. Grady was counting the cars to himself, as if he could certainly see each one clearly, and Brucie watched his lips, hushed and cautious, the way he would watch a bird drinking. Tears suddenly came to Grady's eyes, but it could only be because a tiny man walked along the top of the train, walking and moving on top of the moving train.

They went down again and soon the smell of the river spread over the woods, cool and secret. Every step they took among the great walls of vines and among the passionflowers started up a little life, a little flight.

"We're walking along in the changing-time," said Doc. "Any day now the change will come. It's going to turn from hot to cold, and we can kill the hog that's ripe and have fresh meat to eat. Come one of these nights and we can wander down here and tree a nice possum. Old Jack Frost will be pinching things up. Old Mr. Winter will be standing in the door. Hickory tree there will be yellow. Sweet-gum red, hickory yellow, dogwood red, syca-

more yellow." He went along rapping the tree trunks with his knuckle. "Magnolia and live oak never die. Remember that. Persimmons will all get fit to eat, and the nuts will be dropping like rain all through the woods here. And run, little quail, run, for we'll be after you too."

They went on and suddenly the woods opened upon light, and they had reached the river. Everyone stopped, but Doc talked on ahead as though nothing had happened. "Only today," he said, "today, in October sun, it's all gold—sky and tree and water. Everything just before it changes looks to be made of gold."

William Wallace looked down as though he thought of Hazel with the shining eyes, sitting at home and looking straight before her, like a piece of pure gold, too precious to touch.

Below them the river was glimmering, narrow, soft, and skin-colored, and slowed nearly to stillness. The shining willow trees hung round them. The net that was being drawn out, so old and so long-used, it too looked golden, strung and tied with golden threads.

Standing still on the bank, all of a sudden William Wallace, on whose word they were waiting, spoke up in a voice of surprise. "What is the name of this river?"

They looked at him as if he were crazy not to know the name of the river he had fished in all his life. But a deep frown was on his forehead, as if he were compelled to wonder what people had come to call this river, or to think there was a mystery in the name of a river they all knew so well, the same as if it were some great far torrent of waves that dashed through the mountains somewhere, and almost as if it were a river in some dream, for they could not give him the name of that.

"Everybody knows Pearl River is named the Pearl River," said Doc.

A bird note suddenly bold was like a stone thrown into the water to sound it.

"It's deep here," said Virgil, and jogged William Wallace. "Remember?"

William Wallace stood looking down at the river as if it were still a mystery to him. There under his foot which hung over the bank it was transparent and yellow like an old bottle lying in the sun, filling with light.

Doc clattered all his paraphernalia.

Then all of a sudden all the Malones scattered jumping and tumbling down the bank. They gave their loud shout. Little Brucie started after them and looked back.

"Do you think she jumped?" Virgil asked William Wallace.

Since the net was so wide when it was all stretched, it reached from bank to bank of the Pearl River, and the weights would hold it all the way to the bottom. Juglike sounds filled the air, splashes lifted in the sun, and the

party began to move upstream. The Malones with great groans swam and pulled near the shore; the Doyles swam and pushed from behind with Virgil to tell them how to do it best; Grady and Brucie with his thread and pin trotted along the sandbars hauling buckets and lines. Sam and Robbie Bell, naked and bright, guided the old oarless rowboat that always drifted at the shore, and in it, sitting up tall with his hat on, was Doc—he went along without ever touching water and without ever taking his eye off the net. William Wallace himself did everything but most of the time he was out of sight, swimming about under water or diving, and he had nothing to say any more.

The dogs chased up and down, in and out of the water and in and out of the woods.

"Don't let her get too heavy, boys," Doc intoned regularly every few minutes, "and she won't let nothing through."

"She won't let nothing through, she won't let nothing through," chanted Sam and Robbie Bell, one at his front and one at his back.

The sandbars were pink or violet drifts ahead. Where the light fell on the river, in a wandering from shore to shore, it was leaf-shaped spangles that trembled softly, while the dark of the river was calm. The willow trees leaned overhead and their trailing leaves hung like waterfalls in the morning air. The thing that seemed like silence must have been the endless cry of all the crickets and locusts in the world, rising and falling.

Every time William Wallace took hold of a big eel that slipped the net, the Malones all yelled, "Rassle with him, son!"

"Don't let her get too heavy, boys," said Doc.

"This is hard on catfish," William Wallace said once.

There were big and little fishes, dark and light, that they caught, good ones and bad ones, the same old fish.

"This is more shoes than I ever saw got together in any store," said Virgil when they emptied the net to the bottom. "Get going!" he shouted in the next breath.

The little Rippens who had stayed ahead in the woods stayed ahead on the river. Brucie, leading them all, made small jumps and hops as he went, sometimes on one foot, sometimes on the other.

The winding river looked old sometimes, when it ran wrinkled and deep under high banks where the roots of trees hung down, and sometimes it seemed to be only a young creek, shining with the colors of wildflowers. Sometimes sandbars in the shapes of fishes lay nose to nose, without the track of even a bird.

"Here comes some alligators," said Virgil. "Let's let them by."

They drew out on the shady side of the water, and three big alligators and four middle-sized ones went by, taking their own time.

"Look at their great big old teeth!" called a shrill voice. It was Grady making his only outcry, and the alligators were not showing their teeth at all.

"The better to eat folks with," said Doc from his boat, looking at him severely.

"Doc, you are bound to declare all you know," said Virgil. "Get going!"

When they started off again the first thing they caught in the net was the baby alligator.

"That's just what we wanted!" cried the Malones.

They set the little alligator down on a sandbar and he squatted perfectly still; they could hardly tell when it was he started to move. They watched with set faces his incredible mechanics, while the dogs after one bark stood off in inquisitive humility, until he winked.

"He's ours!" shouted all the Malones. "We're taking him home with us!"

"He ain't nothing but a little old baby," said William Wallace.

The Malones only scoffed, as if he might be only a baby but he looked like the oldest and worst lizard.

"What are you going to do with him?" asked Virgil.

"Keep him."

"I'd be more careful what I took out of this net," said Doc.

"Tie him up and throw him in the bucket," the Malones were saying to one another, while Doc was saying, "Don't come running to me and ask me what to do when he gets big."

They kept catching more and more fish, as if there was no end in sight.

"Look, a string of lady's beads," said Virgil. "Here, Sam and Robbie Bell."

Sam wore them round his head, with a knot over his forehead and loops round his ears, and Robbie Bell walked behind and stared at them.

In a shadowy place something white flew up. It was a heron and it went away over the dark treetops. William Wallace followed it with his eyes and Brucie clapped his hands, but Virgil gave a sigh, as if he knew that when you go looking for what is lost everything is a sign.

An eel slid out of the net.

"Rassle with him, son!" yelled the Malones. They swam like fiends.

"The Malones are in it for the fish," said Virgil.

It was about noon that there was a little rustle on the bank.

"Who is that yonder?" asked Virgil, and he pointed to a little undersized man with short legs and a little straw hat, who was following along on the other side of the river.

"Never saw him and don't know his brother," said Doc.

Nobody had ever seen him before.

"Who invited you?" cried Virgil hotly. "Hi . . . !" and he made signs for the little undersized man to look after him, but he would not.

"Looks like a crazy man from here," said the Malones.

"Just don't pay any attention to him and maybe he'll go away," advised Doc.

But Virgil had already swum across and was up on the other bank. He and the stranger could be seen exchanging a word apiece and then Virgil put out his hand the way he would pat a child and patted the man to the ground. The little man got up again just as quickly, lifted his shoulders, turned round, and walked away with his hat tilted over his eyes.

When Virgil came back he said, "Little old man claimed he was harmless as a baby. I told him to just try horning in on this river and anything in it."

"What did he look like up close?" asked Doc.

"I didn't study how he looked," said Virgil. "But I don't like anybody to come looking at me that I am not familiar with." And he shouted, "Get going!"

"Things are moving in too great a rush," said Doc.

Brucie darted ahead and ran looking into all the bushes, lifting up the branches and peeping underneath.

"Not one of the Doyles has spoke a word," said Virgil.

"That's because they're not talkers," said Doc.

All day William Wallace kept diving to the bottom. Once he dived down and down into the dark water, where it was so still that nothing stirred, not even a fish, and so dark that it was no longer the muddy world of the upper river but the dark clear world of deepness, and he must have believed this was the deepest place in the whole Pearl River, and if she was not here she would not be anywhere. He was gone such a long time that the others stared hard at the surface of the water, through which the bubbles came from below. So far down and all alone, had he found Hazel? Had he suspected down there, like some secret, the real, the true trouble that Hazel had fallen into, about which words in a letter could not speak . . . (who knew?) she had been filled to the brim with that elation that they all remembered, like their own secret, the elation that comes of great hopes and changes, sometimes simply of the harvest time, that comes with a little course of its own like a tune to run in the head, and there was nothing she could do about it—they knew—and so it had turned into despair? It could be nothing but the old trouble that William Wallace was finding out, reaching and turning in the gloom of such depths.

"Look down yonder," said Grady softly to Brucie.

He pointed to the surface, where their reflections lay colorless and still side by side. He touched his brother gently as though to impress him.

"That's you and me," he said.

Brucie swayed precariously over the edge, and Grady caught him by the

seat of his overalls. Brucie looked, but showed no recognition. Instead, he backed away, and seemed all at once unconcerned and spiritless and pressed the nickel William Wallace had given him into his palm, rubbing it into his skin. Grady's inflamed eyes rested on the brown water. Without warning he saw something . . . perhaps the image in the river seemed to be his father, the drowned man—with arms open, eyes open, mouth open . . . Grady stared and blinked, again something wrinkled up his face.

And when William Wallace came up it was in an agony from submersion, which seemed an agony of the blood and of the very heart, so woeful he looked. He was staring round in astonishment, as if a long time had gone by, away from the pale world where the brown light of the sun and the river and the little party watching him trembled before his eyes.

"What did you bring up?" somebody called—was it Virgil?

One of his hands was holding fast to a little green ribbon of plant, root and all. He was surprised and let it go.

It was afternoon. The trees spread softly, the clouds hung wet and tinted. A buzzard turned a few slow wheels in the sky and drifted upward. The dogs promenaded the banks.

"It's time we ate fish," said Virgil.

On a wide sandbar on which seashells lay they dragged up the haul and built a fire.

Then for a long time among clouds of odors and smoke, all half naked except Doc, they cooked and ate catfish. They ate until the Malones groaned and all the Doyles stretched out on their faces, though for long after Sam and Robbie Bell sat up to their own little table on a cypress stump and ate on and on. Then they all were silent and still and one by one fell asleep.

"There ain't a thing better than fish," muttered William Wallace. He lay stretched on his back in the glimmer and shade of trampled sand. His sunburned forehead and cheeks seemed to glow with fire. His eyelids fell. The shadow of a willow branch dipped and moved over him. "There is nothing in the world as good as . . . fish. The fish of Pearl River." Then slowly he smiled. He was asleep.

But it seemed almost at once that he was leaping up, and one by one up sat the others in their ring and looked at him, for it was impossible to stop and sleep by the river.

"You're feeling as good as you felt last night," said Virgil, setting his head on one side.

"The excursion is the same when you go looking for your sorrow as when you go looking for your joy," said Doc.

But William Wallace answered none of them anything, for he was leaping all over the place and all over them and the feast and the bones of the feast, trampling the sand, up and down, and doing a dance so crazy that he would

die next. He took a big catfish and hooked it to his belt buckle and went up and down, so that they all hollered, and the tears of laughter streaming down his cheeks made him put his hand up, and the two days' growth of beard began to jump out, bright red.

But all of a sudden there was an even louder cry, something almost like a cheer, from everybody at once, and all pointed fingers moved from William Wallace to the river. In the center of three light gold rings across the water was lifted first an old hoary head ("It has whiskers!" a voice cried) and then in an undulation loop after loop and hump after hump of a long dark body, until there were a dozen rings of ripples, one behind the other, stretching all across the river, like a necklace.

"The King of the Snakes!" cried all the Malones at once, in high tenor voices and leaning together.

"The King of the Snakes," intoned old Doc, alone in his profound bass.

"He looked you in the eye."

William Wallace stared back at the King of the Snakes with all his might.

It was Brucie that darted forward, dangling his little thread with the pin tied to it, going toward the water.

"That's the King of the Snakes!" cried Grady, who always looked after him.

Then the snake went down.

The little boy stopped with one leg in the air, spun around on the other, and sank to the ground.

"Git up," Grady whispered. "It was just the King of the Snakes. He went off whistling. Git up. It wasn't a thing but the King of the Snakes."

Brucie's green eyes opened, his tongue darted out, and he sprang up; his feet were heavy, his head light, and he rose like a bubble coming to the surface.

The thunder like a stone loosened and rolled down the bank.

They all stood unwilling on the sandbar, holding the net. In the eastern sky were the familiar castles and the round towers to which they were used, gray, pink, and blue, growing darker and filling with thunder. Lightning flickered in the sun along their thick walls. But in the west the sun shone with such a violence that in an illumination like a long-prolonged glare of lightning the heavens looked black and white; all color left the world, the goldenness of everything was like a memory, and only heat, a kind of glamour and oppression, lay on their heads. The thick heavy trees on the other side of the river were brushed with mile-long streaks of silver, and a wind touched each man on the forehead. At the same time there was a very long roll of thunder that began behind them, came up and down mountains and valleys of air, passed over their heads, and left them listening still. With a small,

near noise a mockingbird followed it, the little white bars of its body flashing over the willow trees.

"We are here for a storm now," Virgil said. "We will have to stay until it's over."

They retreated a little, and hard drops fell in the leathery leaves at their shoulders and about their heads.

"Magnolia's the loudest tree there is in a storm," said Doc.

Then the light changed the water, until all about them the woods in the rising wind seemed to grow taller and blow inward together and suddenly turn dark. The rain struck heavily. A huge tail seemed to lash through the air and the river broke in a wound of silver. In silence the party crouched and stooped beside the trunk of the great tree, which in the push of the storm rose full of a fragrant and unyielding weight. Where they all stared, past their tree was another tree, and beyond that another and another, all the way down the bank of the river, all towering and darkened in the storm.

"The outside world is full of endurance," said Doc. "Full of endurance."

Robbie Bell and Sam squatted down low and embraced each other from the start.

"Runs in our family to get struck by lightnin'," said Robbie Bell. "Lightnin' drawed a pitchfork right on our grandpappy's cheek, stayed till he died. Pappy got struck by some bolts of lightnin' and was dead three days, dead as that-there ax."

There was a succession of glares and crashes.

"This'n's goin' to be either me or you," said Sam. "Here come a little bug. If he go to the left, it's me, and to the right, it's you."

But at the next flare a big tree on the hill seemed to turn into fire before their eyes, every branch, twig, and leaf, and a purple cloud hung over it.

"Did you hear that crack?" asked Robbie Bell. "That were its bones."

"Why do you little niggers talk so much!" said Doc. "Nobody's profiting by this information."

"We always talks this much," said Sam, "but now everybody so quiet, they hears us."

The great tree, split and on fire, fell roaring to earth. Just at its moment of falling, a tree like it on the opposite bank split wide open and fell in two parts.

"Hope they ain't goin' to be no balls of fire come rollin' over the water and fry all the fishes with they scales on," said Robbie Bell.

The water in the river had turned purple and was filled with sudden currents and whirlpools. The little willow trees bent almost to its surface, bowing one after another down the bank and breaking under the storm. A great curtain of wet leaves was borne along before a blast of wind, and every human being was covered.

"Now us got scales," wailed Sam. "Us is the fishes."

"Shut up, little old colored children," said Virgil. "This isn't the way to act when somebody takes you out to drag the river."

"Poor lady's ghost, I bet it is scareder than us," said Sam.

"All I hoping is, us don't find her!" screamed Robbie Bell.

William Wallace bent down and knocked their heads together. After that they clung silently in each other's arms, the two black heads resting with wind-filled cheeks and tight-closed eyes one upon the other, until the storm was over.

"Right over yonder is Dover," said Virgil. "We've come all the way. William Wallace, you have walked on a sharp rock and cut your foot open."

In Dover it had rained and the town looked somehow like new. The wavy heat of late afternoon came down from the water tank and fell over everything like shiny mosquito netting. At the wide place where the road was paved and patched with tar it seemed newly embedded with Coca-Cola tops. A few wet wagons and cars stood like a sparkling puzzle down the middle of the street. The old circus posters on the store were nearly gone, only bits, the snowflakes of white horses, clinging to its side. Morning-glory vines started almost visibly to grow over the roofs and cling round the ties of the railroad track, where bluejays lighted on the rails, and umbrella chinaberry trees hung heavily over the whole town dropping their first fall berries onto tin roofs.

Each with his counted fish on a string, the members of the river-dragging party walked through the town. They went toward the town well, and there was Hazel's mother's house, but no sign of her yet, coming out. They all drank a dipper of the water, and still there was not a soul on the street. Even the bench in front of the store was empty.

But something told them somebody had come, for after one moment people began to look out of the store and out of the post office. All the bird dogs woke up to see such a large number of men and boys materialize suddenly with such a big catch of fish, and they ran out barking. The bluejays flashed up from the track and screeched above the town, whipping through their tunnels in the chinaberry trees. In the café a nickel clattered inside a music box and a love song began to play. The whole town of Dover began to throb in its wood and tin, like an old tired heart, when the men walked through once more, coming around again and going down the street carrying the fish, so drenched, exhausted, and muddy that no one could help but admire them.

William Wallace walked through the town as though he did not see anybody or hear anything. Yet he carried his great string of fish held high where

it could be seen by all. Virgil came next, imitating William Wallace exactly, then the modest Doyles crowded by the Malones, who were holding up their alligator, tossing it in the air, even, like a father tossing his child. Following behind and pointing authoritatively at the ones in front strolled Doc, with Sam and Robbie Bell still chanting in his wake. In and out of the whole little line Grady and Brucie jerked about. Grady, with his head ducked, and stiff as a rod, walked with a springy limp; it made him look forever angry and unapproachable. Under his breath he was whispering, "Sty, sty, git out of my eye, and git on somebody passing by." He traveled on with narrowed shoulders and kept his eye unerringly upon his little brother, wary and at the same time proud, as though he held a flying June bug on a string. Brucie, making a twanging noise with his lips, had shot forth again, and he was darting rapidly everywhere at once, delighted and tantalized, running in circles round William Wallace pointing to his fish. A frown of pleasure like the print of a bird's foot was stamped between his faint brows, and he trotted in some unknown realm of delight.

"Did you ever see so many fish?" said the people in Dover.

"How much are your fish, mister?"

"Would you sell your fish?"

"Is that all the fish in Pearl River?"

"How much you sell them all for? Everybody's?"

"Three dollars," said William Wallace suddenly.

The Malones were upon him and shouting, but it was too late.

And just as William Wallace was taking the money in his hand, Hazel's mother walked solidly out of her front door and saw it.

"You can't head her mother off," said Virgil. "Here she comes in full bloom."

But William Wallace turned his back on her, and on them all, for that matter, and that was the breaking-up of the party.

Just as the sun went down, Doc climbed his back steps, sat in his chair on the back porch where he sat in the evenings, and lighted his pipe. William Wallace hung out the net and came back and Virgil was waiting for him, so they could say good evening to Doc.

"All in all," said Doc, when they came up, "I've never been on a better river-dragging, or seen better behavior. If it took catching catfish to move the Rock of Gibraltar, I believe this outfit could move it."

"We didn't catch Hazel Jamieson," said Virgil.

"What did you say?" asked Doc.

"He don't really pay attention," said Virgil. "I said, 'We didn't catch Hazel.'"

"Who says she was to be caught?" asked Doc. "She wasn't in there. Girls don't like the water—remember that. Girls don't just haul off and go jumping in rivers to get back at their husbands. They got other ways."

"Didn't you ever think she was in there?" asked William Wallace.

"Not once," said Doc.

"He's just smart," said Virgil, putting his hand on William Wallace's arm. "It's only because we didn't find her that he wasn't looking for her."

"I'm beholden to you for the net, anyway," said William Wallace.

"You're welcome to borry it again," said Doc.

On the way home Virgil kept saying, "Calm down, calm down, William Wallace."

"If he wasn't such an old skinny man I'd have wrung his neck for him," said William Wallace. "He had no business coming."

"He's too big for his britches," said Virgil. "Don't nobody know everything. And just because it's his net. Why does it have to be his net?"

"If it wasn't for being polite to old men, I'd have skinned him alive," said William Wallace.

"I guess he don't really know nothing about wives at all; his wife's so deaf," said Virgil.

"He don't know Hazel," said William Wallace. "I'm the only man alive knows Hazel: would she jump in the river or not, and I say she would. She jumped in because I was sitting on the back of my neck in a ditch singing, and that's just what she ought to done. Doc ain't got no right to say one word about it."

"Calm down, calm down, William Wallace," said Virgil.

"If it had been you that talked like that I'd have broke every bone in your body," said William Wallace. "Just let you talk like that. You're my age and size."

"But I ain't going to talk like that," said Virgil. "What have I done the whole time but keep this river-dragging going straight and running even, without no hitches? You couldn't have drug the river a foot without me."

"What are you talking about!" cried William Wallace. "This wasn't your river-dragging! It wasn't your wife!" He jumped on Virgil and they began to fight.

"Let me up." Virgil was breathing heavily.

"Say it was my wife. Say it was my river-dragging."

"Yours!" Virgil was on the ground with William Wallace's hand putting dirt in his mouth.

"Say it was my net."

"Your net!"

"Get up then."

They walked along getting their breath. On a hill William Wallace

looked down, and at the same time there went drifting by the sweet sounds of music outdoors. They were having the Sacred Harp Sing on the grounds of an old white church glimmering there at the crossroads, far below. He stared away as if he saw it minutely, as if he could see a lady in white take the flowered cover off the organ, which was set on a little slant in the shade, dust the keys, and start to pump and play. . . . He smiled faintly, as he would at his mother, and at Hazel, and at the singing women in his life, now all one young girl standing up to sing under the trees the oldest and longest ballads there were.

Virgil told him good night and went into his own house and the door shut on him.

When he got to his own house, William Wallace saw to his surprise that it had not rained at all. But there, curved over the roof, was something he had never seen before as long as he could remember, a rainbow at night. In the light of the moon, which had risen again, it looked small and of gauzy material, like a lady's summer dress, a faint veil through which the stars showed.

He went up on the porch and in at the door, and all exhausted he had walked through the front room and through the kitchen when he heard his name called. After a moment he smiled, as if no matter what he might have hoped for in his wildest heart, it was better than that to hear his name called out in the house. The voice came out of the bedroom.

"What do you want?" he yelled, standing stock-still.

Then she opened the bedroom door with the old complaining creak and there she stood. She was not changed a bit.

"How do you feel?" he said.

"I feel pretty good. Not too good," Hazel said, looking mysterious.

"I cut my foot," said William Wallace, taking his shoe off to show the blood.

"How in the world did you do that?" she cried, with a step back.

"Dragging the river. But it don't hurt any longer."

"You ought to have been more careful," she said. "Supper's ready and I wondered if you would ever come home, or if it would be last night all over again. Go and make yourself fit to be seen," she said, and ran away from him.

After supper they sat on the front steps awhile.

"Where were you this morning when I came in?" asked William Wallace when they were ready to go in the house.

"I was hiding," she said. "I was still writing on the letter. And then you tore it up."

"Did you watch me when I was reading it?"

"Yes, and you could have put out your hand and touched me, I was so close."

But he bit his lip and gave her a little tap and slap and then turned her up and spanked her.

"Do you think you will do it again?" he asked.

"I'll tell my mother on you for this!"

"Will you do it again?"

"No!" she cried.

"Then pick yourself up off my knee."

It was just as if he had chased her and captured her again. She lay smiling in the crook of his arm. It was the same as any other chase at the end.

"I will do it again if I get ready," she said. "Next time will be different too."

Then she was ready to go in and rose up and looked out from the top step, out across the yard where the chinaberry tree was and beyond, into the dark fields where the lightning bugs flickered away. He climbed to his feet too and stood beside her, with the frown on his face, trying to look where she looked. And after a few minutes she took him by the hand and led him into the house, smiling as if she were smiling down on him.

1943: *from the Atlantic Monthly*

LIVVIE IS BACK

by Eudora Welty

Solomon carried Livvie twenty-one miles away from her home when he married her. He carried her away up on the Old Natchez Trace into the deep country to live in his house. She was sixteen then. People said he thought nobody would ever come along there. It had been a long time, and a day she did not know about, he told her himself, since that road was a traveled road with *people* coming and going. He was good to her, but he kept her in the house. She had not thought that she could not get back. Where she came from, people said an old man did not want anybody in the world to find his

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wife, for fear they would steal her back from him. Solomon had asked her before he took her, "Would she be happy?"—very dignified, for he was a colored man that owned his land and had it written down in the courthouse; and she said, "Yes sir," since he was an old man then and she was young, and just listened and answered. He asked her, if she was choosing winter, would she pine for spring, and she said, "No indeed." Whatever she said, always, was because he was an old man, while nine years went by. All the time he got old, and he got so old he gave out. At last he slept the whole day in bed, and she was young still.

It was a nice house, inside and outside both. In the first place, it had three rooms. The front room was papered in holly paper, with green palmettos from the swamp spaced at careful intervals over the walls. There was fresh newspaper cut with fancy borders on the mantelshelf, on which were propped straight-up photographs of old or very young men printed in faint yellow—Solomon's people. Solomon had a houseful of furniture. There was a double settee, a tall scrolled rocker, and an organ in the front room, all around a three-legged table with a pink marble top, on which was set a lamp with three gold feet, besides a jelly glass with pretty hen feathers in it.

The room behind the front room had a bright iron bed with polished knobs like a throne, in which Solomon slept all day. There were snow-white curtains of wiry lace at the window, and a lace bedspread belonged on the bed. But what old Solomon slept so sound under was a big featherstitched piece quilt in the pattern Trip Around the World, which had twenty-one different colors, four hundred and forty pieces, and a thousand yards of thread; and that was what Solomon's mother made in her life and old age. There was a table holding the Bible, and a trunk with a key. On the wall were two calendars and a diploma from somewhere in Solomon's family, and under that Livvie's one possession was nailed, a picture of the little white baby of the family she worked for, back in Natchez before she was married.

In the kitchen beyond there were a big wood stove and a big round table always with a wet top and with the knives and forks in one jelly glass and the spoons in another, and a cut-glass vinegar bottle between, and going out from those, many shallow dishes of pickled peaches, fig preserves, watermelon pickles, and blackberry jam always sitting there. The churn sat in the sun, the doors of the safe were always both shut, and there were four baited mousetraps in the kitchen, one in every corner.

The outside of Solomon's house looked nice. It was not painted, but across the porch was an even balance. On each side there was one easy chair with high springs, looking out, and a fern basket hanging over it from the ceiling, and a dishpan of zinnia seedlings growing at its foot on the floor. By the door there was a plow wheel, just a pretty iron circle nailed up on one wall, and a square mirror on the other, a turquoise-blue comb stuck up in the

frame, with the washstand beneath it. On the door was a wooden knob with a pearl in the end, and Solomon's black hat hung on that, if he was in the house.

Out front was a clean dirt yard with every vestige of grass patiently uprooted and the ground scarred in deep whorls from the strike of Livvie's broom. Rosebushes with tiny blood-red roses blooming every month grew in threes on either side of the steps. On one side was a peach tree, on the other a pomegranate. Then coming around up the path from the deep cut of the Natchez Trace below was a line of bare crape-myrtle trees with every branch of them ending in a colored bottle, green or blue. There was no word that fell from Solomon's lips to say what they were for, but Livvie knew that there could be a spell put in trees, and she was familiar from the time she was born with the way bottle trees keep evil spirits from coming into the house—by luring them inside the colored bottles, where they cannot get out again. Solomon had made the bottle trees with his own hands over the nine years, in labor amounting to about a tree a year, and without a sign that he had any uneasiness in his heart, for he took as much pride in his precautions against spirits coming in the house as he took in the house, and sometimes in the sun the bottle trees looked prettier than the house did.

But there was nobody, nobody at all, not even a white person. And if there had been anybody, Solomon would not have let Livvie look at them, just as he would not let her look at a field hand, or a field hand look at her. There was no house near, except for the cabins of the tenants that were forbidden to her, and there was no house as far as she had been, stealing away down the still, deep trace. She felt as if she waded a river when she went, for the dead leaves on the ground reached as high as her knees, and when she was all scratched and bleeding she said it was not like a road that went anywhere. One day, climbing up the high bank, she had found a graveyard without a church, with ribbon grass growing about the foot of an angel (she had climbed up because she thought she saw angel wings), and in the sun, trees shining like burning flames through the great caterpillar nets which enclosed them. Scarey thistles stood looking like the prophets in the Bible in Solomon's house. Indian paintbrushes grew over her head, and the mourning dove made the only sound in the world. Oh, for a stirring of the leaves, and a breaking of the nets! But not by a ghost, prayed Livvie, jumping down the bank. After Solomon took to his bed she never went out, except one more time.

Livvie knew she made a nice girl to wait on anybody. She fixed things to eat on a tray like a surprise. She could keep from singing when she ironed; and to sit by a bed and fan away the flies, she could be so still she could not hear herself breathe. She could clean up the house and never drop a thing, and wash the dishes without a sound, and she would step outside to churn,

for churning sounded too sad to her, like sobbing, and if it made her homesick and not Solomon, she did not think of that.

But Solomon scarcely opened his eyes to see her, and scarcely tasted his food. He was not sick or paralyzed or in any pain that he mentioned, but he was surely wearing out in the body, and no matter what nice hot thing Livvie would bring him to taste, he would only look at it now, as if he were past seeing how he could add anything more to himself. Before she could beg him, he would go fast asleep. She could not surprise him any more if he would not taste, and she was afraid he was never in the world going to taste another thing she brought him—and so how could he last?

But one morning it was breakfast time, and she cooked his eggs and grits, carried them in on the tray, and called his name. He was sound asleep. He lay in a dignified way with his watch beside him, on his back in the middle of the bed. One hand drew the quilt up high, though it was the first day of spring. Through the white lace curtains a little puffy wind was blowing in as if it came from round cheeks. All night the frogs had sung out in the swamp like a commotion in the room, and he had not stirred, though she lay wide awake and saying, "Shh, frogs!" for fear he would mind them.

He looked as if he would like to sleep a little longer, and so she put back the tray and waited a little. When she tiptoed and stayed so quiet she surrounded herself with a little reverie, and sometimes it seemed to her, when she was so stealthy, that the quiet she kept was for a sleeping baby, and that she had a baby and was its mother. When she stood at Solomon's bed and looked down at him she would be thinking, "He sleeps so well," and she would hate to wake him up. And in some other way, too, she was afraid to wake him up because even in his sleep he seemed to be such a strict man.

Of course, nailed to the wall over the bed—only she would forget who it was—there was a picture of him when he was young. Then he had a fan of hair over his forehead like a king's crown. Now his hair lay down on his head; the spring had gone out of it. Solomon had a lightish face, with eyebrows scattered but rugged, the way privet grows, strong eyes, with second sight, a strict mouth, and a little gold smile. This was the way he looked in his clothes, but in bed in the daytime he looked like a different and smaller man, even when he was wide awake and holding the Bible. He looked like somebody kin to himself. And then sometimes when he lay in sleep and she stood fanning the flies away, and the light came in, his face was like new, so smooth and clear that it was like a glass of jelly held to the window, and she could almost look through his forehead and see what he thought.

She fanned him, and at length he opened his eyes and spoke her name, but he would not taste the nice eggs she had kept warm under a pan.

Back in the kitchen she ate heartily, his breakfast and hers, and looked

out the open door at what went on. The whole day, and the whole night before, she had felt the stir of spring close to her. It was as present in the house as a young man would be. The moon was in the last quarter, and outside they were turning the sod and planting peas and beans. Up and down the red fields, over which smoke from the brush burning hung, showing like a little skirt of sky, a white horse and a white mule pulled the plow.

At intervals hoarse shouts came through the air and roused her as if she dozed neglectfully in the shade, and they were telling her, "Jump up!" She could see how over each ribbon of field were moving men and girls, on foot and mounted on mules, with hats set on their heads, and bright with tall hoes and forks as if they carried streamers on them and were going to some place on a journey—and how as if at a signal now and then they would all start at once shouting, hollering, cajoling, calling and answering back, running, being leaped on, and breaking away, flinging to the earth with a shout and lying motionless in the trance of noon. The old women came out of the cabins and brought them the food they had ready for them, and then all worked together, spread evenly out. The little children came too, like a bouncing stream overflowing the fields, and set upon the men, the women, the dogs, the rushing birds, and the wavelike rows of earth, their little voices almost too high to be heard. In the middle distance like some white and gold towers were the haystacks, with black cows coming around to eat their edges. High above everything—the wheel of fields, house, and cabins, and the deep road surrounding like a moat to keep them in—was the turning sky, blue with long, far-flung white mare's-tail clouds, serene and still as high flames. And sound asleep while all this went around him that was his, Solomon was like a little still spot in the middle.

Even in the house the earth was sweet to breathe. Solomon had never let Livvie go any farther than the chicken house and the well. But what if she would walk now into the heart of the fields and take a hoe and work until she fell stretched out and drenched with her efforts, like other girls, and laid her cheek against the laid-open earth, and shamed the old man with her humbleness and delight? To shame him! A cruel wish could come in uninvited and so fast while she looked out the back door. She washed the dishes and scrubbed the table. She could hear the cries of the little lambs. Her mother, whom she had not seen since her wedding day, had said one time, "I rather a man be anything than a woman be mean."

So all morning she kept tasting the chicken broth on the stove, and when it was right she poured off a nice cupful. She carried it in to Solomon, and there he lay having a dream. Now what did he dream about? For she saw him sigh gently as if not to disturb some whole thing he held round in his mind, like a fresh egg. So even an old man dreamed about something pretty.

by Eudora Welty

Did he dream of her, while his eyes were shut and sunken, and his small hand with the wedding ring curled close in sleep around the quilt? He might be dreaming of what time it was, for even through his sleep he kept track of it like a clock, and knew how much of it went by, and waked up knowing where the hands were, even before he consulted the silver watch that he never let go. He would sleep with the watch in his palm, and even holding it to his cheek like a child that loves a plaything. Or he might dream of journeys and travels on a steamboat to Natchez. Yet she thought he dreamed of her; but even while she scrutinized him the rods of the foot of the bed seemed to rise up like a rail fence between them, and she could see that people never could be sure of anything as long as one of them was asleep and the other awake. To look at him dreaming of her when he might be going to die frightened her a little, as if he might carry her with him that way, and she wanted to run out of the room. She took hold of the bed and held on, and Solomon opened his eyes and called her name, but he did not want anything. He would not taste the good broth.

Just a little after that, as she was taking up the ashes in the front room for the last time in the year, she heard a sound. It was somebody coming. She pulled the curtains together and looked through the slit.

Coming up the path under the bottle trees was a white lady. At first she looked young, but then she looked old. Marvelous to see, a little car stood steaming like a kettle out in the field track—it had come without a road.

Livvie stood listening to the long, repeated knockings at the door, and then she opened it just a little. The lady came in through the crack, though she was more than middlesized and wore a big hat.

"My name is Miss Baby Marie," she said.

Livvie gazed respectfully at the lady and at the little suitcase she was holding close to her by the handle until the proper moment. The lady's eyes were running over the room, from palmetto to palmetto, but she was saying, "I live at home . . . out from Natchez . . . and get out and show these pretty cosmetic things to the white people and the colored people both . . . all around . . . years and years . . . both shades of powder and rouge . . . it's the kind of work a girl can do and not go clear 'way from home. . . ." And the harder she looked, the faster she talked. Suddenly she turned up her nose and said, "It is not Christian or sanitary to put feathers in a vase," and then she took a gold key out of the front of her dress and began unlocking the locks on her suitcase. Her face drew the light, the way it was covered with intense white and red, with a little pattycake of white between the wrinkles by her upper lip. Little red tassels of hair bobbed under the rusty wires of her picture hat, as with an air of triumph and secrecy she now

drew open her little suitcase and brought out bottle after bottle and jar after jar, which she put down on the table, the mantelpiece, the settee, and the organ.

"Did you ever see so many cosmetics in your life?" asked Miss Baby Marie.

"No'm," Livvie tried to say, but the cat had her tongue.

"Have you ever applied cosmetics?" asked Miss Baby Marie next.

"No'm."

"Then look!" she said, and pulling out the last thing of all, "Try this!" she said. And in her hand was unclenched a golden lipstick which popped open like magic. A fragrance came out of it like incense, and Livvie cried out suddenly, "Chinaberry flowers!"

Her hand took the lipstick, and in an instant she was carried away in the air through the spring; and looking down with a half-drowsy smile from a purple cloud which floated above a chinaberry tree, dark and smooth and neatly leaved, neat as a guinea hen in the dooryard, she saw again her home that she had left. On one side of the tree was her mama holding up her heavy apron, and she could see it was loaded with ripe figs; and on the other side was her papa holding a fish pole over the pond, and she could see it transparently, the little clear fishes swimming up to the brim.

"Oh no, not chinaberry flowers—secret ingredients," said Miss Baby Marie. "My cosmetics have secret ingredients—not chinaberry flowers."

"It's purple," Livvie breathed, and Miss Baby Marie said, "Use it freely. Rub it on."

Livvie tiptoed out to the washstand on the front porch and, before the mirror, put the paint on her mouth. In the wavery surface her face danced before her like a flame. Miss Baby Marie followed her out, took a look at what she had done, and said, "That's it."

Livvie tried to say "Thank you" without moving her parted lips where the paint lay so new.

By now Miss Baby Marie stood behind Livvie and looked in the mirror over her shoulder, twisting up the tassels of her hair. "The lipstick I can let you have for only two dollars," she said, close to her neck.

"Lady, but I don't have no money, never did have," said Livvie.

"Oh, but you don't pay the first time. I make another trip, that's the way I do. I come back again—later."

"Oh—*then*."

"But if you don't take it now, this may be the last time I'll call at your house," said Miss Baby Marie sharply. "It's far away from anywhere, I'll tell you that. You don't live close to anywhere."

"Yes'm. My husband, he keep the *money*," said Livvie, trembling. "He is strict as he can be. He don't know *you* walk in here—Miss Baby Marie!"

"Where is he?"

"In yonder, sound asleep, an old man. I wouldn't ever ask him for anything."

Miss Baby Marie took back the lipstick and packed it up. She gathered up her jars and got them all inside the suitcase, with the same little fuss of triumph with which she had brought them out. She started away.

"Good-by," she said, making herself look grand from the back, but she could not help turning around in the door. Her old hat wobbled as she whispered, "Let me see your husband."

Livvie obediently went on tiptoe and opened the door to the other room. Miss Baby Marie came behind her and rose on her toes and looked in.

"My, what a little tiny old, old man!" she whispered, clasping her hands and shaking her head over them. "What a beautiful quilt! What a tiny old, old man!"

"He can sleep like that all day," whispered Livvie proudly.

They looked at him awhile so fast asleep, and then they looked at each other. Somehow that was as if they had a secret, for he had never stirred. Livvie then politely, but all at once, closed the door.

"Well! I'd certainly like to leave you with a lipstick!" said Miss Baby Marie vivaciously. She smiled in the door.

"Lady, I told you I don't have no money and never did have."

"And never will?" In the air and all around, like a bright halo around the white lady's nodding head, it was a true spring day.

"Would you take eggs, lady?" asked Livvie softly.

"No, eggs I have plenty of," said Miss Baby Marie.

"I still don't have no money," said Livvie, and Miss Baby Marie took her suitcase and went on somewhere else.

Livvie stood watching her go, and all the time she felt her heart beating in her left side. She touched the place with her hand. It seemed as if her heart beat and her whole face flamed from the pulsing color of her lips. She went in to sit by Solomon, and when he opened his eyes he could not see a change in her. "He's fixin' to die," she said inside. That was the secret. That was when she went out of the house for a little breath of air.

She went down the path and down the Natchez Trace a way, and she did not know how far she had gone, but it was not far, when she saw a sight. It was a man, looking like a vision—she standing on one side of the Old Natchez Trace and he standing on the other.

As soon as this man caught sight of her, he began to look himself over. Starting at the bottom with his pointed shoes, he began to look up, lifting his peg-top pants the higher to see fully his bright socks. His coat, long and wide and leaf-green, he opened like doors to see his high-up tawny pants, and his pants he smoothed downward from the points of his collar, and he wore a luminous baby-pink satin shirt. At the end he reached gently above

his wide platter-shaped round hat, the color of a plum, and one finger touched at the feather, emerald green, blowing in the spring winds.

No matter how she looked, she could never look so fine as he did, and she was not sorry for that, she was pleased.

He took three jumps, one down and two up, and was by her side.

"My name is Cash," he said.

He had a guinea pig in his pocket. They began to walk along. She stared on and on at him, as if he were doing some daring spectacular thing, instead of just walking beside her. It was not simply the city way he was dressed that made her look at him and see hope in its insolence looking back. It was not only the way he moved along, kicking the flowers as if he could break through everything in the way and destroy anything in the world, that made her eyes grow bright. It might be, if he had not appeared the way he did appear that day, she would never have looked so closely at him, but the time people come makes a difference.

They walked through the still leaves of the Natchez Trace, the light and the dark falling through trees about them, the white irises shining like candles on the banks and the new ferns shining like green stars up in the oak branches. They came out at Solomon's house, bottle trees and all. Livvie stopped and hung her head.

Cash began whistling a little tune. She did not know what it was, but she had heard it before from a distance, and she had a revelation. Cash was a field hand. He was a transformed field hand. Cash belonged to Solomon. But he had stepped out of his overalls into this. There in front of Solomon's house he laughed. He had a round head, a round face; all of him was young, and he flung his head up, rolled it against the mare's-tail sky in his round hat, and he could laugh just to see Solomon's house sitting there. Livvie looked at it, and there was Solomon's black hat hanging on the peg on the front door, the blackest thing in the world.

"I been to Natchez," Cash said, wagging his head around against the blue sky. "I taken a trip, I been to Natchez, I been today. I am ready for Easter!"

How was it possible to look so fine before the harvest? Cash must have stolen the money. He stood in the path and lifted his spread hand high and brought it down again and again in his laughter. He kicked up his heels. A chill went through her. It was as if Cash were bringing that strong hand down to beat a drum or to rain blows upon a man, such an abandon and menace were in his laugh. Frowning, she went closer to him, and his swinging arm drew her in at once and the fright was crushed from her body, as a little match flame might be smothered out by what it lighted. She gathered the folds of his coat behind him and fastened her red lips to his mouth, and she was dazzled at herself then, the way he had been dazzled at himself to begin with.

In that instant she felt something that could not be told—that Solomon's death was at hand, that he was the same to her as if he were dead now. She cried out and, uttering little cries, turned and ran for the house.

At once Cash was coming, following after; he was running behind her. He came close, and halfway up the path he laughed and passed her. He even picked up a stone and sailed it into the bottle trees. She put her hands over her head, and sounds clattered through the bottle trees like cries of outrage. Cash stamped and plunged zigzag up the front steps and in at the door.

When she got there he had stuck his hands in his pockets and was turning slowly about in the front room. The little guinea pig peeped out. Around Cash the pinned-up palmettos looked as if a lazy green monkey had walked up and down and around the walls leaving green prints of his hands and feet.

She got through the room, and his hands were still in his pockets, and fell upon the closed door to the other room and pushed it open. She ran to Solomon's bed, calling "Solomon! Solomon!" The little shape of the old man never moved at all, wrapped under the quilt as if it were winter still.

"Solomon!" She pulled the quilt away, but there was another one under that, and she fell on her knees beside him. He made no sound except a sigh, and then she could hear in the silence the light springy steps of Cash walking and walking in the front room, and the ticking of Solomon's silver watch, which came from the bed. Old Solomon was far away in his sleep; his face looked small, relentless, and devout, as if he were walking somewhere where she could imagine the snow falling.

Then there was a noise like a hoof pawing the floor, and the door gave a creak, and Cash appeared beside her. When she looked up Cash's face was so black it was bright, and so bright and bare of pity that it looked sweet to her. She stood up and held up her head. Cash was so powerful that his presence gave her strength even when she did not need any.

Under their eyes Solomon slept. People's faces tell of things and places not known to the one who looks at them while they sleep, and while Solomon slept under the eyes of Livvie and Cash his face told them like a mythical story how all his life he had built, little scrap by little scrap, respect. A beetle could not have been more laborious or more ingenious in the task of its destiny. When Solomon was young, as he was in his picture overhead, it was the infinite thing with him, and he could see no end to the respect he would contrive and keep in a house. He had built a lonely house, the way he would make a cage, but it grew to be the same with him as a great monumental pyramid, and sometimes in his absorption of getting it erected he was like the builder slaves of Egypt who forgot or never knew the origin and meaning of the thing to which they gave all the strength of their bodies and used up all their days. Livvie and Cash could see that as a man might

rest from a life labor he lay in his bed, and they could hear how, wrapped in his quilt, he sighed to himself comfortably in sleep, while in his dream he might have been an ant, a beetle, a bird, an Egyptian, assembling and carrying on his back and building with his hands, or he might have been an old man of India or a swaddled baby about to smile and brush all away.

Then without warning old Solomon's eyes flew wide open under the hedgelike brows. He was wide awake.

And instantly Cash raised his quick arm. A radiant sweat stood on his temples. But he did not bring his arm down—it stayed in the air, as if something might have taken hold.

It was not Livvie—she did not move. As if something said "Wait," she stood waiting. Even while her eyes burned under motionless lids, her lips parted in a stiff grimace, and with her arms stiff at her sides she stood above the prone old man and the panting young one, erect and apart.

Movement, when it came, came in Solomon's face. It was an old and strict face, a frail face, but behind it, like a covered light, came an animation that could play hide-and-seek, that would dart and escape—had always escaped. The mystery flickered in him and invited from his eyes. It was that very mystery that Cash with his quick arm would have to strike, and that Livvie could not weep for. But Cash only stood holding his arm in the air, when the gentlest flick of his great strength, almost a puff of his breath, would have been enough, if he had known how to give it, to send the old man over the obstruction that kept him away from death. If it could not be that the tiny illumination in the fragile and ancient face caused a crisis, a mystery in the room that would not permit a blow to fall, at least it was certain that Cash, throbbing in his Easter clothes, felt a pang of shame that the vigor of a man would come to such an end that he could not be struck without warning. He took down his hand and stepped back behind Livvie, like a round-eyed schoolboy on whose unsuspecting head the dunce cap has been placed.

"Young ones can't wait," said Solomon.

Livvie shuddered violently, and then in a gush of tears she stooped for a glass of water and handed it to him, but he did not see her.

"So here come the young man Livvie wait for. There was no prevention. No prevention. Now I lay eyes on him and it come to be somebody I know all the time, and been knowing since he were born in a cotton patch, and watched grow up year to year, Cash McCord, growed to size, growed to come in my house in the end—ragged and barefoot."

Solomon gave a cough of distaste. Then he shut his eyes vigorously, and his lips began to move like a chanter's.

"When Livvie married, her husband were already somebody. He had paid great cost for his land. He spread sycamore leaves over the ground from wagon to door, day he brought her home, so her foot would not have to

touch ground. He carried her through his door. Then he growed old and could not lift her, and she were still young."

Livvie's sobs followed his words like a soft melody repeating each thing as he stated it. His lips moved for a little without sound, or she cried too fervently, and unheard he might have been telling his whole life, and then he said, "God forgive Solomon for sins great and small. God forgive Solomon for carrying away too young a wife and keeping her away from her people and from young people who would want her back."

Then he lifted up his right hand toward Livvie where she stood by the bed, and offered her his silver watch. He dangled it before her eyes, and she hushed crying; her tears stopped. For a moment the watch could be heard ticking precisely in his proud hand. She lifted it away. Then he took hold of the quilt; then he was dead.

Livvie left Solomon dead and went out of the room. Stealthily, nearly without noise, Cash went beside her. He was like a shadow, but his shiny shoes moved over the floor in spangles, and the green downy feather shone like a light in his hat. As they reached the front room he seized her deftly as a long black cat and dragged her hanging by the waist round and round him, while he turned in a circle, his face bent down to hers. The first moment she kept one arm and its hand stiff and still, the one that held Solomon's watch. Then the fingers softly let go, all of her was limp, and the watch fell somewhere on the floor. It ticked away in the still room, and all at once there began outside the full song of a bird.

They moved around and around the room and into the brightness of the open door, then he stopped and shook her once. She rested in silence in his trembling arms, unprotesting as a bird on a nest. Outside the redbirds were flying and crisscrossing, the sun was in all the bottles on the prisoned trees, and the young peach was shining in the middle of them with the bursting light of spring.

1944: *from The New Yorker*

WALKING WOUNDED

by Irwin Shaw, who was only twenty-three when his first play, Bury the Dead, *was produced in New York in 1936. After graduating from Brooklyn College*

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he began writing for the radio, motion pictures, and magazines. He served overseas with the Army during World War II, *and wrote for* Yank *and* Stars and Stripes. *In addition to the first-prize winning story, "Walking Wounded," Mr. Shaw's "Gunners' Passage" was awarded second prize in 1945. He is also represented with "God on Friday Night" in the 1939 volume of this series, and by "Then We Were Three" in 1957. He is the author of a number of plays, including* The Gentle People, Quiet City, *and* The Assassin; *several novels, among which are* The Young Lions *and* The Troubled Air; *and some collections of short stories.*

Peter Crome wondered what had happened to the curtains. He lay stiffly on the bed, listening, with the old, irritated tightening of the nerves, to the wild and grating hubbub of the Cairo street outside his windows—the insane wailing of newsboys, the everlasting iron drip of gharry horses' hoofs, the pained yelps of peddlers. The sun, bright and hurtful as hot nickel, cut in through the open windows. On the floor lay the curtains, torn, with bits of cord running from them to the top of the windows, like a ruptured spider web.

"What happened to the curtains?" he asked. His voice felt dry and sandy in his throat and the right side of his head began to ache.

Mac was shaving at the washstand. "Last night," he said without turning. "In the excitement."

"What excitement?"

"You pulled the curtains down."

"Why?"

Mac shaved quietly and intently around his short, soldierly mustache. "Don't know," he said. "Either you wanted to throw me out, or throw yourself out, or just tear down the curtains."

"Oh, God."

Mac scrubbed his face with water. "Pretty drunk, Peter," he said.

"What else did I do?"

"Two lieutenants and a major. In the lounge. Ten minutes of insults."

"A major! Christ!" Peter closed his eyes.

"I think you hit somebody." Mac's voice was muffled in a towel. "Anyway, you hit something. Your hand's all cut up."

Peter opened his eyes and looked at his hand. Across the back of it there was a wide, ugly wound, just beginning to puff up around the edges. As he looked at it he realized that it was hurting him.

"I poured iodine over it," Mac said. "You won't die."

"Thanks." Peter let his hand drop. He licked his dry lips. "What did I say to the major?"

"'Base wallah,' 'imperial vulture,' 'Gezira bloodsucker,' 'headquarters hangman.'"

"That's enough." The right side of Peter's head hurt very strongly for a moment.

"You were a little unfair," Mac said calmly. "He was a nice type. Been in the desert three years. Just come back from Sicily with dysentery. Wounded twice. Been attached to headquarters four days."

"Oh, Christ!" Peter said. "Oh, Christ!"

The room was silent as Mac put on his shirt and combed his hair.

"Get his name?" Peter asked finally.

"Major Robert Lewis. Might be a good idea to say good morning."

"How about the lieutenants?"

Mac took out his notebook. "MacIntyre and Clark," he read. "They wait your pleasure."

Peter sat up and swung his legs over the side of the bed. The room faded and glittered for a moment and he had to hold onto the bed when he stood up. "Someday soon," he said, "I have to stop drinking."

"A little whisky is good for the soul," Mac said kindly. "Anything I can do for you?"

"No, thanks."

Mac was now at the door.

"Mac."

"Yes, Captain?" There was tiny, astringent, helpful mockery in the title.

"Mac, this is the first time anything like this ever happened to me."

"I know," Mac said softly. He went quietly out of the room.

Peter walked slowly over to the washbasin and looked at himself in the mirror—the familiar long, thin face, the uneven dotted crenelation of the wound across his forehead, the strange dark mark in the eye that had been blind for three weeks, all seeming to tremble slightly now in the bitter sunlight, as it had trembled for two months.

He shaved carefully and went to take a shower. He came back, feeling better, and put on fresh clothes. He switched his three pips to the shoulders of his clean shirt. Then he went down to apologize to the major.

Peter sat at his desk, sweating. The heat of Egypt was like the inside of a balloon. The balloon was being constantly filled, the pressure getting greater and greater. Typewriters clicked dryly in the swelling air, and flies, the true owners of Egypt, whirled cleverly and maliciously before his eyes.

Peter stared at the stack of papers on his desk. Ruled forms and tiny and intricate notations that had to be gone over slowly, corrected, signed.

Outside a donkey brayed painfully. It sounded like an immense wooden

machine in agony, wood grating against wood, incredibly loud. It made the little paper-stacked room seem hotter than ever.

Peter reread the letter he had received that morning from Italy. ". . . I am taking the liberty of answering your letter to Colonel Sands, who was badly wounded last week. I am afraid there is nothing we can do about requesting your being posted to this regiment, as there is no provision in our establishment for medically graded officers."

The donkey brayed again outside. It sounded like the death of all the animals of Egypt on this hot morning.

Peter took the top paper off the pile and looked at it. The figures leaped and wavered in the heat and a drop of sweat fell from his forehead and mistily covered a 3, a 7, and an 8. His hands glistened in little beads and the paper felt slippery under his fingers. His throat burned dryly with the fifteenth cigarette of the morning.

He stood up jerkily and took his hat and went out. In the corridor he met Mrs. Burroughs. She was a tall, full-bodied girl who wore flowered prints and always seemed to manage silk stockings. She was going home to England to divorce her husband, who was a lieutenant in India. She was going to marry an American Air Forces major who had been switched to London from Cairo. She was very pretty and she had a soft, hesitant voice, and her bosom was always oppressively soft and noticeable under the flowered prints. Peter hated her.

She smiled at him, hesitant, polite, gentle. She had two rosebuds clasped in her dark hair. "Good morning," she said, her voice cool, shy, inviting in the drab corridor.

"Good morning," Peter said stiffly. He never could look squarely at her. He looked down. No silk stockings this morning. The pretty legs bare, the skin firm and creamy. He had a sudden, hateful vision of Mrs. Burroughs landing in London, running to be crushed in the arms of the American major in the press of Waterloo Station, her eyes bright with tears and love and gratitude, her husband, used and forgotten, in India.

"I'm going to Groppi's," he was surprised to hear himself saying. "Tea. Would you like to join me?"

"Sorry," Mrs. Burroughs said, her voice sounding genuinely sorry. "So much work. Some other time. I'd be delighted."

Peter nodded awkwardly and went out.

The street was full of heat, beggars, dirt, children with fly-eaten eyes, roaring army lorries. Peter put on his hat, feeling his forehead, wet and warm, rebel under the wool. A drunken New Zealander wobbled sorrowfully in the full glare of the sun, hatless, senseless, reft of dignity, ten thousand miles from his green and ordered island.

Groppi's was cooler, dark, and shaded. The red-fezzed waiters in long

white galabias moved quietly through the pleasant gloom. Two American sergeants with air-crew wings on their shirts were solemnly ordering two ice-cream sodas apiece.

Peter had tea and read the morning paper. The birth rate had gone up in England and an American magazine had suggested that Princess Elizabeth marry an American. The *Egyptian Mail* reprinted this suggestion with approval, in a flood of Anglo-American feeling. After six years, somebody had said in Parliament, men in the forces were to be sent home. The Russians had made another substantial gain. Peter always saved the Russian news for last. Every step the Russians took was that much nearer home, nearer the rugged and manly weather of his native Scotland, nearer Anne.

He tried to think of Anne, what she looked like, what her skin felt like. He looked up at the ceiling and half closed his eyes to shut out the tea-and-ice-cream shop, to close out Egypt, summer, war, Army, distance, absence—close out everything but his wife. But he couldn't remember what she looked like. He remembered the dress she wore when they were married and the inn they'd stayed at after Dunkirk, and he remembered that he loved her. But her face, the sound of her voice . . . lost. She refused to have photographs taken of her. Some whim or female superstition, far away in England.

He paid and went out and started back to his office. But when he stood in front of the building and thought of the small, hot office, the endless papers, and the sweat, he couldn't go in. He turned and walked slowly down the street. He looked at his watch. Still an hour before the bars opened. He walked on the shady side, erect and soldierly, slowly, like a man with a grave purpose. A horribly dirty woman with a horribly dirty child, as dirty and street-worn as only Egyptians can be, followed him, whining, for half a block. Peter didn't walk any faster, although he felt his nerves jerking at the sound of the woman's voice.

The woman left him finally, and he walked deliberately through the crowded streets, stopping from time to time to peer into shopwindows. French perfume, dresses, mangoes, books, photographs, his mind recorded heavily. He went into a photographer's and had his picture taken, refusing to smile, looking soberly square into the camera, intimidating the photographer. He would send the picture to Anne. Three years. How long could a woman be expected to remember a man? His face would stare solemnly at her, morning, noon, and night, crying, "Remember me, remember your husband!"

Out in the street again he resumed his grave pacing down the shady side of the street. Fifteen minutes more and the bars would open. He grinned as he thought of his pose before the camera, frozen Scotch passion grimly and puritanically peering across three years and two oceans. Anne would probably giggle at the absurdly stern, accusing face.

"Officer, wanna lady, wanna lady?"

Peter looked down. A tiny, filthy ten-year-old boy, barefooted, in a torn, baglike single garment, was smiling up at him, pulling at his blouse.

"French lady," the boy whispered wickedly. "Fine French lady."

Peter stared at him, then broke into a roar of laughter. The boy, after a moment of doubt, also laughed.

"No, thank you, sir," Peter said.

The boy shrugged, grinned up at him. "Officer," he said, "cigarette?"

Peter gave him a cigarette and lit it for him and the boy darted off to try the French lady on a Polish corporal.

The bar had a nice beery smell and was dark and cool and the bartender drew eight glasses at a time, letting the foam settle whitely on the glass rims.

"The two lieutenants," Peter was saying to Mac, "were a little stuffy, but the major was fine."

"I knew he would be," Mac said. "I talked to him last night."

"I had breakfast with him"—Peter waved for two more beers—"and he said he guessed he'd be doing the same thing himself if he had to hang around this town five months."

Mac drained his beer.

"The birth rate in England," Peter said, "has gone up. I read it in the *Mail* this morning. There're three million Englishmen out of the country and the birth rate's rocketing." He heard his own voice, loud and angry and humorless. "How in the name of God do they dare print things like that?" He saw Mac grinning widely, but he couldn't stop. "Who're the fathers? Where're the fathers? Bloody damned newspaper!"

"My, you have it bad today," Mac said.

Suddenly Peter realized that Mac, placid and tolerant, was bearing a great deal of the burden of Peter's nerves.

"Mac," he said quietly, "forgive me."

"Uh?" Mac looked at him, surprised.

"Wailing-Wall Crome. Agony, Cairo division." Peter shook his head in disgust. "I keep feeding it to you seven days a week."

"Oh, shut up. I've lived with lots worse."

"Any time I get on your nerves, sing out, will you?"

"Sure thing. Drink your beer." Mac was embarrassed.

"I must be going a little crazy." Peter looked at his hands, which had taken to trembling in the last few months. His cigarette jerked minutely between his fingers, in a spasmodic rhythm. "This town. When I was with the regiment—oh hell . . ." The truth was that out in the desert, under the guns, on a pint of water a day, and the air often dire with Stukas, he had been much happier. There were no women in the desert, no reminders of a civilized and normal life. There was clean, sterile sand, the noise of armor,

thousands of grumbling, good-humored men intimate with an equal death, and above all there was the sense of immense and hardy effort and accomplishment, as first they had held the Afrika Korps and then driven it back. Cairo had been a beautiful town, two days at a time, a hot bath and unlimited scotch, and sweet clean sheets and relief from the guns. But now, under the dry flood of paper, under the stiffness and pettiness of headquarters politics, under the cheap weight of men who had clung to soft jobs for three years, with the streets full of barelegged girls, with the war on another continent a thousand miles away . . .

Now the regiment, what was left of it, was broken up. Most of them were in graves on the road to Tunis, others were in hospitals, the rest scattered among other units, after the four years that had started in France.

"Six years," he said. "Some bloody M.P. said we'd be sent home after six years. What do you think a woman thinks when she reads that she'll get her man back in only six years?"

Mac grinned. "Always remember what Monty said. 'The war can't last more than seven years. We'll run out of paper.' "

"If only I could get back to England," Peter said, "and sleep with my wife for two nights, everything would be all right. Just two nights."

Mac sighed. He was a quiet, efficient, small, matter-of-fact man, noticeably graying, and sighing was strange and incongruous to him. "Peter," he said, "can I talk plainly?"

Peter nodded.

"Peter, you ought to get yourself a girl."

They sat in silence. Peter played somberly with his beer. In France, even though he had just been married, he had been the gay young officer. Handsome and debonair, he had played joyfully and thoughtlessly with the pretty ladies of the country towns at which he'd been stationed, and in Paris, when he'd had a month there, a charming, beautifully dressed wife of a French captain stationed in Algiers . . . But when he'd got back to England with the gray-faced remnants of his regiment, after the hideous, bloody days of the break-through, and had taken his wife silently into his arms, all frivolity, all smallness and lack of faith had seemed wanton and irreligious. Leaving England for Africa, he had felt that he had to keep the best part of his life orderly and decent.

"Maybe," he said to Mac. "Maybe."

"A man's got to be practical," Mac said. "Three years. Oh, my God!"

Peter had to smile at the drastic expression on the practical man's face.

"You'll just explode," Mac said, "and blow away."

Peter laughed loudly, nervously. "Whisky provides certain compensations," he said.

"Whisky will send you home a doddering wreck," Mac said grimly. "You'll do no one any good that way."

"Maybe. Maybe." Peter shrugged. "Anyway, I hate these women out here. Having the best time of their lives, just because there are a hundred men for every woman. Snobbish, overconfident. Bitches, all of them." He talked faster and faster, all the bitter observation of the years flooding to his tongue. "They demand abasement, homage, the ugliest and meanest of them. Women have been among the most horrible of the war's casualties. All humility's gone, all normal value, all friendship. They're man-greedy. They're profiteering on the war, like the worst usurer and manufacturer of machine tools, except that their profits are lieutenants and generals, not cash. After the war we should have rehabilitation hospitals for women who have been in troop areas, just like the hospitals for maimed men, to teach them how to live normal lives again——"

Mac was laughing by now, helplessly, into his beer. "Enough," he said. "Enough, John Knox! All I wanted to say is that I have a date tonight and my girl has a friend who's just come from Jerusalem and it might do you a world of good just to have dinner with a woman for once. Do you want to go?"

Peter flushed and looked down at the beer-ringed table. "I wouldn't even know how to talk to a woman any more."

"Do you want to go?"

Peter opened his mouth and closed it. "All right," he said. "All right."

"Jerusalem is nice enough." It was on the dance floor at the Auberge des Pyramides, under the stars, with the three great tombs standing huge and a rebuke to time in the darkness just outside the lights and the music. Joyce was talking as they went slowly and painfully around the dance floor. "The city's clean, and the King David's an amusing hotel, but the people're simply dreadful." She had a brittle, drawling voice, pitched just high enough so that everyone near by could hear clearly what she was saying. "There," she said brightly as Peter managed a full turn, "we're doing much better, aren't we?"

"Yes," Peter said, sweating in the heavy Nile heat as he tried to concentrate on the beat of the music. Joyce's voice distracted him and put him off, and somehow she never seemed to stop talking. She worked in the consular service and by nine-thirty Peter had a full store of information on the doings of the consulate in Jerusalem for the last year and a half, back to the time Joyce had come out from England. He had hardly said a word all night—stammering half-finished sentences, suffering, feeling like the clumsiest farmer. Still, she was pretty, most desirable in a full white evening gown ("We always dress in Jerusalem"), with full, sleek shoulders bare and daring under the gay lights.

"That's King Farouk." For the first time all evening her voice dropped a bit. "Isn't it?"

Peter looked. "Yes," he said.

"Isn't he attractive? What an original beard."

Peter looked at King Farouk. "He looks like a fat, self-satisfied young man," Peter said, the first full sentence he had got out. "And I understand he grew the beard because he has a terrible case of acne."

"Dance around the edge of the dance floor," Joyce whispered. "I'd like people to see me."

Dutifully and heavily, Peter danced around the edge of the floor until the music stopped. Then he followed Joyce to their table. Joyce smiled viva-ciously at seven or eight officers seated at various tables throughout the establishment.

"It's amazing," she said brightly and loudly, "how many men I know in Cairo." They sat down. There was an awful silence while Peter wondered where in the name of God Mac was, and his girl, and Joyce smiled prettily first at one table, then another.

"Are you married?" Peter heard himself asking. For the first time that evening Joyce gave him her undivided attention.

"Why," she said, looking at him queerly and coldly, "what a strange question."

"It's just that there's a girl around my office," Peter said, almost dazedly. "Married to a lieutenant in India. Marrying an American major in London . . ." The expression on Joyce's face became strained. "I don't know what made me think of her," Peter said lamely.

"No," Joyce said coldly, "I'm not married."

"I am," Peter said.

"Really." Joyce smiled automatically at a colonel four tables away.

"My wife," said Peter, feeling his tongue too loose from the drinking, which had been continuous since six that evening, "my wife is a woman of admirable character, although I can't remember what she looks like. Her name is Anne. She works for the Air Ministry in Manchester. After Dunkirk I was stationed on the beach at Dover for five months. I used to manage to get away week ends. We'd just stay in one room and just look at each other. After France I felt as though my wife had healed me of a dreadful disease. She healed me of mud and death and friends dying on all sides. She's most beautiful, but I don't remember what she looks like. She's very calm and simple and her voice is low, although I don't remember that either. I sent her my photograph today. Six years is too long for a man to expect a woman to remember him. Someone ought to tell Parliament that. Don't you think?"

Joyce was staring at him. "Yes," she said.

"If I could only see her for two nights . . ." Well, finally, the thought crossed his consciousness, the lady from Jerusalem is listening to me. "Right before I came out here I was moved to another beach. It was raining. Au-

tumn and miserable and barbed wire at the high-tide marks and mines all over the beaches. I called her long distance and she told me she had a week and asked me if she should come down. I told her no. It was so miserable. Cheap little shacks waiting for the Germans in the rain. I knew we were leaving for Africa and I didn't want our last days together to be dreary, in that abominable place. I told her no, but she said, 'You wait right there. I'm coming down tonight.' " Suddenly, above the dance music in the valley of the Nile, Peter remembered what his wife's voice had sounded like—merry and sensual and confidently commanding over the faulty wires on that autumn night. "She came down and we had the week together," he went on, "and the rain and the barbed wire made no difference at all. I've never been so gay, and it was early in the war, and we always had a coal fire and hot rum and lovely heavy breakfasts, with the curtains still drawn. And never a tear when she left. And I started for Africa singing in my heart." He was talking straight ahead to the Pyramids in the ancient desert darkness now, not to the silly, bare-shouldered girl across the table. "I haven't heard from her in two months. Not a letter in two months." He shrugged. "After the war," he said, "I'm going to go in for politics. I'm going to stand for Parliament. There must be somebody in Parliament who knows what a war is like, who knows that one war is enough, that six years is too much——"

"Why, Joyce, how nice!" It was the colonel, standing gallantly at the table. "Dance?"

Joyce looked doubtfully at Peter. Peter stood up, a little unsteadily. "Delighted," he said. Without looking at Peter, Joyce went off with the colonel, smiling impartially at dozens of officers as she danced around the edge of the floor.

Peter hazily watched the flashing plump white dress among the brave khaki. He passed his hand over his eyes, thinking, as he remembered his outburst: God, I must be going crazy.

He saw a captain cut in and dance with Joyce, then an American major. "The world," he said softly to himself, "is full of American majors." He laughed gently, stood up, and walked slowly out of the night club. Outside, with the music thin and distant in his ears, he stood for a few moments and looked at the pyramids, which loomed, crumbling in the darkness, in memory of the unremembered dead.

He got into a cab and started for Cairo.

When the cab got to Gezira Island Peter tapped the driver on the shoulder. "Sporting Club," he said. I need a drink, Peter told himself seriously. I need a drink very badly. He thought of old Mac, caught there with two girls and the tremendous bill. He felt bad about it, but he'd pay his share, although it would mean considerably less drinking for the rest of the month. But he couldn't stay with that damned girl. The truth was he couldn't stay

with any girl. Anne, unphotographed, in Manchester . . . Still, she should write more often than once every two months.

The bar was still open. There were three South Africans and three American fliers lounging against it. One of the American fliers was singing, in a soft Southern voice, " 'Oh, Susanna, don't you cry for me.' "

"Scotch and soda," Peter said to the bartender, feeling for the first time that evening a cessation of loneliness, his constant climate.

" 'Fo' Ah'm gawn t' Alabama with mah banjo on mah knee . . .' " the American pilot sang sweetly and happily.

"Gin and lime," said one of the South Africans, a gigantic captain with huge bare arms, whom the others called Lee. "Gin and lime all around." He turned to Peter. "What're you drinking, Captain?"

"I've ordered, thanks." Peter smiled at him.

"Man says he's ordered," the American pilot sang. "What do you know about that? British captain says he's ordered. Order again and order again, oh, Captain, order again . . ."

The bartender, grinning, put two scotches in front of Peter. The huge South African captain poured it all into one glass. They lifted their glasses.

"To South Africa," one of the Americans said.

They drank.

"To sergeants." The American who had been singing grinned at a large South African with a mustache. He wore lieutenant's pips on his shoulders.

The man with the mustache looked around him uneasily. "Quiet, please," he said. "I'll be in jail five years."

"This gentleman looks like a gentleman." Lee put his arm around the man with the mustache. "Doesn't he?"

"Yes," said Peter.

"Jail," said the man with the mustache.

"He's not a gentleman," Lee said to Peter. "He's a sergeant. He's my bloody sergeant from my bloody company."

"Ten years," said the man with the mustache.

"We're all A.W.O.L.," Lee went on. "Sergeant Monks—Lieutenant Monks for the evening. Lieutenant Fredericks"—he waved to the slightly smaller redheaded South African down the bar—"and myself. We're farmers. Independent men. When the bloody O.C. said no leaves we said farewell. Sixty miles out on the desert for three weeks. 'Sergeant Monks,' I said, 'take off those bloody stripes and put these pips on your shoulders. We wish to show you the glories of Shepheard's and Gezira so that you can come back and dazzle the poor bastards in the Other Ranks with tales of the high life in Cairo.' "

"I've been talking to brigadiers all afternoon and evening," Monks complained. "Wearing on the nerves."

"If the O.C. shows up it's all taped," Lee said. "I grab Monks by one arm, Freddie grabs him by the other. 'We've just arrested the bugger, sir,' we say, 'impersonating an officer.' "

"Ten years," Monks said, grinning. "This round is on me."

Peter laughed. He lifted his glass. "To sergeants everywhere." They all drank.

"On my right," said Lee, "is the American Air Forces."

The American Air Forces—two lieutenants and a twenty-four-year-old major—raised its glasses at Peter and the lieutenant who sang started in on "Chattanooga Choo-Choo." The other lieutenant, tall, gangling, and very blond, and the major just stood there grinning.

"The American Air Forces is going home," said Lee. "Their tour is over. Home, by way of England. The infantry's tour is never over. Oh, the poor, stinking, bloody infantry, their tour is never over."

"Unskilled labor," the blond pilot said calmly. "We're delicate and highly sensitive mechanisms. We're war-weary. We've bombed too many places. We've seen too much flak. We're lopsided from wearing ribbons. We're going home now to instruct the young idea how to shoot."

"I am going home to play with my wife," the major said soberly.

"The infantry is not under the same Awful Strain," said the pilot who had been singing. "All they have to do is walk in and be shot. Their nerves are not stretched to the breaking point like ours. Captain," he said, leaning back and talking to Peter, "you look a little war-weary yourself."

"I'm pretty war-weary," Peter said.

"He looks sensitive," the major said. "He looks fine and sensitive enough to be at least a navigator. He looks like Hamlet on a rough night."

"I was in the tanks," Peter said.

"It's possible," said the major, "to get war-weary in a tank, too, I suppose."

"It's possible," Peter said, grinning.

" '. . . breakfast in Carolina . . .' " sang the musical pilot.

"When're you leaving for home?" Peter asked.

"Six A.M. tomorrow—0600 hours, as they say in the Army," said the major.

"Five or six glorious days in London among our brave English allies and cousins," said the blond pilot, "and then Fifty-second Street and all the full-bosomed, ribbon-conscious, lascivious American girls."

"London," said Peter. "I wish I were going with you."

"Come along," said the major. "We have a nice empty Liberator. Pleased to have you. Closer relations with our British comrades. Merely be at the airport at 0600 hours as they say in the Army."

"Did you see in the *Mail* today?" asked the singing pilot. "Some idiot wants Princess Elizabeth to marry an American."

"Excellent idea," said the major. "Some outstanding representative of the

Republic. Postwar planning on all fronts. My nomination for Prince Escort is Maxie Rosenbloom."

Everyone considered the suggestion gravely.

"You could do worse," the blond pilot said.

"Infusion of sturdy American stock into an aging dynasty," the major said. "The issue would be strongly built, with good left hands."

"Do you mean it?" Peter asked the major. "You really could take me?"

"Delighted," the major said.

The singing pilot started in on "All Alone" and everyone but Peter joined him. Peter stared unseeingly at the glasses and bottles behind the bar. In two days he could be home. Three days and he could walk into Anne's room, quietly, unannounced, smiling a little tremulously as she looked up unsuspectingly. Maybe it was possible. He had had no leave since he'd come to Africa, except for two weeks' convalescent. He could go immediately to Colonel Foster's apartment, explain to him. If the colonel gave him a written order releasing him from duty for twenty-one days he would undertake to get transportation back. Somehow, somehow . . . He would take all the responsibility himself. He was sure that Colonel Foster, who was a good soul, would do it.

Peter stood up straight. He spoke to the American major. "Perhaps I'll see you at six o'clock."

"Fine," the major said heartily. "It's going to be a great trip. We're loaded with scotch." He waved as Peter turned and left the bar.

" 'All alone, I'm so all alone, sitting by the telephone . . .' " the wailing, mocking voices quavered in the night.

Peter got into a taxicab and gave Colonel Foster's address. He was trembling. He closed his eyes and leaned back. It was all absolutely possible. England was only two days away. Two weeks there and he could face the rest of the war calmly, knowing that he would not explode, would not lose his reason. England in three days, after the three years . . . Colonel Foster would most certainly say yes. Peter was sure of it as the taxi drove up to the dark apartment building where Colonel Foster lived. Peter paid the driver and looked up. The colonel's window was alight, the only one in the entire building. Peter felt his breath coming fast. It was a symbol, an omen. The man was awake. His friend, who could give him England tonight with a few strokes of a pen, by luck was wakeful in the quiet night, when all the rest of the city slept around him. It would be irregular, and Colonel Foster would be running some risk, but he had rank enough and was independent enough to take the chance.

Peter rang the night bell of the apartment building. Far in the depths of the sleeping stone and brick a forlorn and distant bell sang weirdly. As he waited for the hall boy to open the doors Peter hastily rehearsed his story.

No leave in three years. The tension getting worse and worse. Medically graded, no chance of getting to an active unit. Regiment disbanded. Work deteriorating. Given to sudden fits of temper and what could be described only as melancholia, although a doctor wouldn't believe it until it was too late. He knew the British Army couldn't provide transportation, but here were these Americans with an empty Liberator. He'd get back somehow. As he went over it, in the darkness, with the faraway bell sounding as though it were ringing at the bottom of a troubled sea, Peter was sure the logic was irrefutable. Foster couldn't refuse.

When the hall boy finally opened the door Peter sprang past him and raced up the steps, too impatient to take the elevator.

He was panting when he rang Colonel Foster's bell and sweat was streaming down the sides of his face. He rang the bell sharply, twice. He heard his breath whistling in the dim hall and he tried to compose himself, so that Colonel Foster would think him absolutely calm, absolutely lucid.

The door opened. The figure at the door was silhouetted against the yellowish light behind it.

"Colonel," Peter said, panting, "I'm so glad you're up. I must talk to you. I hate to disturb you, but——"

"Come in." The door was opened wider and Peter strode down the hall into the living room. He heard the door close and turned around. "I——" He stopped. The man who was standing there was not Colonel Foster. It was a large, red-faced man, bald, in a tattered red bathrobe. He had a mustache and tired eyes and he was holding a book in his hand. Peter looked at the book. The poems of Robert Browning.

The man stood there waiting, pulling his bathrobe tighter, a curious little smile in his weary face.

"I . . . I saw the light, sir," Peter said. "I thought Colonel Foster would be up and I took the liberty of . . . I had some business with . . ."

"Colonel Foster doesn't live here," the man said. His voice was clipped and military, but tired, aging. "He moved out a week ago."

"Oh," Peter said. He swallowed and made a conscious effort to speak quietly. "Do you know where he lives, sir?"

"I'm afraid not. Is there anything I can do, Captain? I'm Colonel Gaines. That's why when you said 'Colonel,' at the door, I——"

"No sir," Peter said. "Nothing, sir. I'm dreadful sorry. This time of night."

"Oh, that's all right." The colonel waved a little embarrassedly. "I never go to sleep. I was reading."

"Well . . . Thank you, sir. Good night."

"Uh"—the colonel looked hesitantly at him, as though he felt, in some dubious, obscure way, that Peter should be helped—"uh . . . perhaps a drink. I have some whisky I was just going to . . . for myself . . ."

by Irwin Shaw

"No, thank you, sir," Peter said. "I'd better be getting along."

Clumsily they went down the hall together to the door. The colonel opened the door. He stood there, red-faced, huge, British, like a living Colonel Blimp, lonely and tired, with Robert Browning, in the foreign night.

"Good night, sir."

"Good night."

The door closed and Peter walked slowly down the dark stairs. He started toward his hotel, but the thought of the disordered room and Mac lying there, steadily asleep, steadily and lightly snoring in the next bed, was impossible. He walked slowly past the dark policemen standing quietly with their rifles on the street corners. Down the street gharry lights, small and flickering and lonesome, wandered along and the sound of the horses' hoofs was deliberate and weary. He came to the English Bridge and stood on the bank of the river, looking at the dark water swirling north toward the Mediterranean. Down the river a felucca, its immense sail spread in a soaring triangle, slowly made its way among the shadows from the trees along the shore. Across the river a minaret, poignant with faith, shone sharp and delicate in the moonlight.

Peter felt spent and drained. A nervous and hysteric pulse pulled at his bad eye and a gigantic sob seemed wedged in his throat.

Overhead, far away, there was the sound of a plane. It came nearer, passed across the stars, died away, going somewhere.

The wedge dislodged and the sob broke out like tears and blood.

Peter closed his eyes, and when he opened them again the wild pulse had stopped, his throat was clear. He stared across the river at the minaret, faithful and lovely in the light of the moon, by the side of the old river. Tomorrow, he thought, tomorrow there may be a letter from home.

1945: *from The Yale Review*

THE WIND AND THE SNOW OF WINTER

by Walter Van Tilburg Clark, whose first published short story—"Hook," from The Atlantic—*was in the* O. Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories of 1941. *He was represented in this series for the next three consecutive years. Mr. Clark's first work was mainly poetry. His first novel,* The Ox-Bow In-

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cident, *published in 1940, received high critical praise, and was made into a movie. He has contributed to such periodicals as* Atlantic Monthly, Accent, The New Yorker, The Nation, Saturday Evening Post, Yale Review, *and* Virginia Quarterly Review. *Two of his most recent books are* The Track of the Cat *and* The Watchful Gods.

Mr. Clark was born August 3, 1909, in Maine. He was brought up in West Nyack, New York, and later in Reno, Nevada, where his father was president of the University of Nevada. He did his undergraduate work at the University of Nevada, spent two years on a fellowship at the University of Vermont, and did additional graduate work in England. From 1935–1945 he taught school in Cazenovia, New York, and coached sports and dramatics. He now teaches and resides in Virginia City, Nevada.

It was near sunset when Mike Braneen came onto the last pitch of the old wagon road which had led into Gold Rock from the east since the Comstock days. The road was just two ruts in the hard earth, with sagebrush growing between them, and was full of steep pitches and sharp turns. From the summit it descended even more steeply into Gold Rock, in a series of short switchbacks down the slope of the canyon. There was a paved highway on the other side of the pass now, but Mike never used that. Cars coming from behind made him uneasy, so that he couldn't follow his own thoughts long, but had to keep turning around every few minutes, to see that his burro, Annie, was staying out on the shoulder of the road, where she would be safe. Mike didn't like cars anyway, and on the old road he could forget about them and feel more like himself. He could forget about Annie too, except when the light, quick tapping of her hoofs behind him stopped. Even then he didn't really break his thoughts. It was more as if the tapping were another sound from his own inner machinery, and when it stopped he stopped too, and turned around to see what she was doing. When he began to walk ahead again at the same slow, unvarying pace, his arms scarcely swinging at all, his body bent a little forward from the waist, he would not be aware that there had been any interruption of the memory or the story that was going on in his head. Mike did not like to have his stories interrupted except by an idea of his own, something to do with his prospecting, or the arrival of his story at an actual memory which warmed him to closer recollection or led into a new and more attractive story.

An intense, golden light, almost liquid, fanned out from the peaks above him and reached eastward under the gray sky, and the snow which occasionally swarmed across this light was fine and dry. Such little squalls had been going on all day, and still there was nothing like real snow down, but

only a fine powder which the wind swept along until it caught under the brush, leaving the ground bare. Yet Mike Braneen was not deceived. This was not just a flurrying day; it was the beginning of winter. If not tonight, then tomorrow, or the next day, the snow would begin which shut off the mountains, so that a man might as well be on a great plain for all he could see, perhaps even the snow which blinded a man at once and blanketed the desert in an hour. Fifty-two years in this country had made Mike Braneen sure about such things, although he didn't give much thought to them, but only to what he had to do because of them. Three nights before he had been awakened by a change in the wind. It was no longer a wind born in the near mountains, cold with night and altitude, but a wind from far places, full of a damp chill which got through his blankets and into his bones. The stars had still been clear and close above the dark humps of the mountains, and overhead the constellations had moved slowly in full panoply, unbroken by any invisible lower darkness; yet he had lain there half awake for a few minutes, hearing the new wind beat the brush around him, hearing Annie stirring restlessly and thumping in her hobble. He had thought drowsily, "Smells like winter this time," and then, "It's held off a long time this year, pretty near the end of December." Then he had gone back to sleep, mildly happy because the change meant he would be going back to Gold Rock. Gold Rock was the other half of Mike Braneen's life. When the smell of winter came he always started back for Gold Rock. From March or April until the smell of winter he wandered slowly about among the mountains, anywhere between the White Pines and the Virginias, with only his burro for company. Then there would come the change, and they would head back for Gold Rock.

Mike had traveled with a good many burros during that time, eighteen or twenty, he thought, although he was not sure. He could not remember them all, but only those he had had first, when he was a young man and always thought most about seeing women when he got back to Gold Rock, or those with something queer about them, like Baldy, who'd had a great pale patch, like a bald spot, on one side of his belly, or those who'd had something queer happen to them, like Maria. He could remember just how it had been that night. He could remember it as if it were last night. It had been in Hamilton. He had felt unhappy, because he could remember Hamilton when the whole hollow was full of people and buildings, and everything was new and active. He had gone to sleep in the hollow shell of the Wells Fargo Building, hearing an old iron shutter banging against the wall in the wind. In the morning Maria had been gone. He had followed the scuffing track she made on account of her loose hobble, and it had led far up the old snow-gullied road to Treasure Hill, and then ended at one of the black shafts that opened like mouths right at the edge of the road. A man remembered a thing like that.

There weren't many burros that foolish. But burros with nothing particular about them were hard to remember—especially those he'd had in the last twenty years or so, when he had gradually stopped feeling so personal about them and had begun to call all the jennies Annie and all the burros Jack.

The clicking of the little hoofs behind him stopped, and Mike stopped too, and turned around. Annie was pulling at a line of yellow grass along the edge of the road.

"Come on, Maria," Mike said patiently. The burro at once stopped pulling at the dead grass and came on up toward him, her small black nose working, the ends of the grass standing out on each side of it like whiskers. Mike began to climb again, ahead of her.

It was a long time since he had been caught by a winter, too. He could not remember how long. All the beginnings ran together in his mind, as if they were all the beginning of one winter so far back that he had almost forgotten it. He could still remember clearly, though, the winter he had stayed out on purpose, clear into January. He had been a young man then, thirty-five or forty or forty-five, somewhere in there. He would have to stop and try to bring back a whole string of memories about what had happened just before, in order to remember just how old he had been, and it wasn't worth the trouble. Besides, sometimes even that system didn't work. It would lead him into an old camp where he had been a number of times, and the dates would get mixed up. It was impossible to remember any other way, because all his comings and goings had been so much alike. He had been young, anyhow, and not much afraid of anything except running out of water in the wrong place; not even afraid of the winter. He had stayed out because he'd thought he had a good thing, and he had wanted to prove it. He could remember how it felt to be out in the clear winter weather on the mountains, the piñon trees and the junipers weighted down with feathery snow, and making sharp blue shadows on the white slopes. The hills had made blue shadows on one another too, and in the still air his pick had made the beginning of a sound like a bell's. He knew he had been young, because he could remember taking a day off now and then, just to go tramping around those hills, up and down the white and through the blue shadows, on a kind of holiday. He had pretended to his common sense that he was seriously prospecting, and had carried his hammer and even his drill along, but he had really just been gallivanting, playing colt. Maybe he had been even younger than thirty-five, though he could still be stirred a little, for that matter, by the memory of the kind of weather which had sent him gallivanting. High-blue weather, he called it. There were two kinds of high-blue weather, besides the winter kind, which didn't set him off very often, spring and fall. In the spring it would have a soft, puffy wind and soft, puffy white clouds which made separate shadows that traveled silently across hills

that looked soft too. In the fall it would be still, and there would be no clouds at all in the blue, but there would be something in the golden air and the soft, steady sunlight on the mountains that made a man as uneasy as the spring blowing, though in a different way, more sad and not so excited. In the spring high-blue a man had been likely to think about women he had slept with, or wanted to sleep with, or imaginary women made up with the help of newspaper pictures of actresses or young society matrons, or of the old oil paintings in the Lucky Boy Saloon, which showed pale, almost naked women against dark, sumptuous backgrounds—women with long hair or braided hair, calm, virtuous faces, small hands and feet, and ponderous limbs, breasts, and buttocks. In the fall high-blue, though it had been much longer since he had seen a woman, or heard a woman's voice, he was more likely to think about old friends, men, or places he had heard about, or places he hadn't seen for a long time. He himself thought most often about Goldfield the way he had last seen it in the summer in 1912. That was as far south as Mike had ever been in Nevada. Since then he had never been south of Tonopah. When the high-blue weather was past, though, and the season worked toward winter, he began to think about Gold Rock. There were only three or four winters out of the fifty-two when he hadn't gone home to Gold Rock, to his old room at Mrs. Wright's, up on Fourth Street, and to his meals in the dining room at the International House, and to the Lucky Boy, where he could talk to Tom Connover and his other friends, and play cards, or have a drink to hold in his hand while he sat and remembered.

This journey had seemed a little different from most, though. It had started the same as usual, but as he had come across the two vast valleys, and through the pass in the low range between them, he hadn't felt quite the same. He'd felt younger and more awake, it seemed to him, and yet, in a way, older too, suddenly older. He had been sure that there was plenty of time, and yet he had been a little afraid of getting caught in the storm. He had kept looking ahead to see if the mountains on the horizon were still clearly outlined, or if they had been cut off by a lowering of the clouds. He had thought more than once how bad it would be to get caught out there when the real snow began, and he had been disturbed by the first flakes. It had seemed hard to him to have to walk so far too. He had kept thinking about distance. Also the snowy cold had searched out the regions of his body where old injuries had healed. He had taken off his left mitten a good many times, to blow on the fingers which had been frosted the year he was sixty-three, so that now it didn't take much cold to turn them white and stiffen them. The queer tingling, partly like an itch and partly like a pain, in the patch on his back that had been burned in that old powder blast was sharper than he could remember its ever having been before. The rheumatism in his joints, which was so old a companion that it usually made him feel no more

than tight-knit and stiff, and the place where his leg had been broken and torn when that ladder broke in '97 ached, and had a pulse he could count. All this made him believe that he was walking more slowly than usual, although nothing, probably not even a deliberate attempt, could actually have changed his pace. Sometimes he even thought, with a moment of fear, that he was getting tired.

On the other hand, he felt unusually clear and strong in his mind. He remembered things with a clarity which was like living them again—nearly all of them events from many years back, from the time when he had been really active and fearless and every burro had had its own name. Some of these events, like the night he had spent in Eureka with the little brown-haired whore, a night in the fall in 1888 or '89, somewhere in there, he had not once thought of for years. Now he could remember even her name. Armandy, she had called herself: a funny name. They all picked names for their business, of course, romantic names like Cecily or Rosamunde or Belle or Claire, or hard names like Diamond Gert or Horseshoe Sal, or names that were pinned on them, like Indian Kate or Roman Mary, but Armandy was different.

He could remember Armandy as if he were with her now, not the way she had behaved in bed; he couldn't remember anything particular about that. In fact he couldn't be sure that he remembered anything about that at all. There were others he could remember more clearly for the way they had behaved in bed, women he had been with more often. He had been with Armandy only that one night. He remembered little things about being with her, things that made it seem good to think of being with her again. Armandy had a room upstairs in a hotel. They could hear a piano playing in a club across the street. He could hear the tune, and it was one he knew, although he didn't know its name. It was a gay tune that went on and on the same, but still it sounded sad when you heard it through the hotel window, with the lights from the bars and hotels shining on the street, and the people coming and going through the lights, and then, beyond the lights, the darkness where the mountains were. Armandy wore a white silk dress with a high waist, and a locket on a gold chain. The dress made her look very brown and like a young girl. She used a white powder on her face, that smelled like violets, but this could not hide her brownness. The locket was heart-shaped, and it opened to show a cameo of a man's hand holding a woman's hand very gently, just their fingers laid out long together, and the thumbs holding, the way they were sometimes on tombstones. There were two little gold initials on each hand, but Armandy would never tell what they stood for, or even if the locket was really her own. He stood in the window, looking down at the club from which the piano music was coming, and Armandy stood beside him, with her shoulder against his arm, and a glass of wine in her

hand. He could see the toe of her white satin slipper showing from under the edge of her skirt. Her big hat, loaded with black and white plumes, lay on the dresser behind them. His own leather coat, with the sheepskin lining, lay across the foot of the bed. It was a big bed, with a knobby brass foot and head. There was one oil lamp burning in the chandelier in the middle of the room. Armandy was soft-spoken, gentle, and a little fearful, always looking at him to see what he was thinking. He stood with his arms folded. His arms felt big and strong upon his heavily muscled chest. He stood there, pretending to be in no hurry, but really thinking eagerly about what he would do with Armandy, who had something about her which tempted him to be cruel. He stood there, with his chin down into his heavy, dark beard, and watched a man come riding down the middle of the street from the west. The horse was a fine black, which lifted its head and feet with pride. The man sat very straight, with a high rein, and something about his clothes and hat made him appear to be in uniform, although it wasn't a uniform he was wearing. The man also saluted friends upon the sidewalks like an officer, bending his head just slightly, and touching his hat instead of lifting it. Mike Braneen asked Armandy who the man was, and then felt angry because she could tell him, and because he was an important man who owned a mine that was in bonanza. He mocked the airs with which the man rode, and his princely greetings. He mocked the man cleverly, and Armandy laughed and repeated what he said, and made him drink a little of her wine as a reward. Mike had been drinking whisky, and he did not like wine anyway, but this was not the moment in which to refuse such an invitation.

Old Mike remembered all this, which had been completely forgotten for years. He could not remember what he and Armandy had said, but he remembered everything else, and he felt very lonesome for Armandy, and for the room with the red, figured carpet and the brass chandelier with oil lamps in it, and the open window with the long tune coming up through it, and the young summer night outside on the mountains. This loneliness was so much more intense than his familiar loneliness that it made him feel very young. Memories like this had come up again and again during these three days. It was like beginning life over again. It had tricked him into thinking, more than once, "Next summer I'll make the strike, and this time I'll put it into something safe for the rest of my life, and stop this fool wandering around while I've still got some time left"—a way of thinking which he had really stopped a long time before.

It was getting darker rapidly in the pass. When a gust of wind brought the snow against Mike's face so hard that he noticed the flakes felt larger, he looked up. The light was still there, although the fire was dying out of it, and the snow swarmed across it more thickly. Mike remembered God. He did not think anything exact. He did not think about his own relationship to God.

He merely felt the idea as a comforting presence. He'd always had a feeling about God whenever he looked at a sunset, especially a sunset which came through under a stormy sky. It had been the strongest feeling left in him until these memories like the one about Armandy had begun. Even in this last pass his strange fear of the storm had come on him again a couple of times, but now that he had looked at the light and thought of God it was gone. In a few minutes he would come to the summit and look down into his lighted city. He felt happily hurried by this anticipation.

He would take the burro down and stable her in John Hammersmith's shed, where he always kept her. He would spread fresh straw for her, and see that the shed was tight against the wind and snow, and get a measure of grain for her from John. Then he would go up to Mrs. Wright's house at the top of Fourth Street, and leave his things in the same room he always had, the one in front, which looked down over the roofs and chimneys of his city, and across at the east wall of the canyon, from which the sun rose late. He would trim his beard with Mrs. Wright's shears, and shave the upper part of his cheeks. He would bathe out of the blue bowl and pitcher, and wipe himself with the towel with yellow flowers on it, and dress in the good dark suit and the good black shoes with the gleaming box toes, and the good black hat which he had left in the chest in his room. In this way he would perform the ceremony which ended the life of the desert and began the life of Gold Rock. Then he would go down to the International House, and greet Arthur Morris in the gleaming bar, and go into the dining room and eat the best supper they had, with fresh meat and vegetables, and new-made pie, and two cups of hot clear coffee. He would be served by the plump blond waitress who always joked with him, and gave him many little extra things with his first supper, including the drink which Arthur Morris always sent in from the bar.

At this point Mike Braneen stumbled in his mind, and his anticipation wavered. He could not be sure that the plump blond waitress would serve him. For a moment he saw her in a long skirt, and the dining room of the International House, behind her, had potted palms standing in the corners, and was full of the laughter and loud, manly talk of many customers who wore high vests and mustaches and beards. These men leaned back from tables covered with empty dishes. They patted their tight vests and lighted expensive cigars. He knew all their faces. If he were to walk down the aisle between the tables on his side they would all speak to him. But he also seemed to remember the dining room with only a few tables, with oilcloth on them instead of linen, and with moody young men sitting at them in their work clothes—strangers who worked for the highway department, or were just passing through, or talked mining in terms which he did not understand or which made him angry.

No, it would not be the plump blond waitress. He did not know who it would be. It didn't matter. After supper he would go up Canyon Street under the arcade to the Lucky Boy Saloon, and there it would be the same as ever. There would be the laurel wreaths on the frosted glass panels of the doors, and the old sign upon the window, the sign that was older than Tom Connover, almost as old as Mike Braneen himself. He would open the door and see the bottles and the white women in the paintings, and the card table in the back corner and the big stove and the chairs along the wall. Tom would look around from his place behind the bar.

"Well, now," he would roar, "look who's here, boys. Now will you believe it's winter?" he would roar at them.

Some of them would be the younger men, of course, and there might even be a few strangers, but this would only add to the dignity of his reception, and there would also be his friends. There would be Henry Bray with the gray walrus mustache, and Mark Wilton and Pat Gallagher. They would all welcome him loudly.

"Mike, how are you, anyway?" Tom would roar, leaning across the bar to shake hands with his big, heavy, soft hand with the diamond ring on it. "And what'll it be, Mike? The same?" he'd ask, as if Mike had been in there no longer ago than the night before.

Mike would play that game too. "The same," he would say.

Then he would really be back in Gold Rock; never mind the plump blond waitress.

Mike came to the summit of the old road and stopped and looked down. For a moment he felt lost again, as he had when he'd thought about the plump blond waitress. He had expected Canyon Street to look much brighter. He had expected a lot of orange windows close together on the other side of the canyon. Instead there were only a few scattered lights across the darkness, and they were white. They made no communal glow upon the steep slope, but gave out only single white needles of light, which pierced the darkness secretly and lonesomely, as if nothing could ever pass from one house to another over there. Canyon Street was very dark too. There it went, the street he loved, steeply down into the bottom of the canyon, and down its length there were only the few street lights, more than a block apart, swinging in the wind and darting about that cold, small light. The snow whirled and swooped under the nearest street light below.

"You are getting to be an old fool," Mike Braneen said out loud to himself, and felt better. This was the way Gold Rock was now, of course, and he loved it all the better. It was a place that grew old with a man, that was going to die sometime too. There could be an understanding with it.

He worked his way slowly down into Canyon Street, with Annie slipping and checking behind him. Slowly, with the blown snow behind them, they

came to the first built-up block and passed the first dim light showing through a smudged window under the arcade. They passed the dark places after it, and the second light. Then Mike Braneen stopped in the middle of the street, and Annie stopped beside him, pulling her rump in and turning her head away from the snow. A highway truck, coming down from the head of the canyon, had to get way over onto the wrong side of the street to pass them. The driver leaned out as he went by, and yelled, "Pull over, Pop. You're in town now."

Mike Braneen didn't hear him. He was staring at the Lucky Boy. The Lucky Boy was dark, and there were boards nailed across the big window that had shown the sign. At last Mike went over onto the boardwalk to look more closely. Annie followed him, but stopped at the edge of the walk and scratched her neck against a post of the arcade. There was the other sign, hanging crossways under the arcade, and even in that gloom Mike could see that it said Lucky Boy and had a Jack of Diamonds painted on it. There was no mistake. The Lucky Boy sign, and others like it under the arcade, creaked and rattled in the wind.

There were footsteps coming along the boards. The boards sounded hollow, and sometimes one of them rattled. Mike Braneen looked down slowly from the sign and peered at the approaching figure. It was a man wearing a sheepskin coat with the collar turned up around his head. He was walking quickly, like a man who knew where he was going, and why, and where he had been. Mike almost let him pass. Then he spoke.

"Say, fella——"

He even reached out a hand as if to catch hold of the man's sleeve, though he didn't touch it. The man stopped and asked, impatiently, "Yeah?" and Mike let the hand down again slowly.

"Well, what is it?" the man asked.

"I don't want anything," Mike said. "I got plenty."

"Okay, okay," the man said. "What's the matter?"

Mike moved his hand toward the Lucky Boy. "It's closed," he said.

"I see it is, Dad," the man said. He laughed a little. He didn't seem to be in quite so much of a hurry now.

"How long has it been closed?" Mike asked.

"Since about June, I guess," the man said. "Old Tom Connover, the guy that ran it, died last June."

Mike waited for a moment. "Tom died?" he asked.

"Yup. I guess he'd just kept it open out of love of the place anyway. There hasn't been any real business for years. Nobody cared to keep it open after him."

The man started to move on, but then he waited, peering, trying to see Mike better.

"This June?" Mike asked finally.

"Yup. This last June."

"Oh," Mike said. Then he just stood there. He wasn't thinking anything. There didn't seem to be anything to think.

"You knew him?" the man asked.

"Thirty years," Mike said. "No, more'n that," he said, and started to figure out how long he had known Tom Connover, but lost it, and said, as if it would do just as well, "He was a lot younger than I am, though."

"Hey," said the man, coming closer, and peering again. "You're Mike Braneen, aren't you?"

"Yes," Mike said.

"Gee, I didn't recognize you at first. I'm sorry."

"That's all right," Mike said. He didn't know who the man was, or what he was sorry about.

He turned his head slowly and looked out into the street. The snow was coming down heavily now. The street was all white. He saw Annie with her head and shoulders in under the arcade, but the snow settling on her rump.

"Well, I guess I'd better get Molly under cover," he said. He moved toward the burro a step, but then halted.

"Say, fella——"

The man had started on, but he turned back. He had to wait for Mike to speak.

"I guess this about Tom's mixed me up."

"Sure," the man said. "It's tough, an old friend like that."

"Where do I turn up to get to Mrs. Wright's place?"

"Mrs. Wright?"

"Mrs. William Wright," Mike said. "Her husband used to be a foreman in the Aztec. Got killed in the fire."

"Oh," the man said. He didn't say anything more, but just stood there, looking at the shadowy bulk of old Mike.

"She's not dead too, is she?" Mike asked slowly.

"Yeah, I'm afraid she is, Mr. Braneen," the man said. "Look," he said more cheerfully. "It's Mrs. Branley's house you want right now, isn't it? Place where you stayed last winter?"

Finally Mike said, "Yeah. Yeah, I guess it is."

"I'm going up that way. I'll walk up with you," the man said.

After they had started Mike thought that he ought to take the burro down to John Hammersmith's first, but he was afraid to ask about it. They walked on down Canyon Street, with Annie walking along beside them in the gutter. At the first side street they turned right and began to climb the steep hill toward another of the little street lights dancing over a crossing. There

was no sidewalk here, and Annie followed right at their heels. That one street light was the only light showing up ahead.

When they were halfway up to the light Mike asked, "She die this summer too?"

The man turned his body half around, so that he could hear inside his collar.

"What?"

"Did she die this summer too?"

"Who?"

"Mrs. Wright," Mike said.

The man looked at him, trying to see his face as they came up toward the light. Then he turned back again, and his voice was muffled by the collar.

"No, she died quite a while ago, Mr. Braneen."

"Oh," Mike said finally.

They came up onto the crossing under the light, and the snow-laden wind whirled around them again. They passed under the light, and their three lengthening shadows before them were obscured by the innumerable tiny shadows of the flakes.

BIRD SONG

by John Mayo Goss, who has been a student at Yale, a soldier (in World War I), a writer of advertising copy, a resident of France, an Illinois farmer, and a book salesman at Marshall Field & Co.—in addition to being a successful author. "Bird Song" was his first published short story; it has been expanded into a novel since its publication in 1946. Mr. Goss is also represented in the 1949 volume of the O. Henry Memorial Award Prize Stories *with "Evening and Morning Prayer" from* The New Yorker. *For the past several years he has made his home in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.*

Mike, the hospital attendant, whisked the collar of the oversize canvas lumber jacket up around Beresford's ears and grinned. "That coat looks good

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on you, fella," he said. "A little big, but it's cold out and those sleeves will keep your fingers warm." He held up a cap of black cloth, round as a casserole, with visor and ear tabs provided with strings to tie beneath the chin. "Here's just the hat to go with it." Beresford tried to strike a comic attitude as Mike pulled the thing down hard on his head, but it was no use. He could not, he knew, be funnier-looking than he was.

"Who's coming for you, Georgie? Your wife? Oh, oh—the little French babe, hey? Well, you be careful, Georgie—don't forget to come back."

Mike was young but his manner was fatherly; his arm lay across Beresford's shoulder as they walked away from the clothes room, down the long corridor, past the small, neat kitchen and dining room. "Now you go up front and listen to the radio, George." (Hop along, my boy, Papa's busy.)

The common room crossed the corridor at its top like a T. The big hall with its high, grilled windows and solid furniture served as meeting place, reading and writing room, library, and game room for the ward. Well patronized on weekdays, on a Sunday morning such as this, when no doctors came and there were no treatments, insulin shots, or occupational classes, it was a case of standing room only. There was a restlessness here, like flotsam in flowing water; a sitter here, another there, would be pulled to his feet and away. Even as Beresford stood alert in the doorway, a chair in the row against the wall, almost next to him, was vacated and he slid into it, pulling out of his uncomfortable coat.

As many patients as could find places were seated about two center tables, reading magazines and the morning papers. At the end of one, "Aunt Nellie" Nelson and "One-eye" Connor, dignified in overalls, were playing checkers. At the opposite end a slap-bang card game was in progress.

Swinging around these groups of furniture and humanity, a number of tireless individuals were finding release for their energy in marching single file, counterclockwise, in a rhythm unbroken except when one would flop triumphantly into a vacant chair or another would hesitate in his stride to twirl a knob of the radio. This last diversion, imparting endless variety to the programs and volume, gave a kaleidoscopic accompaniment of sound to the pervading activity.

Beresford glanced at the electric wall clock. A quarter of ten—his wife should have been here an hour ago. A sweep of uncertainty left him clenching and unclenching his hands on the rough canvas of the coat in his lap. He took out a cigarette and cast around for someone already smoking, for matches in the pocket are considered a hazard for patients in state hospitals.

On the far side of the room an attendant, loud-mouthed Bill Pfluger, spread himself throughout one of the big chairs and George could get a light from him—probably. But to be beholden to Pfluger even for a match was distasteful. Just now Pfluger was expanding his body and soul before those of

the mentally deficient who sat about him. With Olympian authority, his great face red with the exertion, he proclaimed his opinions.

"Why, that punk'd have no more chance against Louis——" George heard distinctly across the wide room, above the exhortations of a fleeting sermon just caught from the air by an indefatigable marcher. Pfluger waved a cigar in the face of the nearest of his audience. "You don't know nothin', you poor goddam——" "Nothing is beyond our strength if we hold——" intoned the air-borne sermon.

Three chairs away Graber had a cigarette going. Graber was a husky man with whom George often had confidential conversations, but he was unpredictable. Sometimes he had to be tied in his bed—only yesterday he had assailed the outer door of the ward with a frenzy that would have shattered the glass if it had not been made to withstand such emergencies. Now Graber offered a light without a word, looking intently only at the tips of the cigarettes as they met.

Urie, a mute with a shaved head, was sitting in Beresford's chair when he turned back, but it was not usurpation—merely the guarding of his friend George's seat against seizure. Urie got up at once, and when Beresford thanked him he writhed like a patted dog.

George breathed his cigarette long and deeply. The waiting and the flickering radio were wearing down his earlier exultation. He was getting nervous; his stomach was vacant and fluttery. Oh, Lord, what could be holding Denise?

Around and around the walkers went. Young Peters (he wet the bed at night) paused at the radio, jerky as a squirrel, and took his twirl. The instrument came in on short wave: "Calling all cars, calling all cars. Watch for——" Police, eh? It reminded Beresford of a refrain from a play a long time ago—*Liliom,* wasn't it?—"Look out, here come the damn police, the damn police, the damn——"

George sat stiffly, his face dead-pan. Infrequently a thumb or finger twitched in almost imperceptible gesture. He wasn't going to get jittery today, he was telling himself, whatever happened. Not on this day of days, the day he had thought might never come, this day of proving himself, of rebirth. Nothing must shake him. This was the day of good-by to that drawn-faced Beresford who had crept around crying to himself, "They've got to let me out of here. I'm all right now—they've got to let me out."

A twitter of birds—canaries, a cageful of canaries—sang through the room. "Gluck's Cake, Light as a Feather." Canaries in a broadcast—too damn farfetched. A line of verse leaped into Beresford's mind, bright and fixed as a neon sign: "Bird song at morning, and starshine at night, bird song at morning——"

The marchers moved in quicker cadence. Pfluger's voice rose more positive

and profane. The room swung in inexorable movement. Someone laughed shrilly.

Beresford finished his cigarette in one long drag and forced himself to relax. How about your achievement of ten days ago? (That's a good thing to think about.) When you sat beside the doctor before his wretched "class" and, when your turn came, finally answered his questions, quickly and naturally as anyone should:

"What day is it?"

"Wednesday, the thirteenth of November, 1940, Doctor."

"How old are you? When is your birthday?"

"Three weeks ago I was forty-six, Doctor."

(I'm living, Doctor. I am of my own generation. I am not a child nor an old man, not unborn or dead, just miraculously George Beresford, groped back out of oblivion to consciousness, to sanity.)

"Good! Very good indeed, Beresford. Nicely oriented. I am proud of you. One of my best patients."

And then a little later, "A day with your wife now? Well, I don't know, Beresford. Her influence on you has not been soothing. You recall after some of her visits——"

"Yes, Doctor, but I was worried about her then—desperate. I'm all right now, and she has a job and a room."

So it had been arranged. Denise had been telephoned to come for him; he was to spend the day with her. (Don't look at the clock, Beresford—don't look. So, you see, only twenty-seven minutes since the last time. She'll be here. She will not fail you after all these months.)

No, he thought, she won't fail me. I failed her but she won't fail me. Whatever happened, ever, we were in it together. Nothing was too bad for us to share. Where I went, you went, drink for drink, always. I couldn't leave you in France, could I? Are you sorry now? Ah, no, you liked it on the farm; those were five good years—or four and three quarters. "Oh, but this is *merveilleux*," you said. Remember? "I love it here. See, I can milk the cows and in the garden I am content."

We came close to it there, *ma chère*. And we knew it. "Let's drink to it," we said. "Let's drink in the long winter evenings before the fire. Let's drink in the mornings and in the afternoons. Let's drink to be happier. Let's drink to keep it as it is. You and I against the world, Denise."

Fog, wisps of fog, seeping into the old house, haze impalpable but ponderable, fog over the garden, over the elms, mist clinging to my face. Flashes of lightning through the fog, shattering, shuddering glimpses of terror. Where are you, Denise? Hold me, for the love of God, hold me fast!

Beresford drew a hand across his eyes, as a diver does coming to the surface, and sat back again in his chair. Those last days—how were they for

you, Denise? And after? This town is not Paris, ah, no. This town is hard and ugly when you have no money, no friends.

But today, at last, you can tell me. A job and a room! Carefully Beresford drew a small, folded paper from his pocket. "Lavinia Street." I don't know it, he thought, but no matter. All we need is a safe and quiet corner, all by ourselves, away from these smirking guards and goggling inmates. You don't come to see me very often any more but I don't blame you for that. Those short, urgent, dumb moments were agony for us both.

Have you a fireplace in your room? Of course not. But pictures, maybe. I'll bet *Sainte Thérèse* is looking down from the wall. And the little water-color that hung in the hall at the farm—did you bring that in? You liked it so. Is there a tree outside your window?

Mike came to the door and beckoned to Beresford. On the instant, as George jumped to his feet, young Lolly, one of the walkers, fell like a board in front of Graber. Lolly was six feet tall, had a girlish face and a constant giggle, and fell down here and there. Graber stayed impassive though the falling body brushed his legs. Pfluger parted himself from his chair and his educational endeavors, picked up Lolly's limp figure, and departed with it toward the limbo of the dormitory. Pfluger maintained his cigar in his mouth, and one of Lolly's shoes scraped across the floor.

Clutching his coat and cap, almost stepping on Pfluger's heels in his eager-ness, Beresford followed the guard's wide back, straining with its burden, out into the corridor. Denise, at last, he was certain.

Standing beside Mike's desk was a taxi driver gazing in fascination at the scarecrow figure of Lolly draped in Pfluger's arms. Mike looked up from a note he was reading and Beresford shivered in premonition.

"Your little Frenchy can't make it, George. Ain't that tough?" It was an exaggerated sympathy. "But the dame she lives with says come on down. She sent a cab for you." Mike fingered the note and examined Beresford specu-latively. "I guess that's all right. Wanna go?"

Beresford hugged his lumber jacket tighter. "Yes," he said. "Yes, I—would like to go."

The driver took his turn at speculative examination. You could feel his wariness: riding one of these birds around might not be so hot. Things went on in this place. But he followed unprotesting as Mike led the way down the corridor and unlocked the door to the stairway.

"There y'are, George. Give her my love—and don't forget to come back."

Beresford grinned and waved casually as people do on the outside. He fixed the loops over the buttons on his coat as he and the taxi driver de-scended the metal stairs, and tilted his cap a little to one side.

"Wanna ride in front, bud?" the driver asked.

Probably scared I'll bean him from the back seat, but maybe he's just being friendly, George thought, and climbed in as quickly as he could.

"How long you been in there, bud?"

Beresford had to concentrate on the question. They had passed out of the stone gates of the hospital grounds and were on the edge of town, a section of factories and freight yards which he had never known well, but which seemed now familiar in every detail. He did not want to talk.

"Not very long," he replied.

Even the smoke hanging low and white over the locomotives, solid and white in the cold air against the gray sky, he had seen before, exactly as it was now. He read the names on the factories and warehouses, still there, steady and normal, names that he knew. They stopped for a streetcar, and a girl got on, a pretty girl with brown hair and rosy cheeks. She wore a brown hat and a brown coat with a fur collar.

They drove fast down the almost deserted Sunday-morning street. They would reach the middle of town in a few blocks.

"Isn't Lavinia Street on the south side?" he asked politely.

"North side—near north. It's Bertha's place we're heading for." Launched into conversation, the driver continued, "Ain'cha never been there? Say, is that little Frenchy your wife?"

Beresford was startled out of his thoughts. "Why, yes," he replied loudly. "My wife is French."

"Them Frenchies is sure full of hell. She's a good kid, though. I've drove her lotsa times. I do a lot of work for that gang at Bert's. They always ask for Eddie."

What was the fool saying? But almost immediately, before George could ask for an explanation, the cab had turned and pulled up at the side of a dingy frame building, a store building from the look of it. There were filling stations on the other three corners of the intersection.

"Here y'are, bud. No, it's all paid for. Any time you want a cab, just ask for Eddie." The driver leaned out as the taxi pulled away and called, "Don't forget to go back home, bud."

Beresford stood on the sidewalk, only the tips of his fingers showing from his coat sleeves, and wished to God he had stayed in the cab. He walked slowly to the corner. "Lavinia Street," the marker said.

It's the wrong number then, he told himself. That smart taxi driver. He fumbled for the address slip through his buttoned jacket. "Ninety-two Lavinia Street." This won't be ninety-two.

The raw wind helped George back down the side street to the spot where he had been deposited. At the far end of the building was a door. Upon it were nailed two metal figures, a nine and a two. His upward glance found four shaded windows on the upper floor.

"Oh, my Lord, it can't be a—*bordel*." Say it fast, Beresford. Say it in French and you won't be sick.

Yet it did not have the right look about it, somehow, for that. Too honestly bare. Without giving himself time to think, he punched at the bell with a numb finger.

A strong female voice responded so quickly that it seemed the button must have been in direct electrical contact with it. "Come in. Come on up," the voice commanded.

The stairway, narrow and unlighted, mounted steeply. Whatever light there might have been was blocked by the wide figure of a woman on the top step.

"Say, ain't this our George?" the figure shouted. "Come right on up. I seen you get outta Eddie's cab. I got your little Frenchy tucked away waiting for you. She ain't feeling so hot this morning." Beresford had groped his way to the upper floor and was greeted with a dig in the ribs. "*You* know, George, Saturday night."

Beresford grinned, desperately friendly. "May I—see her?" he asked.

"You sure can, George. That door right there. Say, I'm Bertha. I run this place. It ain't much, but there's no funny business—men only, except Denise. I sure think the world and all of that little girl. You go right in, George. Nobody'll disturb you."

Of course it's all right here, it's only a rooming house, Beresford thought. It's just me—the old head still goes rocketing. But I wasn't afraid, he thought. I came up.

Denise was propped up in bed; her head turned to look at him as he entered. His first glance saw only that her eye and cheekbone were discolored by a faded bruise. She was trying to smile, half welcoming, half pleading. He crossed the little room in two strides and kissed her on the mouth quickly. Her breath was strong of overnight whisky.

"I wanted to go for you," she whispered in French.

Beresford nodded. He understood perfectly. He had done the same thing often enough himself. There was no question of forgiveness.

He sat on the edge of the bed, turning his cap in his hands. He should be talking to Denise, hugging her. Go on and talk, he goaded himself. Where are all those things you had to talk about?

Heavy footsteps tramped past the closed door.

The room was small and mean—bedbug mean. Except for a cheap dresser, there was no furniture but the dirty white iron bed, which sagged under even his light weight. Hanging beneath a shelf were Denise's dresses. With a lump in his throat George recognized most of them.

Denise was looking at him, smiling still, but frowning a little, too, looking

at him a little uncertainly. Her hair was dark on the pillow, her eyes dark and questioning.

He found her hand and gripped it hard. She was a little thinner, he thought, her highish Breton cheekbones a little more noticeable than he remembered. He bent and kissed her again, longer this time, lifting her shoulders to hold her close. Ah, this was better. This was Denise, brave and gallant, doing the best she could.

"Soon you can be out, *mon homme?*" she whispered. "Soon we can go back to the farm?"

Back to the farm? Back to the old furniture, the silver, the pictures on the walls? Go fishing in the creek again with Denise, work in the garden with her, play with the dogs? What about that letter from the bank? There was no money. What was it that he had to do about that? He must see about everything, so many things. Not now—someday. He couldn't think about them now.

A bang on the door shook the light wall and a man shouted, "How you comin', Frenchy?"

"V*a-t'en*, go to 'ell, *sale cochon*," Denise called back. Even as he gripped his knees in panic, Beresford cursed himself for a weakling. Wasn't that Pfluger's voice? Could it be? Had he followed him? Did they put a tail on you when you went out? Then George heard Bertha, good-natured, "On your way, you big bum," and the man's answering chuckle. It wasn't Pfluger; Pfluger was at the asylum. He was working himself up over nothing again.

Denise was talking. She was telling him, vivaciously now, that *Berthe* was *formidable*. "She makes the men here march straight as soldiers," she said, and showed George with stiff hands how straight the men must march. "But a good heart. She guards me well. She sees that I eat much. V*raiment*, it is not so bad here, *mon Georges*."

As he looked at her his heart constricted in pity, in remorse, in a love greater than he had known for her. No word of reproach from her, though it was as if he had led her by the hand and left her in this—this joint. Left her to fight for her life with no help from him. And she tries to cheer me up. He must get her out of here.

"Denise——"

With the clang of a hammer on sheet metal, Bertha's voice came from just outside. "Hey, get up and get some clothes on, dearie," she ordered, and opened the door. "I'm cooking you and George a nice dinner. Do you like fried chicken, George? Bet you ain't had none for a while. Say, how they been treating you anyhow?" She blanketed Beresford in heartiness. "Hey, look at the poor guy sweat. Take off that hot coat, George. Make yourself at home." She helped him unbutton it and threw it over the scrolled and battered foot of the bed.

Turning, Beresford saw, propped against the mirror of the dresser, a small, unframed photograph, a picture of himself, taken, he well remembered, in Belfort just before they had moved up into the Argonne.

"Golly," he thought, peering closely, "was I as young as that?" The boy in the photograph gazed back with arrogant confidence, fresh as his gold bars and Sam Browne belt, in a proud pose of "Look who won the war." Then what was that spectacle staring back at Beresford from the mirror? The old tweed coat was familiar, but that curious, intent face, the eyebrows raised in half-circles, the eyes stretched until the whites showed, that face which looked as if an invisible hand were clawing all the features downward, whose face was that? Mirrors were not numerous at the hospital. There was only one small one in the ever-populous washroom, and George had not had a good look at himself for a long time. Through a knothole, he thought. He squinted and lifted the corners of his mouth. That's better.

A squashed package of cigarettes lay on the dresser. He took one and turned around, still squinting. Denise was watching him intently—and Bertha, too, standing there with fists on her hips.

"No matches, hey, George?" Bertha seemed to know everything. "Put this box in your pocket and light one whenever you goddam please. You're on your own today. I'd give you a snort—the babe here could use one—but I don't know, they're plenty ornery out there, I guess. How about a bottla beer?" She was gone with the last word.

Denise squirmed from the covers and sat on the edge of the bed, her shoulders back, stretching, her breasts tight against the jacket of an old pair of his pajamas, the sky-blue pair. "What a girl!" said Beresford. (Forget that specter staring at your back from the mirror.) "You are still wearing my clothes."

"But naturally. Like that, *mon Georges à moi* is with me every night." She's talking to me as if I were a child, thought Beresford. "You want a *coup, Georges?*" She pulled a black pint bottle from beneath the pillow. "I saved a little. Maybe it help you."

Beresford could only shake his head. Nothing's changed—nothing at all, except himself. In how many places, on how many mornings, one or the other brought out the rest of a bottle, proudly, loyally. How could he tell her that the sight of the bottle appalled him now, that he was scared to take a drink, scared of the hospital, inside or out, scared of himself, of everything?

How had Bertha been so quick—back already with two glasses, accurately foamed, in her hands? She gave one to Beresford. It did look good (Hell, what's a glass of beer!), and he took a long swallow. The sharp beer taste cut through the mentholated hospital taste in his mouth, into his nose, through his head, throughout his body, jolting his senses. He put the glass of beer on the dresser.

"Come on over and take a look at my apartment," Bertha said, "while the kid here gets dressed. I got it fixed nice."

Beresford had followed too many guards and nurses to hesitate at authority's voice. That was the way you showed them you were all right, he had learned—by not thinking, by doing what you were told. But his shoulders sagged as he followed Bertha.

On the threshold of a room across the hall he stopped, trembling like a wary animal. In the window opposite, across a welter of shiny furniture and garish decoration, there hung a pair of caged canaries. Canaries—he did not mind canaries. He had never thought about canaries. But this cage—this cage——

Bertha caught his fixed expression. "You like canaries?" she asked. "Denise is nuts about 'em. I got some more in here."

To be sure, in the next room, where there were two windows, two cages hung, a pair of yellow birds in each. All were silent and motionless until, swinging her wide hips through a narrow channel between bed, tables, and chairs, Bertha put her mouth close to a cage and made small sipping sounds. A gentle murmur came in reply; then, altogether, all three cages were alive with song, rising, falling, interweaving, clear notes and half notes, shimmering madly through the room.

Beresford wanted to turn and run. *Now* he knew what that cage had meant. His mind, feverish with strain, sparked and flashed. This was connected with the hospital; this was where they broadcast that canary stuff from—"Gluck's Cake." It was a beastly scheme they were trying out on him. They were showing him he could not get away even for a day. They knew what he was doing all the time—they would always know.

A slow, resistless movement commenced, around and around him, he at its center, a helpless atom in a cosmic carousel, its music a chatter of bird song. His upper lip glistened with sweat, his hands were clenched. Bertha glanced at him and raised an eyebrow.

"Hey, you wanna go back to Denise, George? I—I gotta fix dinner." He followed her submissively, scarcely conscious of moving. The canaries subsided to nervous tweets, then all were still.

Denise was standing in her doorway, laughing and talking with a big fellow in a leather coat, breeches, and puttees. She had on a dressing gown, black with red flowers, one that Beresford had never seen before, and she had made up her face and fixed her hair.

"This is my 'osban'," she said as Beresford came up. "He been seek, you know. *Georges, mon coco,* this is my good fran', Meestaire Bob Scott, *un grand detectif.* He good sonabeech." She laughed and rolled her eyes at the big man.

"We been teaching your wife English, Beresford." The detective grinned

down at George and extended a hand. "Heard about you," he said. "Been taking a little rest cure up on the hill." He patted Denise on the shoulder. "A great little Frenchy you got here."

A detective! "The damn police, the damn police——" They were after him all right, slipping up on every side, spying him out, waiting to grab him. He squeezed past into Denise's room; he would be safer in Denise's room. He sat on her bed, elbows on his knees, head in his hands, and stared at the floor.

Denise came and sat beside him—Bob Scott had disappeared. She said softly, in French, "He is truly good fran', *mon Georges. Bon type.* You would like him. He found a job for me making sandwiches in a tavern."

Beresford could only nod. He was thinking, thinking; he must fit the detective into his place. The canaries were taken care of, but the detective—— Was there something awful about the detective? Was this something worse than he had thought down there on the sidewalk?

It was very hard to think. The giant circle slowly revolving was sweeping everything up. Denise and the detective, Bertha and Pfluger, the song of canaries in cages, the taxi driver, the four shaded windows and the narrow stairs, all were absorbed in the deliberate, swinging wheel. They came and went, approaching and receding, now large, now small, now sharply defined, now dissolving, nebulous, into the background.

Denise had taken his hand and was holding it against her breast, stroking the hand. "You feel bad?" she was whispering. "Don't worry, *mon Georges.* It is all right."

His trembling quieted. He drew a long, shaky breath as a drunken man will do when fighting for control—and Bertha's voice bugled to come and get it. Oh, God, for a few minutes peacefully with Denise!

But not now. She was waiting for him at the door; she led him back to the kitchen. The kitchen was a cubicle, no more; its walls bulged with the stress of holding a refrigerator, a table, three chairs, and Bertha.

"Now fill 'er up, George," Bertha urged as they sat down. "You ain't et good for a long time. More'n that—here, let me——" The muscles of her bare forearm rolled as she gripped the iron skillet and his plate was heaped.

Bertha's off-color blond bangs, wet with perspiration, were stuck against her brow. The air was turgid with the fumes of hot grease.

She talked on undiscouraged. This was a decent rooming house, she was assuring Beresford. No women—she run it strict. A clattering and bumping in the hall broke the monologue as two men passed the open door, one supporting the other, almost dragging him.

"Listen, you lousy bums!" Bertha shouted, harsh with authority. "You get into your room and if I hear a peep out'n either of you I'll throw you out on your cans.

"Nice guys," she commented good-humoredly to George, "but they get a little high week ends."

Across from George, Denise was looking at her food, her hands in her lap. Beresford managed a swallow of mashed potato as he looked at her, but his first piece of chicken wadded against the roof of his mouth. His thoughts distilled into misery absolute. As clearly as if it were a great painting before his eyes he saw, it seemed, all the wrongness of his life with Denise.

You were going to give her a chance, he thought. You were the noble guy who was going to pull her up to sit beside you before all the world. She is sitting beside you now, Beresford—that's Denise looking at her food, her hands in her lap—and that's a tear that's running down her cheek. And here *you* are, Beresford——

"Ain'cha hungry, George?" Bertha's voice was like a blow. "You gotta come and see us often now."

A bell rang. Beresford jumped. Bertha went to answer the telephone in the hall. "Who? Yes, he's here. Yeah, sure, I'll get him there. No, I won't let him out. Hell, no, he won't be late."

Beresford sat stiff. The hospital, calling about him! The swing circled again, faster, dizzying. Outside, a siren wailed its lost-soul way along the street. "The damn police——" They were surrounding the house; they had come to take him back..

Bertha switched on a small radio on top of the refrigerator as she rolled back to the table. She was complaining about having to wet-nurse a lot of goddam drunks and get them back to work.

But Beresford was not listening. A little tearing sound of static had come from the radio, then, "Tune in again next Sunday at the same hour. The following announcement is transcribed."

Beresford waited, holding his breath. It couldn't be—— A clear, ineffably musical whistle, a broken run, a rivulet of melody, "Gluck's Cake, Light as a Feather," then the burst of bird song.

"Listen." Bertha grinned and pointed toward the door. From her own apartment her own feathered pets were responding, not to be outdone, singing for greatly more than they were worth. The sound beat upon Beresford's face; he felt their wings drumming on his eyes and cheeks. He was submerged in their song.

"Ain't that sweet?" asked Bertha.

Never had the swing been so swift, never so crushing. This was the end. He could stand no more. He jerked to his feet, jostling the table. He held to the table corner.

A small voice was trying to tell him, "You are George Beresford, you are George Beresford. You were born——" No use, small voice, you are too far away.

But another voice came and it was clearer—it was very clear. "Get back to the hospital, Beresford," the clear voice said. "Get back to the hospital."

Denise and Bertha had risen too. "I must go." George forced himself to speak. "I must get back. I'm all right. It's just nerves—nerves. I'll have to go."

Bertha shook her head. "And he ain't et nothin', poor guy. It's a lousy deal. He ain't got no luck. But if you think you oughta go, George, I'll call Eddie."

Denise led Beresford back to her room, picked up his coat and held it for him. She seemed to know he must hurry, but for a moment she held him by the hands, turning them slowly, gripping them hard. She smiled at him—his Denise—her eyes steadfast on his own.

"It is better than you think, *mon Georges*," she said. "It is almost. Next time——"

But he was numb, his throat dry wood. He could only kiss her clumsily, dutifully, as if she were a distant relative.

At the head of the stairs he turned, tried to grin, half saluted. Denise, in her doorway, smiled back—or did she? Her mouth curving upward slackened, seemed to melt; her face disintegrated. Both her hands went slowly to her cheeks and she vanished into her room.

Bertha went down the stairs before him, her hips working like rubbery loaves as she hurried. "Get him there as quick as you can," she told the cabdriver, and crumpled money into his hand.

The hospital—already? It had taken so much longer going in. But this was George's building all right. He climbed the stairs, the clean, cold, iron stairs, up to his ward on the top floor. Never before had he climbed those stairs alone. Now, as he returned, for the first time he had a feeling of freedom. He felt superior and privileged, as if he were a senior in college again, and he trod with a firmer step. He took off his cap. His jacket seemed to fit better now and he unbuttoned it and let it swing.

Mike answered the buzzer. "Why, *Mister* Beresford! Back so soon?"

Ignoring him Beresford dropped his coat and cap in the clothes room and walked up the corridor. The ward was still. Two groups of visitors were in the dining room, bags of fruit and cookies on the tables before them. The red-checked tablecloths and curtains lifted the scene to a warm domesticity.

Turning right before he came to the common room, Beresford entered one of the dormitories. *His* dormitory. The beds in two rows were lined up exactly, each with its meticulously draped green cotton cover. Some of the windows were open and the white curtains waved contentedly.

From a cardboard box beside a bed—*his* bed—he took a candy bar and commenced eating it slowly. He was hungry and he let the chocolate dissolve on his tongue and crunched the almonds with relish. From a window he

watched groups of visitors coming and going from the cars wedged along the curb. The sun had come out and it was a fine, sparkling, late fall day—perfect football weather.

He balled the paper covering of the candy bar, dropped it into a waste-basket, and walked into the common room. It was as peaceful as a religious library. Its only occupant was Graber, smoking a cigar and flipping the pages of a magazine, obviously bored, but also, Beresford was glad to perceive, obviously in a good humor. George took the seat next to him and pulled out a package of cigarettes.

"Take one of these," said Graber, and proffered a cigar. "I got five bucks from my brother yesterday and sent down to the commissary for some of their best. Pretty fair. Where you been all day?"

"Thanks, Grabe. I've been down in the city visiting my wife." Beresford hoped the remark sounded casual.

Graber looked at him sharply. "Have you? Swell! Your first time out, isn't it?" His eyes narrowed. "Did they tell you to get back so early? It's only two o'clock."

"No—but it didn't work out so well."

"That's too damn bad. Feel all right?" Graber was acute.

"Well, no—that is, I feel fine now, but when I was down there—I got the jitters—had to get out." He paused. "I hope to God it's not always going to be like that."

"Hell, no, George. There's nothing the matter with you any more. Look, fella, you've been in here quite a while. Lock the sanest guy in the world up in this place for a few months and he would start getting ideas—ideas about the outside, I mean. Everything's wrong here, but everything's right on the outside—get me?"

Beresford nodded. "'I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls,'" he said beneath his breath.

"What? Anyway, a guy sits here and forgets how screwy things were in the world. God, look at this sheet." Graber extended the magazine he had been reading to arm's length and slapped it violently to the floor. "Things aren't perfect out there, Beresford, by a hell of a sight—whatever you've been hoping. What was the matter? Wasn't your cute little wife glad to see you? Or was she living on the wrong side of the tracks?"

Graber drew hard on his cigar in scorn. "I've seen plenty of guys get knocked off balance again the first time they stuck their heads out." Philosophic calm reigned again. "All you have to do, George, is take your time—you'll be O.K. Take me now—seven years——" Graber fell silent.

They sat for a moment smoking their cigars. Beresford crossed one leg over the other. It was good to sit here next to Graber—what a sound, understanding fellow he was.

The sunlight slanted in a close angle through the west windows, lying in rectangular blocks of brightness on the dark floor next to the wall, animating the whole end of the room like footlights before a stage. From their cigars, thin fillets of smoke ascended, steady in the stillness, as blue and clear, as pale yet as vivid, as the outside sky.

Beresford smiled—two businessmen they might have been, two men of affairs anywhere, idling an hour in their club lounge in the hush of a Sunday afternoon.

1947: *from Harper's Magazine*

THE WHITE CIRCLE

by John Bell Clayton, who was born on a farm in the mountainous section of Virginia, west of the Blue Ridge. He spent three years at the University of Virginia, leaving to marry and to start work as a reporter on a small daily newspaper. With the exception of a few intervals of publicity work and a job with the Federal Communications Commission during World War II, he has spent the rest of his working years as a newspaperman. Of his work he says: "A man trying to tell stories can only say about himself that he has some stories he wants to tell, some short ones and some long ones, and then sit down and—come hell, high water, or rejection slips—try his level best to tell them honestly and well." Mr. Clayton is the author of Six Angels at My Back *and* Wait Son, October Is Near.

As soon as I saw Anvil squatting up in the tree like some hateful creature that belonged in trees I knew I had to take a beating and I knew the kind of beating it would be. But still I had to let it be that way because this went beyond any matter of courage or shame.

The tree was *mine*. I want no doubt about that. It was a seedling that grew out of the slaty bank beside the dry creek-mark across the road from the house, and the thirteen small apples it had borne that year were the thirteen most beautiful things on this beautiful earth.

The day I was twelve Father took me up to the barn to look at the colts—

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Saturn, Jupiter, Devil, and Moonkissed, the whiteface. Father took a cigar out of his vest pocket and put one foot on the bottom plank of the fence and leaned both elbows on the top of the fence and his face looked quiet and pleased and proud and I liked the way he looked because it was as if he had a little joke or surprise that would turn out nice for me.

"Tucker," Father said presently, "I am not unaware of the momentousness of this day. Now there are four of the finest colts in Augusta County; if there are four any finer anywhere in Virginia I don't know where you'd find them unless Arthur Hancock over in Albemarle would have them." Father took one elbow off the fence and looked at me. "Now do you suppose," he asked, in that fine, free, good humor, "that if I were to offer you a little token to commemorate this occasion you could make a choice?"

"Yes sir," I said.

"Which one?" Father asked. "Devil? He's wild."

"No sir," I said. "I would like to have the apple tree below the gate."

Father looked at me for at least a minute. You would have to understand his pride in his colts to understand the way he looked. But at twelve how could I express how *I* felt? My setting such store in having the tree as my own had something to do with the coloring of the apples as they hung among the green leaves; it had something also to do with their ripening, not in autumn when the world was full of apples, but in midsummer when you *wanted* them; but it had more to do with a way of life that had come down through the generations. I would have given one of the apples to Janie. I would have made of it a ceremony. While I would not have said the words, because at twelve you have no such words, I would have handed over the apple with something like this in mind: "Janie, I want to give you this apple. It came from my tree. The tree stands on my father's land. Before my father had the land it belonged to his father, and before that it belonged to my great-grandfather. It's the English family land. It's almost sacred. My possession of this tree forges of me a link in this owning ancestry that must go back clear beyond Moses and all the old Bible folks."

Father looked at me for that slow, peculiar minute in our lives. "All right, sir," he said. "The tree is yours in fee simple to bargain, sell, and convey or to keep and nurture and eventually hand down to your heirs or assigns forever unto eternity. You have a touch of poetry in your soul and that fierce, proud love of the land in your heart; when you grow up I hope you don't drink too much."

I didn't know what he meant by that but the tree was mine and now there perched Anvil, callously munching one of my thirteen apples and stowing the rest inside his ragged shirt until it bulged out in ugly lumps. I knew the apples pressed cold against his hateful belly and to me the coldness was a sickening evil.

I picked a rock up out of the dust of the road and tore across the creek bed and said, "All right, Anvil—climb down!"

Anvil's milky eyes batted at me under the strangely fair eyebrows. There was not much expression on his face. "Yaannh!" he said. "You stuck-up little priss, you hit me with that rock. You just do!"

"Anvil," I said again, "climb down. They're my apples."

Anvil quit munching for a minute and grinned at me. "You want an apple? I'll give you one. Yaannh!" He suddenly cocked back his right arm and cracked me on the temple with the half-eaten apple.

I let go with the rock and it hit a limb with a dull chub sound and Anvil said, "You're fixin' to git it—you're real-ly fixin' to git it."

"I'll shake you down," I said. "I'll shake you clear down."

"Clear down?" Anvil chortled. "Where do you think I'm at? Up on top of Walker Mountain? It wouldn't hurt none if I was to fall out of this runty bush on my head."

I grabbed one of his bare feet and pulled backwards, and down Anvil came amidst a flutter of broken twigs and leaves. We both hit the ground. I hopped up and Anvil arose with a faintly vexed expression.

He hooked a leg in back of my knees and shoved a paw against my chin. I went down in the slate. He got down and pinioned my arms with his knees. I tried to kick him in the back of the head but could only flail my feet helplessly in the air.

"You might as well quit kickin'," he said.

He took one of my apples from his shirt and began eating it, almost absent-mindedly.

"You dirty filthy stinkin' sow," I said.

He snorted. "I couldn't be a sow, but you take that back."

"I wish you were fryin' in the middle of hell right this minute."

"Take back the stinkin' part," Anvil said thoughtfully. "I don't stink."

He pressed his knees down harder, pinching and squeezing the flesh of my arms.

I sobbed, "I take back the stinkin' part."

"That's better," Anvil said.

He ran a finger back into his jaw to dislodge a fragment of apple from his teeth. For a moment he examined the fragment and then wiped it on my cheek.

"I'm goin' to tell Father," I said desperately.

" 'Father,' " Anvil said with falsetto mimicry. " 'Father.' Say 'Old Man.' You think your old man is some stuff on a stick, don't you? You think he don't walk on the ground, don't you? You think you and your whole stuck-up family don't walk on the ground. Say 'Old Man.' "

"Go to hell!"

"Shut up your blubberin'. Say 'Old Man.' "

"Old Man. I wish you were dead."

"Yaannh!" Anvil said. "Stop blubberin'. Now call me 'Uncle Anvil.' Say 'Uncle Sweetie Peetie Tweetie Beg-Your-Pardon Uncle Anvil.' Say it!"

"Uncle Sweetie . . . Uncle Peetie, Tweetie Son-of-a-bitch Anvil."

He caught my hair in his hands and wallowed my head against the ground until I said every bitter word of it. Three times.

Anvil tossed away a spent, maltreated core that had been my apple. He gave my head one final thump upon the ground and said "Yaannh!" again in a satisfied way.

He released me and got up. I lay there with my face muscles twitching in outrage.

Anvil looked down at me. "Stop blubberin'," he commanded.

"I'm not cryin'," I said.

I was lying there with a towering, homicidal detestation, planning to kill Anvil—and the thought of it had a sweetness like summer fruit.

There were times when I had no desire to kill Anvil. I remember the day his father showed up at the school. He was a dirty, half-crazy, itinerant knickknack peddler. He had a club and he told the principal he was going to beat the meanness out of Anvil or beat him to death. Anvil scudded under a desk and lay there trembling and whimpering until the principal finally drove the ragged old man away. I had no hatred for Anvil then.

But another day, just for the sheer filthy meanness of it, he crawled through a classroom window after school hours and befouled the floor. And the number of times he pushed over smaller boys, just to see them hit the packed hard earth of the schoolyard and to watch the fright on their faces as they ran away, was more than I could count.

And still another day he walked up to me as I leaned against the warmth of the schoolhack shed in the sunlight, feeling the nice warmth of the weather-beaten boards.

"They hate me," he said dismally. "They hate me because my old man's crazy."

As I looked at Anvil I felt that in the background I was seeing that demented, bitter father trudging his lonely, vicious way through the world.

"They don't hate you," I lied. "Anyway I don't hate you." That was true. At that moment I didn't hate him. "How about comin' home and stayin' all night with me?"

So after school Anvil went along with me—and threw rocks at me all the way home.

Now I had for him no soft feeling of any kind. I planned—practically—his extinction as he stood there before me commanding me to cease the blubbering out of my heart.

"Shut up now," Anvil said. "I never hurt you. Stop blubberin'."

"I'm not cryin'," I said.

"You're still mad though." He looked at me appraisingly.

"No, I'm not," I lied. "I'm not even mad. I was a little bit mad, but not now."

"Well, whattaya look so funny around the mouth and eyes for?"

"I don't know. Let's go up to the barn and play."

"Play whut?" Anvil looked at me truculently. He didn't know whether to be suspicious or flattered. "I'm gettin' too big to play. To play much, anyway," he added undecidedly. "I might play a little bit if it ain't some sissy game."

"We'll play anything," I said eagerly.

"All right," he said. "Race you to the barn. You start."

I started running toward the wire fence and at the third step he stuck his foot between my legs and I fell forward on my face.

"Yaannh!" he croaked. "That'll learn you."

"Learn me what?" I asked as I got up. "Learn me what?" It seemed important to know that. Maybe it would make some difference in what I planned to do to Anvil. It seemed very important to know what it was that Anvil wanted to, and never could, teach me and the world.

"It'll just learn you," he said doggedly. "Go ahead, I won't trip you any more."

So we climbed the wire fence and raced across the burned field the hogs ranged in.

We squeezed through the heavy sliding doors onto the barn floor, and the first thing that caught Anvil's eye was the irregular circle that father had painted there. He wanted to know what it was and I said "Nothing" because I wasn't yet quite ready, and Anvil forgot about it for the moment and wanted to play jumping from the barn floor out to the top of the fresh rick of golden straw.

I said, "No. Who wants to do that, anyway?"

"I do," said Anvil. "Jump, you puke. Go ahead and jump!"

I didn't want to jump. The barn had been built on a hill. In front the ground came up level with the barn floor, but in back the floor was even with the top of the straw rick, with four wide, terrible yawning feet between.

I said, "Nawh, there's nothin' to jumpin'."

"Oh, there ain't, hanh!" said Anvil. "Well, try it——"

He gave me a shove and I went out into terrifying space. He leaped after and upon me and we hit the pillowy side of the straw rick and tumbled to the ground in a smothering slide.

"That's no fun," I said, getting up and brushing the chaff from my face and hair.

Anvil himself had lost interest in it by now and was idly munching another of my apples.

"I know somethin'," I said. "I know a good game. Come on, I'll show you."

Anvil stung me on the leg with the apple as I raced through the door of the cutting room. When we reached the barn floor his eyes again fell on the peculiar white circle. "That's to play prisoner's base with," I said. "That's the base."

"That's a funny-lookin' base," he said suspiciously. "I never saw any base that looked like that."

I could feel my muscles tensing, but I wasn't particularly excited. I didn't trust myself to look up toward the roof where the big mechanical hayfork hung suspended from the long metal track that ran back over the steaming mows of alfalfa and red clover. The fork had vicious sharp prongs that had never descended to the floor except on one occasion Anvil knew nothing about.

I think Father had been drinking the day he bought the hayfork in Staunton. It was an unwieldy involved contraption of ropes, triggers, and pulleys which took four men to operate. A man came out to install the fork and for several days he climbed up and down ladders, bolting the track in place and arranging the various gadgets. Finally, when he said it was ready, Father had a load of hay pulled into the barn and called the men in from the fields to watch and assist in the demonstration.

I don't remember the details. I just remember that something went very badly wrong. The fork suddenly plunged down with a peculiar ripping noise and embedded itself in the back of one of the work horses. Father said very little. He simply painted the big white circle on the barn floor, had the fork hauled back up to the top, and fastened the trigger around the rung of a stationary ladder eight feet off the floor, where no one could inadvertently pull it.

Then he said quietly, "I don't ever want anyone ever to touch this trip rope or to have occasion to step inside this circle."

So that was why I didn't now look up toward the fork.

"I don't want to play no sissy prisoner's base," Anvil said. "Let's find a nest of young pigeons."

"All right," I lied. "I know where there's a nest. But one game of prisoner's base first."

"You don't know where there's any pigeon nest," Anvil said. "You wouldn't have the nerve to throw them up against the barn if you did."

"Yes, I would too," I protested. "Now let's play one game of prisoner's base. Get in the circle and shut your eyes and start countin'."

"Oh, all right," Anvil agreed wearily. "Let's get it over with and find the pigeons. Ten, ten, double ten, forty-five——"

"Right in the middle of the circle," I told him. "And count slow. How'm I goin' to hide if you count that way?"

Anvil now counted more slowly. "Five, ten, fifteen——"

I gave Anvil one last vindictive look and sprang up the stationary ladder and swung out on the trip rope of the unpredictable hayfork with all my puny might.

The fork's whizzing descent was accompanied by that peculiar ripping noise. Anvil must have jumped instinctively. The fork missed him by several feet.

For a moment Anvil stood absolutely still. He turned around and saw the fork, still shimmering from its impact with the floor. His face became exactly the pale green of the carbide we burned in our acetylene lighting plant at the house. Then he looked at me, at the expression on my face, and his Adam's apple bobbed queerly up and down, and a little stream of water trickled down his right trouser leg and over his bare foot.

"You tried to kill me," he said thickly.

He did not come toward me. Instead, he sat down. He shook his head sickly. After a few sullen, bewildered moments he reached into his shirt and began hauling out my apples one by one.

"You can have your stinkin' old apples," he said. "You'd do that for a few dried-up little apples. Your old man owns everything in sight. I ain't got nothin'. Go ahead and keep your stinkin' old apples."

He got to his feet and slowly walked out of the door.

Since swinging off the trip rope I had neither moved nor spoken. For a moment more I stood motionless and voiceless and then I ran over and grabbed up the nine apples that were left and called, "Anvil! Anvil!" He continued across the field without even pausing.

I yelled, "Anvil! Wait, I'll give them to you."

Anvil climbed the fence without looking back and set off down the road toward the store. Every few steps he kicked his wet trouser leg.

Three sparrows flew out of the door in a dusty, chattering spiral. Then there was only the image of the hayfork shimmering and terrible in the great and growing and accusing silence and emptiness of the barn.

1948: *from the Atlantic Monthly*

SHUT A FINAL DOOR

by Truman Capote, who was born in New Orleans on September 30, 1924. He has been writing since he was very young, his stories having appeared in Mademoiselle, Harper's Bazaar, Story, *and other magazines. He says he is an exceedingly slow worker and that there is little else that interests him except writing. His first novel,* Other Voices, Other Rooms, *was a best seller for months after its publication in the autumn of 1947, following exceptionally favorable reviews. "Miriam," appearing in 1946, is this young author's other contribution to the O. Henry Memorial Award series. As predicted, Mr. Capote has taken his place among the best short story writers of our generation. He has written screen plays; adapted one of his books* (The Grass Harp) *for the Broadway stage, where it was a great success; and written books—including* Local Color *and* Tree of Night and Other Stories. *Mr. Capote's most recent book,* In Cold Blood, *published in January 1966, is destined to become a literary landmark.*

"Walter, listen to me; if everyone dislikes you, works against you, don't believe they do so arbitrarily: you create these situations for yourself."

Anna had said that, and, though his healthier side told him she intended nothing malicious (if Anna was not a friend, then who was?), he'd despised her for it, had gone around telling everybody how much he despised Anna, what a bitch she was: that woman! he said, don't trust that Anna: this plain-spoken act of hers—nothing but a cover-up for all her repressed hostility; terrible liar, too, can't believe a word she says: dangerous, my God! And naturally all he said went back to Anna, so that when he called about a play-opening they'd planned attending together she told him: "Sorry, Walter, I can't afford you any longer: I understand you very well, and I have a certain amount of sympathy: it's very compulsive, your malice, and you aren't too much to blame, but I don't want ever to see you again because I'm not so well myself that I can afford it." But why? and what had he done? Well, sure, he'd gossiped about her, but it wasn't as though he'd meant it, and after all, as he said to Jimmy Bergman (now there was a two-face if ever

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there was one), what was the use of having friends if you couldn't discuss them objectively?

He said you said they said we said round and round. Round and round, like the paddle-bladed ceiling fan wheeling above; turning and turning, stirring stale air ineffectively, it made a watch-tick sound, counted seconds in the silence. Walter inched to a cooler part of the bed, and closed his eyes against the dark little room. At seven that evening he'd arrived in New Orleans, at seven-thirty he'd registered in this hotel, an anonymous side-street place. It was August, and it was as though bonfires burned in the red night sky, and the unnatural Southern landscape, observed so assiduously from the train, and which, trying to sublimate all else, he retraced in memory, intensified a feeling of having traveled to the end, the falling off.

But why he was here in this stifling hotel in this faraway town he could not say. There was a window in the room, but he could not seem to get it open, and he was afraid to call the bellboy (what queer eyes that kid had!), and he was afraid to leave the hotel, for what if he got lost? and if he got lost, even a little, then he would be lost altogether. He was hungry; he hadn't eaten since breakfast, so he found some peanut-butter crackers left over from a package he'd bought in Saratoga, and washed them down with a finger of Four Roses, the last. It made him sick: he vomited in a waste-basket, collapsed back on the bed, and cried until the pillow was wet. After a while he just lay there in the hot room shivering, just lay there and watched the slow-turning fan; there was no beginning to its action, and no end: it was a circle.

An eye, the earth, the rings of a tree, everything is a circle, and all circles, Walter said, have a center. It was crazy for Anna to say what had happened was his own doing. If there was anything wrong with him really, then it had been made so by circumstances beyond his control, by, say, his churchly mother, or his father, an insurance official in Hartford, or his older sister, Cecile, who'd married a man forty years her senior: "I just wanted to get out of that house," that was her excuse, and, to tell the truth, Walter had thought it reasonable enough.

But he did not know where to begin thinking about himself, did not know where to find the center. The first telephone call? No, that had been only three days ago and, properly speaking, was the end, not the beginning. Well, he could start with Irving, for Irving was the first person he'd known in New York.

Now Irving was a sweet little Jewish boy with a remarkable talent for chess and not much else: he had silky hair, and pink baby cheeks, and looked about sixteen: actually he was twenty-three, Walter's age, and they'd met at a bar in the Village. Walter was alone and very lonesome in New York, and so when this sweet little Irving was friendly he decided maybe it would be

a good idea to be friendly, too—because you never can tell. Irving knew a great many people, and everyone was very fond of him, and he introduced Walter to all his friends.

And there was Margaret. Margaret was more or less Irving's girl friend. She was only so-so looking (her eyes bulged, there was always a little lipstick on her teeth, she dressed like a child of ten), but she had a hectic brightness which Walter found attractive. He could not understand why she bothered with Irving at all. "Why do you?" he said, on one of the long walks they'd begun taking together in Central Park.

"Irving is sweet," she said, "and he loves me very purely, and who knows: I might just as well marry him."

"A damn-fool thing to do," he said, "Irving could never be your husband because he's really your little brother. Irving is everyone's little brother."

Margaret was too bright not to see the truth in this. So one day when Walter asked if he might make love to her she said all right she didn't mind if he did. They made love often after that.

Eventually Irving heard about it, and one Monday there was a nasty scene in, curiously enough, the same bar where they'd met. There had been that evening a party in honor of Kurt Kuhnhardt (Kuhnhardt Advertising), Margaret's boss, and she and Walter had gone together, afterwards stopping by this bar for a nightcap. Except for Irving and a couple of girls in slacks the place was empty. Irving was sitting at the bar, his cheeks quite pink, his eyes rather glazed: he looked like a little boy playing grownup, for his legs were too short to reach the stool's footrest; they dangled doll-like. The instant Margaret recognized him she tried to turn around and walk out, but Walter wouldn't let her. And anyway, Irving had seen them: never taking his eyes from them, he put down his whisky, slowly climbed off the stool, and, with a kind of sad, ersatz toughness, strutted forward.

"Irving, dear——" said Margaret, and stopped, for he'd given her a terrible look.

His chin was trembling. "You go away," he said, and it was as though he were denouncing some childhood tormentor, "I hate you." Then, almost in slow motion, he swung out and, as if he clutched a knife, struck Walter's chest: it was not much of a blow, and when Walter did nothing but smile, Irving slumped against a jukebox, screaming: "Fight me, you damned coward; come on, and I'll kill you, I swear before God I will." So that was how they left him.

Walking home, Margaret began to cry in a soft tired way. "He'll never be sweet again," she said. And Walter said: "I don't know what you mean." "Oh yes you do," she told him, her voice a whisper, "yes you do; the two of us, we've taught him how to hate. Somehow I don't think he ever knew before."

Walter had been in New York now four months. His original capital of five hundred dollars had fallen to fifteen, and Margaret lent him money to pay his January rent at the Brevoort: why, she wanted to know, didn't he move some place cheaper? Well, he told her, it was better to have a good address. And what about a job? When was he going to start working? Or was he? Sure, he said, sure, as a matter of fact he thought about it a good deal. But he didn't intend fooling around with just any little jerkwater thing that came along: he wanted something good, something with a future, something in, say, advertising. All right, said Margaret, maybe she could help him; at any rate, she'd speak with her boss, Mr. Kuhnhardt.

The K.K.A., so-called, was a middle-sized agency, but, as such things go, very good, the best. Kurt Kuhnhardt, who'd founded it in 1925, was a curious man with a curious reputation: a lean, fastidious German, a bachelor, he lived in an elegant black house on Sutton Place, a house interestingly furnished with, among other things, three Picassos, a superb music box, South Sea Island masks, and a burly Danish youngster, the houseboy. He invited occasionally some one of his staff in to dinner, whoever was favorite at the moment, for he was continually selecting protégés: it was a dangerous position, these alliances being, as they were, whimsical and uncertain: the protégé found himself checking the want ads when, just the evening previous, he'd dined most enjoyably with his benefactor. During his second week at the K.K.A., Walter, who had been hired as Margaret's asasistant, received a memorandum from Mr. Kuhnhardt asking him to lunch, and this, of course, excited him unspeakably.

"Kill-joy?" said Margaret, straightening his tie, plucking lint off a lapel. "Nothing of the sort. It's just that—well, Kuhnhardt's wonderful to work for so long as you don't get too involved—or you're likely not to be working: period."

Walter knew what she was up to; she didn't fool him a minute; he felt like telling her so, too, but restrained himself: it wasn't time yet. One of these days, though, he was going to have to get rid of her, and soon. It was degrading, his working for Margaret. And besides, the tendency from now on would be to keep him down. But nobody could do that, he thought, looking into Mr. Kuhnhardt's sea-blue eyes, nobody could keep Walter down.

"You're an idiot," Margaret told him. "My God, I've seen these little friendships of K.K.'s a dozen times, and they don't mean a damn; he used to palsy-walsy around with the switchboard operator: all K.K. wants is someone to play the fool. Take my word, Walter, there aren't any short cuts: what matters is how you do your job."

He said: "And have you complaints on that score? I'm doing as well as could be expected."

"It depends on what you mean by expected," she said.

One Saturday not long afterwards he made a date to meet her in Grand Central. They were going up to Hartford to spend the afternoon with his family, and for this she'd bought a new dress, new hat, and shoes. But he did not show up. Instead, he drove out on Long Island with Mr. Kuhnhardt, and was the most awed of three hundred guests at Rosa Cooper's debut ball. Rosa Cooper (nee Kuppermann) was heiress to the Cooper Dairy Products: a dark, plump, pleasant child with an unnatural British accent, the result of four years at Miss Jewett's. She wrote a letter to a friend named Anna Stimson, who subsequently showed it to Walter: "Met the divinest man. Danced with him six times, a divine dancer. He is an Advertising Executive, and is terribly divinely good-looking. We have a date—dinner and the theater!"

Margaret did not mention the episode, nor did Walter. It was as though nothing had happened, except that now, unless there was office business to discuss, they never spoke, never saw each other. One afternoon, knowing she would not be at home, he went to her apartment and used a passkey given him long ago; there were things he'd left here, clothes, some books, his pipe; rummaging around collecting all this, he discovered a photograph of himself scrawled red with lipstick: it gave him for an instant the sensation of falling in a dream. He also came across the only gift he'd ever made her, a bottle of L'Heure Bleue, still unopened. He sat down on the bed, and, smoking a cigarette, stroked his hand over the cool pillow, remembering the way her head had lain there, remembering, too, how they used to lie here Sunday mornings reading the funnies aloud, Barney Google and Dick Tracy and Joe Palooka.

He looked at the radio, a little green box; they'd always made love to music, any kind, jazz, symphonies, choir programs: it had been their signal, for whenever she'd wanted him, she'd said, "Shall we listen to the radio, darling?" Anyway, it was finished, and he hated her, and that was what he needed to remember. He found the bottle of perfume again, and put it in his pocket: Rosa might like a surprise.

In the office the next day he stopped by the water cooler and Margaret was standing there. She smiled at him fixedly, and said: "Well, I didn't know you were a thief." It was the first overt disclosure of the hostility between them. And suddenly it occurred to Walter he hadn't in all the office a single ally. Kuhnhardt? He could never count on him. And everyone else was an enemy: Jackson, Einstein, Fisher, Porter, Capehart, Ritter, Villa, Byrd. Oh sure, they were all smart enough not to tell him point-blank, not so long as K.K.'s enthusiasm continued.

Well, dislike was at least positive, and the one thing he could not tolerate was vague relations, possibly because his own feelings were so indecisive, am-

biguous: he was never certain whether he liked X or not. He needed X's love, but was incapable of loving. He could never be sincere with X, never tell him more than fifty per cent of the truth. On the other hand, it was impossible for him to permit X these same imperfections: somewhere along the line Walter was sure he'd be betrayed. He was afraid of X, terrified. Once in high school he'd plagiarized a poem, and printed it in the school magazine; he could not forget its final line, *All our acts are acts of fear*. And when his teacher caught him out, had anything ever seemed to him more unjust?

He spent most of the early summer week ends at Rosa Cooper's Long Island place. The house was as a rule well staffed with hearty Yale and Princeton undergraduates, which was irritating, for they were the sort of boys who, around Hartford, made green birds fly in his stomach, and seldom allowed him to meet them on their own ground. As for Rosa herself, she was a darling; everyone said so, even Walter.

But darlings are rarely serious, and Rosa was not serious about Walter. He didn't mind too much. He was able on these week ends to make a good many contacts: Taylor Ovington, Joyce Randolph (the starlet), E. L. McEvoy, a dozen or so people whose names cast considerable glare in his address book. One evening he went with Anna Stimson to see a film featuring the Randolph girl, and before they were scarcely seated everyone for aisles around knew she was a Friend of his, knew she drank too much, was immoral, and not nearly so pretty as Hollywood made her out to be. Anna told him he was an adolescent female. "You're a man in only one respect, sweetie," she said.

It was through Rosa that he'd met Anna Stimson. An editor on a fashion magazine, she was almost six feet tall, wore black suits, affected a monocle, a walking cane, and pounds of jingling Mexican silver. She'd been married twice, once to Buck Strong, the horse-opera idol, and she had a child, a fourteen-year-old son who'd had to be put away in what she called a "corrective academy."

"He was a nasty child," she said. "He liked to take potshots out the window with a .22, and throw things, and steal from Woolworth's: awful brat, just like you."

Anna was good to him, though, and in her less depressed, less malevolent moments listened kindly while he groaned out his problems, while he explained why he was the way he was: all his life some cheat had been dealing him the wrong cards. Attributing to Anna every vice but stupidity, he liked to use her as a kind of confessor: there was nothing he could tell her of which she might legitimately disapprove. He would say: "I've told Kuhnhardt a lot of lies about Margaret; I suppose that's pretty rotten, but she would do the same for me; and anyway my idea is not for him to fire her, but maybe transfer her to the Chicago office."

Or, "I was in a bookshop, and a man was standing there and we began talking: a middle-aged man, rather nice, very intelligent. When I went outside he followed, a little ways behind: I crossed the street, he crossed the street, I walked fast, he walked fast. This kept up six or seven blocks, and when I finally figured out what was going on I felt tickled, I felt like kidding him on. So I stopped at the corner and hailed a cab; then I turned around and gave this guy a long, long look, and he came rushing up, all smiles. And I jumped in the cab, and slammed the door and leaned out the window and laughed out loud: the look on his face, it was awful, it was like Christ. I can't forget it. And tell me, Anna, why did I do this crazy thing? It was like paying back all the people who've ever hurt me, but it was something else, too." He would tell Anna these stories, go home and go to sleep: his dreams were clear blue.

Now the problem of love concerned him, mainly because he did not consider it a problem. Nevertheless, he was conscious of being unloved: this knowledge was like an extra heart beating inside him. But there was no one. Anna, perhaps. Did Anna love him? "Oh," said Anna, "when was anything ever what it seemed to be? Now it's a tadpole, now it's a frog. It looks like gold but you put it on your finger and it leaves a green ring. Take my second husband: he looked like a nice guy, and turned out to be just another heel. Look around this very room: why, you couldn't burn incense in that fireplace, and those mirrors, they give space, they tell a lie. Nothing, Walter, is ever what it seems to be. Christmas trees are cellophane, and snow is only soap chips. Flying around inside us is something called the Soul, and when you die you're never dead; yes, and when we're alive we're never alive. And so you want to know if I love you? Don't be dumb, Walter, we're not even friends——"

Listen, the fan: turning wheels of whisper: he said you said they said we said round and round fast and slow while time recalled itself in endless chatter. Old broken fan breaking silence: August the third the third the third!

August the third, a Friday, and it was there, right in Winchell's column, his own name: "Big shot Ad exec Walter Ranney and dairy heiress Rosa Cooper are telling intimates to start buying rice." Walter himself had given the item to a friend of a friend of Winchell's. He showed it to the counter boy at the Whelan's where he ate breakfast: "That's me," he said, "I'm the guy," and the look on the boy's face was good for his digestion.

It was late when he reached the office that morning, and as he walked down the aisle of desks a small gratifying flurry among the typists preceded him. No one said anything, however. Around eleven, after a pleasant hour of doing nothing but feel exhilarated, he went to the drugstore downstairs for a cup of coffee. Three men from the office, Jackson, Ritter, and Byrd,

were there, and when Walter came in Jackson poked Byrd, and Byrd poked Ritter, and all of them turned around. "Whatcha say, big shot?" said Jackson, a pink man prematurely bald, and the other two laughed. Acting as if he hadn't heard, Walter stepped quickly into a phone booth: "Bastards," he said, pretending to dial a number. And finally, after waiting a long while for them to leave, he made a real call: "Rosa, hello, did I wake you up?"

"No."

"Say, did you see Winchell?"

"Yes."

Walter laughed. "Where do you suppose he gets that stuff?"

Silence.

"What's the matter? You sound kind of funny."

"Do I?"

"Are you mad or something?"

"Just disappointed."

"About what?"

Silence. And then: "It was a cheap thing to do Walter, pretty cheap."

"I don't know what you mean."

"Good-by, Walter."

On the way out he paid the cashier for a cup of coffee he'd forgotten to have. There was a barbershop in the building. He said he wanted a shave; no—make it a haircut; no—a manicure; and suddenly, seeing himself in the mirror, where his face reflected as pale almost as the barber's bib, he knew he did not know what he wanted. Rosa had been right, he was cheap. He'd always been willing to confess his faults, for, by admitting them, it was as if he made them no longer to exist. He went back upstairs, and sat at his desk, and felt as though he were bleeding inside, and wished very much to believe in God. A pigeon strutted on the ledge outside his window. For some time he watched the shimmering sunlit feathers, the wobbly sedateness of its movements; then, before realizing it, he'd picked up and thrown a glass paperweight: the pigeon climbed calmly upward, the paperweight careened like a giant raindrop: suppose, he thought, listening for a faraway scream, suppose it hits someone, kills them? But there was nothing. Only the ticking fingers of typists, a knocking at the door: "Hey, Ranney, K.K. wants to see you."

"I'm sorry," said Mr. Kuhnhardt, doodling with a gold pen. "And I'll write a letter for you, Walter. Any time."

Now in the elevator the enemy, all submerging with him, crushed Walter between them; Margaret was there wearing a blue hair ribbon: she looked at him, and her face was different from other faces, not vacant as theirs were, and sterile: here still was compassion. But as she looked at him, she looked through him, too. This is my dream: he must not allow himself to

believe otherwise; and yet under his own arm he carried the dream's contradiction, a manila envelope stuffed with all the personals saved from his desk. When the elevator emptied into the lobby, he knew he must speak with Margaret, ask her to forgive him, beg her protection, but she was slipping swiftly toward an exit, losing herself among the enemy: I love you, he said, running after her, I love you, he said, saying nothing.

"Margaret! Margaret!"

She turned around. The blue hair ribbon matched her eyes, and her eyes, gazing up at him, softened, became rather friendly. Or pitying.

"Please," he said, "I thought we could have a drink together, go over to Benny's maybe. We used to like Benny's, remember?"

She shook her head. "I've got a date, and I'm late already."

"Oh."

"Yes—well, I'm late," she said, and began to run. He stood watching as she raced down the street, her ribbon streaming, shining in the darkening summer light. And then she was gone.

His apartment, a one-room walk-up near Gramercy Park, needed an airing, a cleaning, but Walter, after pouring a drink, said to hell with it and stretched out on the couch. What was the use? No matter what you did or how hard you tried, it all came finally to zero; everyday everywhere everyone was being cheated, and who was there to blame? It was strange, though; lying here sipping whisky in the dusk graying room he felt calmer than he had for God knows how long. It was like the time he'd failed algebra and felt so relieved, so free: failure was definite, a certainty, and there is always peace in certainties. Now he would leave New York, take a vacation trip; he had a few hundred dollars, enough to last until fall.

And, wondering where he should go, he all at once saw, as if a film had commenced running in his head, silk caps, cherry-colored and lemon, and little wise-faced men wearing exquisite polka-dot shirts: closing his eyes, he was suddenly five years old, and it was delicious remembering the cheers, the hot dogs, his father's big pair of binoculars. Saratoga! Shadows masked his face in the sinking light. He turned on a lamp, fixed another drink, put a rhumba record on the phonograph, and began to dance, the soles of his shoes whispering on the carpet: he'd often thought that with a little training he could've been a professional.

Just as the music ended, the telephone rang. He simply stood there, afraid somehow to answer, and the lamplight, the furniture, everything in the room went quite dead. When at last he thought it had stopped, it commenced again; louder, it seemed, and more insistent. He tripped over a footstool, picked up the receiver, dropped and recovered it, said: "Yes?"

Long-distance: a call from some town in Pennsylvania, the name of which

he didn't catch. Following a series of spasmic rattlings, a voice, dry and sexless and altogether unlike any he'd ever heard before, came through: "Hello, Walter."

"Who is this?"

No answer from the other end, only a sound of strong orderly breathing; the connection was so good it seemed as though whoever it was was standing beside him with lips pressed against his ear. "I don't like jokes: who is this?"

"Oh, you know me, Walter. You've known me a long time." A click, and nothing.

It was night and raining when the train reached Saratoga. He'd slept most of the trip, sweating in the hot dampness of the car, and dreamed of an old castle where only old turkeys lived, and dreamed a dream involving his father, Kurt Kuhnhardt, someone no-faced, Margaret and Rosa, Anna Stimson, and a queer fat lady with diamond eyes. He was standing on a long, deserted street; except for an approaching procession of slow, black, funeral-like cars there was no sign of life. Still, he knew, his eyes unseen observed his nakedness from every window, and he hailed frantically the first of the limousines; it stopped and a man, his father, invitingly held open the door: Daddy, he yelled, running forward, and the door slammed shut, mashing off his fingers, and his father, with a great belly-laugh, leaned out the window to toss an enormous wreath of roses. In the second car was Margaret, in the third the lady with the diamond eyes (wasn't this Miss Casey, his old algebra teacher?), in the fourth Mr. Kuhnhardt and a new protégé, the no-faced creature. Each door oponed, each closed, all laughed, all threw roses. The procession rolled smoothly away down the silent street. And with a terrible scream Walter fell among the mountain of roses: thorns tore wounds, and a sudden rain, a gray cloudburst, shattered the blooms, and washed pale blood bleeding over the leaves.

By the fixed stare of a woman sitting opposite he realized at once he'd yelled aloud in his sleep. He smiled at her sheepishly, and she looked away with, he imagined, some embarrassment. She was a cripple; on her left foot she wore a giant shoe. Later, in the Saratoga station, he helped with her luggage, and they shared a taxi; there was no conversation: each sat in his corner looking at the rain, the blurred lights. In New York a few hours before he'd withdrawn from the bank all his savings, locked the door of his apartment, and left no messages; furthermore, there was in this town not a soul who knew him: it was a good feeling.

The hotel was filled; not to mention the racing crowd, there was, the desk clerk told him, a medical convention: no, sorry, he didn't know of a room anywhere. Maybe tomorrow.

So Walter found the bar. As long as he was going to stay up all night he

might as well do it drunk. The bar, very large, very hot and noisy, was brilliant with summer-season grotesques: sagging silver-fox ladies, and little stunted jockeys, and pale loud-voiced men wearing cheap fantastic checks. After a couple of drinks, though, the nose seemed faraway. Then, glancing around, he saw the cripple. She was alone at a table where she sat primly sipping crème de menthe. They exchanged a smile. Rising, Walter went to join her. "It's not like we were strangers," she said, as he sat down. "Here for the races, I suppose?"

"No," he said, "just a rest. And you?"

She pursed her lips. "Maybe you noticed I've got a clubfoot; oh, sure now, don't look surprised: you noticed, everybody does. Well, see," she said, twisting the straw in her glass, "see, my doctor's going to give a talk at this convention, going to talk about me and my foot on account of I'm pretty special. Gee, I'm scared. I mean I'm going to have to show off my foot."

Walter said he was sorry, and she said oh there was nothing to be sorry about; after all, she was getting a little vacation out of it, wasn't she? "And I haven't been out of the city in six years. It was six years ago I spent a week at the Bear Mountain Inn." Her cheeks were red, rather mottled, and her eyes, set too closely together, were lavender-colored, intense: they seemed never to blink. She wore a gold band on her wedding finger; play-acting, to be sure: it would not have fooled anybody.

"I'm a domestic," she said, answering a question. "And there's nothing wrong with that: it's honest and I like it. The people I work for have the cutest kid, Ronnie. I'm better to him than his mother, and he loves me more: he's told me so. That one, she stays drunk all the time."

It was depressing to listen to, but Walter, afraid suddenly to be alone, stayed and drank and talked in the way he'd once talked to Anna Stimson. Shh! she said at one point, for his voice had risen too high, and a good many people were staring. Walter said the hell with them, he didn't care; it was as if his brain were made of glass, and all the whisky he'd drunk had turned into a hammer; he could feel the shattered pieces rattling in his head, distorting focus, falsifying shape; the cripple, for instance, seemed not one person, but several: Irving, his mother, a man named Bonaparte, Margaret, all those and others: more and more he came to understand experience is a circle of which no moment can be isolated, forgotten.

The bar was closing. They went Dutch on the check and, while waiting for change, neither spoke. Watching him with her unblinking lavender eyes, she seemed quite controlled, but there was going on inside, he could tell, some subtle agitation. When the waiter returned they divided the change, and she said: "If you want to, you can come to my room." A rashlike blush covered her face. "I mean, you said you didn't have any place to sleep——"

Walter reached out and took her hand: the smile she gave him was touchingly shy.

Reeking with dime-store perfume, she came out of the bathroom wearing only a sleazy flesh-colored kimono, and the monstrous black shoe. It was then that he realized he could never go through with it. And he'd never felt so sorry for himself: not even Anna Stimson would ever have forgiven him this. "Don't look," she said, and there was a trembling in her voice, "I'm funny about anybody seeing my foot."

He turned to the window, where pressing elm leaves rustled in the rain, and lightning, too far off for sound, winked whitely. "All right," she said. Walter did not move.

"All right," she repeated anxiously. "Shall I put out the light? I mean, maybe you like to get ready—in the dark."

He came to the edge of the bed, and, bending down, kissed her cheek. "I think you're so very sweet, but——"

The telephone interrupted. She looked at him dumbly. "Jesus God," she said, and covered the mouthpiece with her hand, "it's long-distance! I'll bet it's about Ronnie! I'll bet he's sick, or—hello—what?—Ranney? Gee, no. You've got the wrong——"

"Wait," said Walter, taking the receiver. "This is me, this is Walter Ranney."

"Hello, Walter."

The voice, dull and sexless and remote, went straight to the pit of his stomach. The room seemed to seesaw, to buckle. A mustache of sweat sprouted on his upper lip. "Who is this?" he said so slowly the words did not connect coherently.

"Oh, you know me, Walter. You've known me a long time." Then silence: whoever it was had hung up.

"Gee," said the woman, "now how do you suppose they knew you were in my room; I mean—say, was it bad news? You look kind of——"

Walter fell across her, clutching her to him, pressing his wet cheek against hers. "Hold me," he said, discovering he could still cry. "Hold me, please."

"Poor little boy," she said, patting his back. "My poor little boy: we're awfully alone in this world, aren't we?" And presently he went to sleep in her arms.

But he had not slept since, nor could he now, not even listening to the lazy lull of the fan; in its turning he could hear train wheels: Saratoga to New York, New York to New Orleans. And New Orleans he'd chosen for no special reason, except that it was a town of strangers, and a long way off. Four spinning fan blades, wheels and voices, round and round; and after all, as he saw it now, there was to this network of malice no ending, none whatever.

by Truman Capote

Water flushed down wall pipes, steps passed overhead, keys jangled in the hall, a news commentator rumbled somewhere beyond, next door a little girl said why? Why? WHY? Yet in the room there was a sense of silence. His feet shining in the transom light looked like amputated stone: the gleaming toenails were ten small mirrors, all reflecting greenly. Sitting up, he rubbed sweat off with a towel; now more than anything the heat frightened him, for it made him know tangibly his own helplessness. He threw the towel across the room, where, landing on a lamp shade, it swung back and forth. At this moment the telephone rang. And rang. And it was ringing so loud he was sure all the hotel could hear. An army would be pounding at his door. So he pushed his face into the pillow, covered his ears with his hands, and thought: think of nothing things, think of wind.

1949: *from the Sewanee Review*

A COURTSHIP

by William Faulkner

This is how it was in the old days, when old Issetibbeha was still the Man, and Ikkemotubbe, Issetibbeha's nephew, and David Hogganbeck, the white man told the steamboat where to walk, courted Herman Basket's sister.

The People all lived in the Plantation now. Issetibbeha and General Jackson met and burned sticks and signed a paper, and now a line ran through the woods, although you could not see it. It ran straight as a bee's flight among the woods, with the Plantation on one side of it, where Issetibbeha was the Man, and America on the other side, where General Jackson was the Man. So now when something happened on one side of the line, it was a bad fortune for some and a good fortune for others, depending on what the white man happened to possess, as it had always been. But merely by occurring on the other side of that line which you couldn't even see, it became what the white men called a crime punishable by death if they could just have found who did it. Which seemed foolish to us. There was one

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uproar which lasted off and on for a week, not that the white man had disappeared, because he had been the sort of white man which even other white men did not regret, but because of a delusion that he had been eaten. As if any man, no matter how hungry, would risk eating the flesh of a coward or thief in this country where even in winter there is always something to be found to eat;—this land for which, as Issetibbeha used to say after he had become so old that nothing more was required of him except to sit in the sun and criticize the degeneration of the People and the folly and rapacity of politicians, the Great Spirit has done more and man less than for any land he ever heard of. But it was a free country, and if the white men wished to make a rule even that foolish in their half of it, it was all right with us.

Then Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck saw Herman Basket's sister. As who did not, sooner or later, young men and old men too, bachelors and widowers too, and some who were not even widowers yet, who for more than one reason within the hut had no business looking anywhere else, though who is to say what age a man must reach or just how unfortunate he must have been in his youthful compliance, when he shall no longer look at the Herman Basket's sisters of this world and chew his bitter thumbs too, aihee. Because she walked in beauty. Or she sat in it, that is, because she did not walk at all unless she had to. One of the earliest sounds in the Plantation would be the voice of Herman Basket's aunt crying to know why she had not risen and gone to the spring for water with the other girls, which she did not do sometimes until Herman Basket himself rose and made her, or in the afternoon crying to know why she did not go to the river with the other girls and women to wash, which she did not do very often either. But she did not need to. Anyone who looks as Herman Basket's sister did at seventeen and eighteen and nineteen does not need to wash.

Then one day Ikkemotubbe saw her, who had known her all his life except during the first two years. He was Issetibbeha's sister's son. One night he got into the steamboat with David Hogganbeck and went away. And suns passed and then moons and then three high waters came and went and old Issetibbeha had entered the earth a year and his son Moketubbe was the Man when Ikkemotubbe returned, named Doom now, with the white friend called the Chevalier Soeur-Blonde de Vitry and the eight new slaves which we did not need either, and his gold-laced hat and cloak and the little gold box of strong salt and the wicker wine hamper containing the four other puppies which were still alive, and within two days Moketubbe's little son was dead and within three Ikkemotubbe whose name was Doom now was himself the Man. But he was not Doom yet. He was still just Ikkemotubbe, one of the young men, the best one, who rode the hardest and fastest and danced the longest and got the drunkest and was loved the best, by the young men and the girls and the older women too who should have had

other things to think about. Then one day he saw Herman Basket's sister, whom he had known all his life except for the first two years.

After Ikkemotubbe looked at her, my father and Owl-by-Night and Sylvester's John and the other young men looked away. Because he was the best of them and they loved him then while he was still just Ikkemotubbe. They would hold the other horse for him as, stripped to the waist, his hair and body oiled with bear's grease as when racing (though with honey mixed into the bear's grease now) and with only a rope hackamore and no saddle as when racing, Ikkemotubbe would ride on his new racing pony past the gallery where Herman Basket's sister sat shelling corn or peas into the silver wine pitcher which her aunt had inherited from her second cousin by marriage's great-aunt who was old David Colbert's wife, while Log-in-the-Creek (one of the young men too, though nobody paid any attention to him. He raced no horses, and fought no cocks and cast no dice and even when forced to, he would not even dance fast enough to keep out of the other dancers' way, and disgraced both himself and the others each time by becoming sick after only five or six horns of what was never even his whiskey) leaned against one of the gallery posts and blew into his harmonica. Then one of the young men held the racing pony, and on his gaited mare now and wearing his flower-painted weskit and pigeon-tailed coat and beaver hat in which he looked handsomer than a steamboat gambler and richer even than the whiskey trader, Ikkemotubbe would ride past the gallery where Herman Basket's sister shelled another pod of peas into the pitcher and Log-in-the-Creek sat with his back against the post and blew into the harmonica. Then another of the young men would take the mare too and Ikkemotubbe would walk to Herman Basket's and sit on the gallery too in his fine clothes while Herman Basket's sister shelled another pod of peas perhaps into the silver pitcher and Log-in-the-Creek lay on his back on the floor, blowing into the harmonica. Then the whiskey trader came and Ikkemotubbe and the young men invited Log-in-the-Creek into the woods until they became tired of carrying him. And although a good deal wasted outside, as usual Log-in-the-Creek became sick and then asleep after seven or eight horns, and Ikkemotubbe returned to Herman Basket's gallery, where for a day or two at least he didn't have to not listen to the harmonica.

Finally Owl-at-Night made a suggestion. "Send Herman Basket's aunt a gift." But the only thing Ikkemotubbe owned which Herman Basket's aunt didn't, was the new racing pony. So after a while Ikkemotubbe said, "So it seems I want this girl even worse than I believed," and sent Owl-at-Night to tie the racing pony's hackamore to Herman Basket's kitchen door-handle. Then he thought how Herman Basket's aunt could not even always make Herman Basket's sister just get up and go to the spring for water. Besides, she was the second cousin by marriage to the grandniece of the wife of old

David Colbert, the chief Man of all the Chickasaws in our section, and she looked upon Issetibbeha's whole family and line as mushrooms.

"But Herman Basket has been known to make her get up and go to the spring," my father said. "And I never heard him claim that old Dave Colbert's wife or his wife's niece or anybody else's wife or niece or aunt was any better than anybody else. Give Herman the horse."

"I can beat that," Ikkemotubbe said. Because there was no horse in the Plantation or America either between Natchez and Nashville whose tail Ikkemotubbe's new pony ever looked at. "I will run Herman a horse race for his influence," he said. "Run," he told my father. "Catch Owl-at-Night before he reaches the house." So my father brought the pony back in time. But just in case Herman Basket's aunt had been watching from the kitchen window or something, Ikkemotubbe sent Owl-at-Night and Sylvester's John home for his crate of gamecocks, though he expected little from this since Herman Basket's aunt already owned the best cocks in the Plantation and won all the money every Sunday morning anyway. And then Herman Basket declined to commit himself, so a horse race would have been merely for pleasure and money. And Ikkemotubbe said how money could not help him, and with that damned girl on his mind day and night his tongue had forgotten the savor of pleasure. But the whiskey trader always came, and so for a day or two at least he wouldn't have to not listen to the harmonica.

Then David Hogganbeck also looked at Herman Basket's sister, whom he too had been seeing once each year since the steamboat first walked to the Plantation. After a while even winter would be over and we would begin to watch the mark which David Hogganbeck had put on the landing to show us when the water would be tall enough for the steamboat to walk in. Then the river would reach the mark, and sure enough within two suns the steamboat would cry in the Plantation. Then all the People—men and women and children and dogs, even Herman Basket's sister because Ikkemotubbe would fetch a horse for her to ride and so only Log-in-the-Creek would remain, not inside the house even though it was still cold, because Herman Basket's aunt wouldn't let him stay inside the house where she would have to step over him each time she passed, but squatting in his blanket on the gallery with an old cooking pot of fire inside the blanket with him—would stand on the landing, to watch the upstairs and the smokestack moving among the trees and hear the puffing of the smokestack and its feet walking fast in the water too when it was not crying. Then we would begin to hear David Hogganbeck's fiddle, and then the steamboat would come walking up the last of the river like a race horse, with the smoke rolling black and its feet flinging the water aside as a running horse flings dirt, and Captain Studenmare who owned the steamboat chewing tobacco in one window and David Hogganbeck playing his fiddle in the other, and between them the

head of the boy slave who turned the wheel, who was not much more than half as big as Captain Studenmare and not even a third as big as David Hogganbeck. And all day long the trading would continue, though David Hogganbeck took little part in this. And all night long the dancing would continue, and David Hogganbeck took the biggest part in this. Because he was bigger than any two of the young men put together almost, and although you would not have called him a man built for dancing or running either, it was as if that very double size, which could hold twice as much whiskey as any other, could also dance twice as long, until one by one the young men fell away and only he was left. And there was horse racing and eating, and although David Hogganbeck had no horses and did not ride one since no horse could have carried him and run fast too, he would eat a match each year for money against any two of the young men whom the People picked, and David Hogganbeck always won. Then the water would return toward the mark he had made on the landing, and it would be time for the steamboat to leave while there was still enough water in the river for it to walk in.

And then it did not go away. The river began to grow little, yet still David Hogganbeck played his fiddle on Herman Basket's gallery while Herman Basket's sister stirred something for cooking into the silver wine pitcher and Ikkemotubbe sat against a post in his fine clothes and his beaver hat and Log-in-the-Creek lay on his back on the floor with the harmonica cupped in both hands to his mouth, though you couldn't hear now whether he was blowing into it or not. Then you could see the mark which David Hogganbeck had marked on the landing while he still played his fiddle on Herman Basket's gallery where Ikkemotubbe had brought a rocking chair from his house to sit in until David Hogganbeck would have to leave in order to show the steamboat the way back to Natchez. And all that afternoon the People stood along the landing and watched the steamboat's slaves hurling wood into its stomach for steam to make it walk; and during most of that night, while David Hogganbeck drank twice as much and danced twice as long as even David Hogganbeck, so that he drank four times as much and danced four times as long as even Ikkemotubbe, even an Ikkemotubbe who at last had looked at Herman Basket's sister or at least had looked at someone else looking at her, the older ones among the People stood along the landing and watched the slaves hurling wood into the steamboat's stomach, not to make it walk but to make its voice cry while Captain Studenmare leaned out of the upstairs with the end of the crying rope tied to the door-handle. And the next day Captain Studenmare himself came onto the gallery and grasped the end of David Hogganbeck's fiddle.

"You're fired," he said.

"All right," David Hogganbeck said. Then Captain Studenmare grasped the end of David Hogganbeck's fiddle.

"We will have to go back to Natchez where I can get money to pay you off," he said.

"Leave the money at the saloon," David Hogganbeck said. "I'll bring the boat back out next spring."

Then it was night. Then Herman Basket's aunt came out and said that if they were going to stay there all night, at least David Hogganbeck would have to stop playing his fiddle so other people could sleep. Then she came out and said for Herman Basket's sister to come in and go to bed. Then Herman Basket came out and said, "Come on now, fellows. Be reasonable." Then Herman Basket's aunt came out and said that the next time she was going to bring Herman Basket's dead uncle's shotgun. So Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck left Log-in-the-Creek lying on the floor and stepped down from the gallery. "Good night," David Hogganbeck said.

"I'll walk home with you," Ikkemotubbe said. So they walked across the Plantation to the steamboat. It was dark and there was no fire in its stomach now because Captain Studenmare was still asleep under Issetibbeha's back porch. Then Ikkemotubbe said, "Good night."

"I'll walk home with you," David Hogganbeck said. So they walked back across the Plantation to Ikkemotubbe's house. But David Hogganbeck did not have time to say good night now because Ikkemotubbe turned as soon as they reached his house and started back toward the steamboat. Then he began to run, because David Hogganbeck still did not look like a man who could run fast. But he had not looked like a man who could dance a long time either, so when Ikkemotubbe reached the steamboat and turned and ran again, he was only a little ahead of David Hogganbeck. And when they reached Ikkemotubbe's house he was still only a little ahead of David Hogganbeck when he stopped, breathing fast but only a little fast, and held the door open for David Hogganbeck to enter.

"My house is not very much house," he said. "But it is yours." So they both slept in Ikkemotubbe's bed in his house that night. And the next afternoon, although Herman Basket would still do no more than wish him success, Ikkemotubbe sent my father and Sylvester's John with his saddle mare for Herman Basket's aunt to ride on, and he and Herman Basket ran the horse race. And he rode faster than anyone had ever ridden in the Plantation. He won by lengths and lengths and, with Herman Basket's aunt watching, he made Herman Basket take all the money, as though Herman Basket had won, and that evening he sent Owl-at-Night to tie the racing pony's hackamore to the door-handle of Herman Basket's kitchen. But that night Herman Basket's aunt did not even warn them. She came out the first time with Herman Basket's dead uncle's gun, and hardly a moment had elapsed before Ikkemotubbe found out that she meant him too. So he and David Hogganbeck left Log-in-the-Creek lying on the gallery and they stopped for a mo-

ment at my father's house on the first trip between Ikkemotubbe's house and the steamboat, though when my father and Owl-at-Night finally found Ikkemotubbe to tell him that Herman Basket's aunt must have sent the racing pony far into the woods and hidden it because they had not found it yet, Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck were both asleep in David Hogganbeck's bed in the steamboat.

And the next morning the whiskey trader came, and that afternoon Ikkemotubbe and the young men invited Log-in-the-Creek into the woods and my father and Sylvester's John returned for the whiskey trader's buckboard and, with my father and Sylvester's John driving the buckboard and Log-in-the-Creek lying on his face on top of the little house on the back of the buckboard where the whiskey kegs rode and Ikkemotubbe standing on top of the little house, wearing the used general's coat which General Jackson gave Issetibbeha, with his arms folded and one foot advanced onto Log-in-the-Creek's back, they rode slow past the gallery where David Hogganbeck played his fiddle while Herman Basket's sister stirred something for cooking into the silver wine pitcher. And when my father and Owl-at-Night found Ikkemotubbe that night to tell him they still had not found where Herman Basket's aunt had hidden the pony, Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck were at Ikkemotubbe's house. And the next afternoon Ikkemotubbe and the young men invited David Hogganbeck into the woods and it was a long time this time and when they came out, David Hogganbeck was driving the buckboard while the legs of Ikkemotubbe and the other young men dangled from the open door of the little whiskey house like so many strands of vine hay and Issetibbeha's general's coat was tied by its sleeves about the neck of one of the mules. And nobody hunted for the racing pony that night, and when Ikkemotubbe waked up, he didn't know at first even where he was. And he could already hear David Hogganbeck's fiddle before he could move aside enough of the young men to get out of the little whiskey house, because that night neither Herman Basket's aunt nor Herman Basket and then finally Herman Basket's dead uncle's gun could persuade David Hogganbeck to leave the gallery and go away or even to stop playing the fiddle.

So the next morning Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck squatted in a quiet place in the woods while the young men, except Sylvester's John and Owl-by-Night who were still hunting for the horse, stood on guard. "We could fight for her then," David Hogganbeck said.

"We could fight for her," Ikkemotubbe said. "But white men and the People fight differently. We fight with knives, to hurt good and to hurt quickly. That would be all right, if I were to lose. Because I would wish to be hurt good. But if I am to win, I do not wish you to be hurt good. If I am to truly win, it will be necessary for you to be there to see it. On the day of the wedding, I wish you to be present, or at least present somewhere, not

lying wrapped in a blanket on a platform in the woods, waiting to enter the earth." Then my father said how Ikkemotubbe put his hand on David Hogganbeck's shoulder and smiled at him. "If that could satisfy me, we would not be squatting here discussing what to do. I think you see that."

"I think I do," David Hogganbeck said.

Then my father said how Ikkemotubbe removed his hand from David Hogganbeck's shoulder. "And we have tried whiskey," he said.

"We have tried that," David Hogganbeck said.

"Even the racing pony and the general's coat failed me," Ikkemotubbe said. "I had been saving them, like a man with two hole cards."

"I wouldn't say that the coat completely failed," David Hogganbeck said. "You looked fine in it."

"Aihee," Ikkemotubbe said. "So did the mule." Then my father said how he was not smiling either as he squatted beside David Hogganbeck, making little marks in the earth with a twig. "So there is just one other thing," he said. "And I am already beaten at that too before we start."

So all that day they ate nothing. And that night when they left Log-in-the-Creek lying on Herman Basket's gallery, instead of merely walking for a while and then running for a while back and forth between Ikkemotubbe's house and the steamboat, they began to run as soon as they left Herman Basket's. And when they lay down in the woods to sleep, it was where they would not only be free of temptation to eat but of opportunity too, and from which it would take another hard run as an appetizer to reach the Plantation for the match. Then it was morning and they ran back to where my father and the young men waited on horses to meet them and tell Ikkemotubbe that they still hadn't found where under the sun Herman Basket's aunt could have hidden the pony and to escort them back across the Plantation to the racecourse, where the People waited around the table, with Ikkemotubbe's rocking chair from Herman Basket's gallery for Issetibbeha and a bench behind it for the judges. First there was a recess while a ten-year-old boy ran once around the race track, to let them recover breath. Then Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck took their places on either side of the table, facing each other across it, and Owl-at-Night gave the word.

First, each had that quantity of stewed bird chitterlings which the other could scoop with two hands from the pot. Then each had as many wild turkey eggs as he was old, Ikkemotubbe twenty-two and David Hogganbeck twenty-three, though Ikkemotubbe refused the advantage and said he would eat twenty-three too. Then David Hogganbeck said he was entitled to one more than Ikkemotubbe so he would eat twenty-four, until Issetibbeha told them both to hush and get on, and Owl-at-Night tallied the shells. Then there was the tongue, paws and melt of a bear, though for a little while Ikkemotubbe stood and looked at his half of it while David Hogganbeck

was already eating. And at the halfway he stopped and looked at it again while David Hogganbeck was finishing. But it was all right; there was a faint smile on his face such as the young men had seen on it at the end of a hard running when he was going from now on not on the fact that he was still alive but on the fact that he was Ikkemotubbe. And he went on, and Owl-at-Night tallied the bones, and the women set the roasted shote on the table and Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck moved back to the tail of the shote and faced one another across it and Owl-at-Night had even given the word to start until he gave another word to stop. "Give me some water," Ikkemotubbe said. So my father handed him the gourd and he even took a swallow. But the water returned as though it had merely struck the back of his throat and bounced, and Ikkemotubbe put the gourd down and raised the tail of his shirt before his bowed face and turned and walked away as the People opened aside to let him pass.

And that afternoon they did not even go to the quiet place in the woods. They stood in Ikkemotubbe's house while my father and the others stood quietly too in the background. My father said that Ikkemotubbe was not smiling now. "I was right yesterday," he said. "If I am to lose to thee, we should have used the knives. You see," he said, and now my father said he even smiled again, as at the end of the long hard running when the young men knew that he would go on, not because he was still alive but because he was Ikkemotubbe; "—you see, although I have lost, I still cannot reconcile."

"I had you beat before we started," David Hogganbeck said. "We both knew that."

"Yes," Ikkemotubbe said. "But I suggested it."

"Then what do you suggest now?" David Hogganbeck said. And now my father said how they loved David Hogganbeck at that moment as they loved Ikkemotubbe; that they loved them both at that moment while Ikkemotubbe stood before David Hogganbeck with the smile on his face and his right hand flat on David Hogganbeck's chest, because there were men in those days.

"Once more then, and then no more," Ikkemotubbe said. "The Cave." Then he and David Hogganbeck stripped and my father and the others oiled them, body and hair too, with bear's grease mixed with mint, not just for speed this time but for lasting too, because the Cave was a hundred and thirty miles away, over in the country of old David Colbert—a black hole in the hill which the spoor of wild creatures merely approached and then turned away and which no dog could even be beaten to enter and where the boys from among all the People would go to lie on their first Night-away-from-Fire to prove if they had the courage to become men, because it had been known among the People from a long time ago that the sound of a

whisper or even the disturbed air of a sudden movement would bring parts of the roof down and so all believed that not even a very big movement or sound or maybe none at all at some time would bring the whole mountain into the Cave. Then Ikkemotubbe took the two pistols from the trunk and drew the loads and reloaded them. "Whoever reaches the Cave first can enter it alone and fire his pistol," he said. "If he comes back out, he has won."

"And if he does not come back out?" David Hogganbeck said.

"Then you have won," Ikkemotubbe said.

"Or you," David Hogganbeck said.

And now my father said how Ikkemotubbe smiled again at David Hogganbeck. "Or me," he said. "Though I think I told you yesterday that such as that for me will not be victory." Then Ikkemotubbe put another charge of powder, with a wadding and bullet, into each of the two small medicine bags, one for himself and one for David Hogganbeck, just in case the one who entered the Cave first should not lose quick enough, and, wearing only their shirts and shoes and each with his pistol and medicine bag looped on a cord around his neck, they emerged from Ikkemotubbe's house and began to run.

It was evening then. Then it was night, and since David Hogganbeck did not know the way, Ikkemotubbe continued to set the pace. But after a time it was daylight again and now David Hogganbeck could run by the sun and the landmarks which Ikkemotubbe described to him while they rested beside a creek, if he wished to go faster. So sometimes David Hogganbeck would run in front and sometimes Ikkemotubbe, then David Hogganbeck would pass Ikkemotubbe as he sat beside a spring or a stream with his feet in the water and Ikkemotubbe would smile at David Hogganbeck and wave his hand. Then he would overtake David Hogganbeck and the country was open now and they would run side by side in the prairies with his hand lying lightly on David Hogganbeck's shoulder, not on the top of the shoulder but lightly against the back of it until after a while he would smile at David Hogganbeck and draw ahead. But then it was sundown, and then it was dark again so Ikkemotubbe slowed and then stopped until he heard David Hogganbeck and knew that David Hogganbeck could hear him and then he ran again so that David Hogganbeck could follow the sound of his running. So when David Hogganbeck fell, Ikkemotubbe heard it and went back and found David Hogganbeck in the dark and turned him onto his back and found water in the dark and soaked his shirt in it and returned and wrung the water from the shirt into David Hogganbeck's mouth. And then it was daylight and Ikkemotubbe waked also and found a nest containing five unfledged birds and ate and brought the other three to David Hogganbeck and then he went on until he was just this side of where David Hog-

ganbeck could no longer see him and sat down again until David Hogganbeck got up onto his feet.

And he gave David Hogganbeck the landmarks for that day too, talking back to David Hogganbeck over his shoulder as they ran, though David Hogganbeck did not need them because he never overtook Ikkemotubbe again. He never came closer than fifteen or twenty paces, although it looked at one time like he was. Because this time it was Ikkemotubbe who fell. And the country was open again so Ikkemotubbe could lie there for a long time and watch David Hogganbeck coming. Then it was sunset again, and then it was dark again, and he lay there listening to David Hogganbeck coming for a long time until it was time for Ikkemotubbe to get up and he did and they went on slowly in the dark with David Hogganbeck at least a hundred paces behind him, until he heard David Hogganbeck fall and then he lay down too. Then it was day again and he watched David Hogganbeck get up onto his feet and come slowly toward him and at last he said to get up too but he did not and it looked like David Hogganbeck was going to come up with him. But he got up at last while David Hogganbeck was still four or five paces away and they went on until David Hogganbeck fell, and then Ikkemotubbe thought he was just watching David Hogganbeck fall until he found that he had fallen too but he got up onto his hands and knees and crawled still another ten or fifteen paces before he too lay down. And there in the sunset before him was the hill in which the Cave was, and there through the night, and there still in the sunrise.

So Ikkemotubbe ran into the Cave first, with his pistol already cocked in his hand. He told how he stopped perhaps for a second at the entrance, perhaps to look at the sun again or perhaps just to see where David Hogganbeck had stopped. But David Hogganbeck was running too and he was still only that fifteen or twenty paces behind, and besides, because of that damned sister of Herman Basket's, there had been no light nor heat either in that sun for moons and moons. So he ran into the Cave and turned and saw David Hogganbeck also running into the Cave and he cried, "Back, fool!" But David Hogganbeck still ran into the Cave even as Ikkemotubbe pointed his pistol at the roof and fired. And there was a noise, and a rushing, and a blackness and a dust, and Ikkemotubbe told how he thought, *Aihee. It comes.* But it did not, and even before the blackness he saw David Hogganbeck cast himself forward onto his hands and knees, and there was not a complete blackness either because he could see the sunlight and air and day beyond the tunnel of David Hogganbeck's arms and legs as, still on his hands and knees, David Hogganbeck held the fallen roof upon his back. "Hurry," David Hogganbeck said. "Between my legs. I can't——"

"Nay brother," Ikkemotubbe said. "Quickly thyself, before it crushes thee. Crawl back."

"Hurry," David Hogganbeck said behind his teeth. "Hurry, damn you." And Ikkemotubbe did, and he remembered David Hogganbeck's buttocks and legs pink in the sunrise and the slab of rock which supported the fallen roof pink in the sunrise too across David Hogganbeck's back. But he did not remember where he found the pole nor how he carried it alone into the Cave and thrust it into the hole beside David Hogganbeck and stooped his own back under it and lifted until he knew that some at least of the weight of the fallen roof was on the pole.

"Now," he said. "Quickly."

"No," David Hogganbeck said.

"Quickly, brother," Ikkemotubbe said. "The weight is off thee."

"Then I can't move," David Hogganbeck said. But Ikkemotubbe couldn't move either, because now he had to hold the fallen roof up with his back and legs. So he reached one hand and grasped David Hogganbeck by the meat and jerked him backward out of the hole until he lay face down upon the earth. And maybe some of the weight of the fallen roof was on the pole before, but now all of the weight was on it and Ikkemotubbe said how he thought, *This time surely aihee.* But it was the pole and not his back which snapped and flung him face down too across David Hogganbeck like two flung sticks, and a bright gout of blood jumped out of David Hogganbeck's mouth.

But by the second day David Hogganbeck had quit vomiting blood, though Ikkemotubbe had run hardly forty miles back toward the Plantation when my father met him with the horse for David Hogganbeck to ride. Presently my father said, "I have a news for thee."

"So you found the pony," Ikkemotubbe said. "All right. Come on. Let's get that damned stupid fool of a white man——"

"No, wait, my brother," my father said. "I have a news for thee."

And presently Ikkemotubbe said, "All right."

But when Captain Studenmare borrowed Issetibbeha's wagon to go back to Natchez in, he took the steamboat slaves too. So my father and the young men built the fire in the steamboat's stomach to make steam for it to walk, while David Hogganbeck sat in the upstairs and drew the crying rope from time to time to see if the steam was strong enough yet, and at each cry still more of the People came to the landing until at last all the People in the Plantation except old Issetibbeha perhaps stood along the bank to watch the young men hurl wood into the steamboat's stomach:—a thing never before seen in our Plantation at least. Then the steam was strong and the steamboat began to walk and then the People began to walk too beside the steamboat, watching the young men for a while, then Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck for a while as the steamboat walked out of the Plantation where hardly seven suns ago Ikkemotubbe and David Hogganbeck would

sit all day long and half the night too until Herman Basket's aunt would come out with Herman Basket's dead uncle's gun, on the gallery of Herman Basket's house while Log-in-the-Creek lay on the floor with his harmonica cupped to his mouth and Log-in-the-Creek's wife shelled corn or peas into old Dave Colbert's wife's grandniece's second cousin by marriage's wine pitcher. Presently Ikkemotubbe was gone completely away, to be gone a long time before he came back named Doom, with his new white friend whom no man wished to love either and the eight more slaves which we had no use for either because at times someone would have to get up and walk somewhere to find something for the ones we already owned to do, and the fine gold-trimmed clothes and the little gold box of salt which caused the other four puppies to become dead too one after another, and then anything else which happened to stand between Doom and what he wanted. But he was not quite gone yet. He was just Ikkemotubbe yet, one of the young men, another of the young men who loved and was not loved in return and could hear the words and see the fact, yet who, like the young men who had been before him and the ones who would come after him, still could not understand it.

"But not for her," Ikkemotubbe said. "And not even because it was Log-in-the-Creek. Perhaps they are for myself: that such a son as Log-in-the-Creek could cause them to wish to flow."

"Don't think about her," David Hogganbeck said.

"I don't. I have already stopped. See?" Ikkemotubbe said while the sunset ran down his face as if it had already been rain instead of light when it entered the window. "There was a wise man of ours who said once how a woman's fancy is like a butterfly which, hovering from flower to flower, pauses at the last as like as not where a horse has stood."

"There was a wise man of ours named Solomon who often said something of that nature too," David Hogganbeck said. "Perhaps there is just one wisdom for all men, no matter who speaks it."

"Aihee. At least, for all men one same heartbreak," Ikkemotubbe said. Then he drew the crying rope, because the boat was now passing the house where Log-in-the-Creek and his wife lived, and now the steamboat sounded like it did the first night while Captain Studenmare still thought David Hogganbeck would come and show it the way back to Natchez, until David Hogganbeck made Ikkemotubbe stop. Because they would need the steam because the steamboat did not always walk. Sometimes it crawled, and each time its feet came up there was mud on them, and sometimes it did not even crawl until David Hogganbeck drew the crying rope as the rider speaks to the recalcitrant horse to remind it with his voice just who is up. Then it crawled again and then it walked again, until at last the People could no longer keep up, and it cried once more beyond the last bend and then there

was no longer either the black shapes of the young men leaping to hurl wood into its red stomach or even the sound of its voice in the Plantation or the night. That's how it was in the old days.

1950: *from Harper's Magazine*

THE BLUE-WINGED TEAL

by Wallace Stegner, who has twice won second prize in the O. Henry competition, with "Two Rivers" in 1942 and "Beyond the Glass Mountain" in 1948. He is also represented in the 1955 volume with "The City of the Living." In addition to producing many excellent short stories himself, he is well known for his work as a teacher of creative writing at Stanford University, and is also a veteran member of the staff of the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference. His first novelette, Remembering Laughter, *won a Little, Brown prize in 1937. Other books are:* The Big Rock Candy Mountain, The Women on the Wall, The Preacher and the Slave, Beyond the Hundredth Meridian. *Mr. Stegner was born in Lake Mills, Iowa, February 18, 1909, and grew up in various parts of the Northwest. He was educated at the universities of Utah, Iowa, and California, and has taught at several colleges, including Harvard.*

Still in waders, with the string of ducks across his shoulder, he stood hesitating on the sidewalk in the cold November wind. His knees were stiff from being cramped up all day in the blind, and his feet were cold. Today, all day, he had been alive; now he was back ready to be dead again.

Lights were on all up and down the street, and there was a rush of traffic and a hurrying of people past and around him, yet the town was not his town, the people passing were strangers, the sounds of evening in this place were no sounds that carried warmth or familiarity. Though he had spent most of his twenty years in the town, knew hundreds of its people, could draw maps of its streets from memory, he wanted to admit familiarity with none of it. He had shut himself off.

Then what was he doing here, in front of this poolhall, loaded down with nine dead ducks? What had possessed him in the first place to borrow

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gun and waders and car from his father and go hunting? If he had wanted to breathe freely for a change, why hadn't he kept right on going? What was there in this place to draw him back? A hunter had to have a lodge to bring his meat to and people who would be glad of his skill. He had this poolhall and his father, John Lederer, Prop.

He stepped out of a woman's path and leaned against the door. Downstairs, in addition to his father, he would find old Max Schmeckebier, who ran a cheap blackjack game in the room under the sidewalk. He would find Giuseppe Sciutti, the Sicilian barber, closing his shop or tidying up the rack of *Artists and Models* and *The Nudist* with which he lured trade. He would probably find Billy Hammond, the night clerk from the Windsor Hotel, having his sandwich and beer and pie, or moving alone around a pool table, whistling abstractedly, practicing shots. If the afternoon blackjack game had broken up, there would be Navy Edwards, dealer and bouncer for Schmeckebier. At this time of evening there might be a few counter customers and a cop collecting his tribute of a beer or that other tribute that Schmeckebier paid to keep the cardroom open.

And he would find sour contrast with the bright sky and the wind of the tule marshes, the cavelike room with its back corners in darkness, would smell that smell compounded of steam heat and cue-chalk dust, of sodden butts in cuspidors, of coffee and meat and beer smells from the counter, of cigarette smoke so unaired that it darkened the walls. From anywhere back of the middle tables there would be the pervasive reek of toilet disinfectant. Back of the lunch counter his father would be presiding, throwing the poolhall light switch to save a few cents when the place was empty, flipping it on to give an air of brilliant and successful use when feet came down the stairs past Sciutti's shop.

The hunter moved his shoulder under the weight of the ducks, his mind full for a moment with the image of his father's face, darkly pale, fallen in on its bones, and the pouched, restless, suspicious eyes that seemed always looking for someone. Over that image came the face of his mother, dead now and six weeks buried. His teeth clicked at the thought of how she had held the old man up for thirty years, kept him at a respectable job, kept him from slipping back into the poolroom Johnny he had been when she married him. Within ten days of her death he had hunted up this old failure of a poolhall.

In anger the hunter turned, thinking of the hotel room he shared with his father. But he had to eat. Broke as he was, a student yanked from his studies, he had no choice but to eat on the old man. Besides, there were the ducks. He felt somehow that the thing would be incomplete unless he brought his game back for his father to see.

His knees unwilling in the stiff waders, he went down the steps, descend-

ing into the light shining through Joe Sciutti's door, and into the momentary layer of clean bay-rum smell, talcum smell, hair-tonic smell, that rose past the still revolving barber pole in the angle of the stairs.

Joe Sciutti was sweeping wads of hair from his tile floor, and hunched over the counter beyond, their backs to the door, were Schmeckebier, Navy Edwards, Billy Hammond, and an unknown customer. John Lederer was behind the counter, mopping alertly with a rag. The poolroom lights were up bright, but when Lederer saw who was coming he flipped the switch and dropped the big room back into dusk.

As the hunter came to the end of the counter their heads turned toward him. "Well I'm a son of a bee," Navy Edwards said, and scrambled off his stool. Next to him Billy Hammond half stood up so that his pale yellow hair took a halo from the backbar lights. "Say!" Max Schmeckebier said. "Say, dot's goot, dot's pooty goot, Henry!"

But Henry was watching his father so intently he did not turn to them. He slid the string of ducks off his shoulder and swung them up onto the wide walnut bar. They landed solidly—offering or tribute or ransom or whatever they were. For a moment it was as if this little act were private between the two of them. He felt queerly moved, his stomach tightened in suspense or triumph. Then the old man's pouchy eyes slipped from his and the old man came quickly forward along the counter and laid hands on the ducks.

He handled them as if he were petting kittens, his big white hands stringing the heads one by one from the wire.

"Two spoonbill," he said, more to himself than to the others crowding around. "Shovel ducks. Don't see many of those any more. And two, no, three, hen mallards and one drake. Those make good eating."

Schmeckebier jutted his enormous lower lip. Knowing him for a stingy, crooked, suspicious little man, Henry almost laughed at the air he could put on, the air of a man of probity about to make an honest judgment in a dispute between neighbors. "I take a budderball," he said thickly. "A liddle budderball, dot is vot eats goot."

An arm fell across Henry's shoulders, and he turned his head to see the hand with red hairs rising from its pores, the wristband of a gray silk shirt with four pearl buttons. Navy Edwards' red face was close to his. "Come clean now," Navy said. "You shot 'em all sitting, didn't you, Henry?"

"I just waited till they stuck their heads out of their holes and let them have it," Henry said.

Navy walloped him on the back and convulsed himself laughing. Then his face got serious again, and he bore down on Henry's shoulder. "By God, you could've fooled me," he said. "If I'd been makin' book on what you'd bring in I'd've lost my shirt."

"Such a pretty shirt, too," Billy Hammond said.

Across the counter John Lederer cradled a little drab duck in his hand. Its neck, stretched from the carrier, hung far down, but its body was neat and plump and its feet were waxy. Watching the sallow face of his father, Henry thought it looked oddly soft.

"Ain't that a beauty, though?" the old man said. "There ain't a prettier duck made than a blue-winged teal. You can have all your wood ducks and redheads, all the flashy ones." He spread a wing until the hidden band of bright blue showed. "Pretty?" he said, and shook his head and laughed suddenly, as if he had not expected to. When he laid the duck down beside the others his eyes were bright with sentimental moisture.

So now, Henry thought, you're right in your element. You always did want to be one of the boys from the poolroom pouring out to see the elk on somebody's running board, or leaning on a bar with a schooner of beer talking baseball or telling the boys about the big German Brown somebody brought in in a cake of ice. We haven't any elk or German Browns right now, but we've got some nice ducks, a fine display along five feet of counter. And who brought them in? The student, the alien son. It must gravel you.

He drew himself a beer. Several other men had come in, and he saw three more stooping to look in the door beyond Sciutti's. Then they too came in. Three tables were going; his father had started to hustle, filling orders. After a few minutes Schmeckebier and Navy went into the cardroom with four men. The poolroom lights were up bright again, there was an ivory click of balls, a rumble of talk. The smoke-filled air was full of movement.

Still more people dropped in, kids in high school athletic sweaters and bums from the fringes of skid road. They all stopped to look at the ducks, and Henry saw glances at his waders, heard questions and answers. John Lederer's boy. Some of them spoke to him, deriving importance from contact with him. A fellowship was promoted by the ducks strung out along the counter. Henry felt it himself. He was so mellowed by the way they spoke to him that when the players at the first table thumped with their cues, he got off his stool to rack them up and collect their nickels. It occurred to him that he ought to go to the room and get into a bath, but he didn't want to leave yet. Instead he came back to the counter and slid the nickels toward his father and drew himself another beer.

"Pretty good night tonight," he said. The old man nodded and slapped his rag on the counter, his eyes already past Henry and fixed on two youths coming in, his mouth fixing itself for the greeting and the "Well, boys, what'll it be?"

Billy Hammond wandered by, stopped beside Henry a moment. "Well, time for my nightly wrestle with temptation," he said.

"I was just going to challenge you to a game of call-shot."

"Maybe tomorrow," Billy said, and let himself out carefully as if afraid a noise would disturb someone—a mild, gentle, golden-haired boy who looked as if he ought to be in some prep school learning to say "Sir" to grownups instead of clerking in a girlie hotel. He was the only one of the poolroom crowd that Henry half liked. He thought he understood Billy Hammond a little.

He turned back to the counter to hear his father talking with Max Schmeckebier. "I don't see how we could on this rig. That's the hell of it, we need a regular oven."

"In my room in back," Schmeckebier said. "Dot old electric range."

"Does it work?"

"Sure. Vy not? I tink so."

"By God," John Lederer said. "Nine ducks, that ought to give us a real old-fashioned feed." He mopped the counter, refilled a coffee cup, came back to the end and pinched the breast of a duck, pulled out a wing and looked at the band of blue hidden among the drab feathers. "Just like old times, for a change," he said, and his eyes touched Henry's in a look that might have meant anything from a challenge to an apology.

Henry had no desire to ease the strain that had been between them for months. He did not forgive his father the poolhall, or forget the way the old man had sprung back into the old pattern, as if his wife had been a jailer and he was now released. He neither forgot nor forgave the red-haired woman who sometimes came to the poolhall late at night and waited on a bar stool while the old man closed up. Yet now when his father remarked that the ducks ought to be drawn and plucked right away, Henry stood up.

"I could do ten while you were doing one," his father said.

The blood spread hotter in Henry's face, but he bit off what he might have said. "All right," he said. "You do them and I'll take over the counter for you."

So here he was, in the poolhall he had passionately sworn he would never do a lick of work in, dispensing Mrs. Morrison's meat pies and tamales smothered in chile, clumping behind the counter in the waders which had been the sign of his temporary freedom. Leaning back between orders, watching the Saturday night activity of the place, he half understood why he had gone hunting, and why it had seemed to him essential that he bring his trophies back here.

That somewhat disconcerted understanding was still troubling him when his father came back. The old man had put on a clean apron and brushed his hair. His pouched eyes, brighter and less houndlike than usual, darted along the bar, counting, and darted across the bright tables, counting again. His eyes met Henry's, and both half smiled. Both of them, Henry thought, were a little astonished.

Later, propped in bed in the hotel room, he put down the magazine he had been reading and stared at the drawn blinds, the sleazy drapes, and asked himself why he was here. The story he had told others, and himself, that his mother's death had interrupted his school term and he was waiting for the new term before going back, he knew to be an evasion. He was staying because he couldn't get away, or wouldn't. He hated his father, hated the poolhall, hated the people he was thrown with. He made no move to hobnob with them, or hadn't until tonight, and yet he deliberately avoided seeing any of the people who had been his friends for years. Why?

He could force his mind to the barrier, but not across it. Within a half minute he found himself reading again, diving deep, and when he made himself look up from the page he stared for a long time at his father's bed, his father's shoes under the bed, his father's soiled shirts hanging in the open closet. All the home he had any more was this little room. He could not pretend that as long as he stayed here the fragments of his home and family were held together. He couldn't fool himself that he had any function in his father's life any more, or his father in his, unless his own hatred and his father's uneasy suspicion were functions. He ought to get out and get a job until he could go back to school. But he didn't.

Thinking made him sleepy, and he knew what that was, too. Sleep was another evasion, like the torpor and monotony of his life. But he let drowsiness drift over him, and drowsily he thought of his father behind the counter tonight, vigorous and jovial, Mine Host, and he saw that the usual fretful petulance had gone from his face.

He snapped off the bed light and dropped the magazine on the floor. Then he heard the rain, the swish and hiss of traffic in the wet street. He felt sad and alone, and he disliked the coldness of his own isolation. Again he thought of his father, of the failing body that had once been tireless and bull-strong, of the face before it had sagged and grown dewlaps of flesh on the square jaws. He thought of the many failures, the jobs that never quite worked out, the schemes that never quite paid off, and of the eyes that could not quite meet, not quite hold, the eyes of his cold son.

Thinking of this, and remembering when they had been a family and when his mother had been alive to hold them together, he felt pity, and he cried.

His father's entrance awakened him. He heard the fumbling at the door, the creak, the quiet click, the footsteps that groped in darkness, the body that bumped into something and halted, getting its bearings. He heard the sighing weight of his father's body on the other bed, his father's sighing breath as he bent to untie his shoes. Feigning sleep, he lay unmoving, breathing deeply and steadily, but an anguish of fury had leaped in him as sharp and sudden as a sudden fear, for he smelled the smells his father

brought with him: wet wool, stale tobacco, liquor; and above all, more penetrating than any, spreading through the room and polluting everything there, the echo of cheap musky perfume.

The control Henry imposed upon his body was like an ecstasy. He raged at himself for the weak sympathy that had troubled him all evening. One good night, he said to himself now, staring furiously upward. One lively Saturday night in the joint and he can't contain himself, he has to go top off the evening with his girl friend. And how? A drink in her room? A walk over to some illegal afterhours bar on Rum Alley? Maybe just a trip to bed, blunt and immediate?

His jaws ached from the tight clamping of his teeth, but his orderly breathing went in and out, in and out, while the old man sighed into bed and creaked a little, rolling over, and lay still. The taint of perfume seemed even stronger now. The sow must slop it on by the cupful. And so cuddly. Such a sugar baby. How's my old sweetie tonight? It's been too long since you came to see your baby. I should be real mad at you. The cheek against the lapel, the unreal hair against the collar, the perfume like some gaseous poison tainting the clothes it touched.

The picture of his mother's bureau drawers came to him, the careless simple collection of handkerchiefs and gloves and lace collars and cuffs, and he saw the dusty blue sachet packets and smelled the faint fragrance. That was all the scent she had ever used.

My God, he said, how can he stand himself?

After a time his father began to breathe heavily, then to snore. In the little prison of the room his breathing was obscene—loose and bubbling, undisciplined, animal. Henry with an effort relaxed his tense arms and legs, let himself sink. He tried to concentrate on his own breathing, but the other dominated him, burst out and died and whiffled and sighed again. By now he had a resolution in him like an iron bar. Tomorrow, for sure, for good, he would break out of his self-imposed isolation and see Frank, see Welby. They would lend him enough to get to the coast. Not another day in this hateful relationship. Not another night in this room.

He yawned. It must be late, two or three o'clock. He ought to get to sleep. But he lay uneasily, his mind tainted with hatred as the room was tainted with perfume. He tried cunningly to elude his mind, to get to sleep before it could notice, but no matter how he composed himself for blankness and shut his eyes and breathed deeply, his mind was out again in a half minute, bright-eyed, lively as a weasel, and he was helplessly hunted again from hiding place to hiding place.

Eventually he fell back upon his old device.

He went into a big dark room in his mind, a room shadowy with great half-seen tables. He groped and found a string above him and pulled, and

light fell suddenly in a bright cone from the darker cone of the shade. Below the light lay an expanse of dark green cloth, and this was the only lighted thing in all that darkness. Carefully he gathered bright balls into a wooden triangle, pushing them forward until the apex lay over a round spot on the cloth. Quietly and thoroughly he chalked a cue: the inlaid handle and the smooth taper of the shaft were very real to his eyes and hands. He lined up the cue ball, aimed, drew the cue back and forth in smooth motions over the bridge of his left hand. He saw the balls run from the spinning shock of the break, and carom, and come to rest, and he hunted up the yellow 1-ball and got a shot at it between two others. He had to cut it very fine, but he saw the shot go true, the 1 angle off cleanly into the side pocket. He saw the cue ball rebound and kiss and stop, and he shot the 2 in a straight shot for the left corner pocket, putting drawers on the cue ball to get shape for the 3.

Yellow and blue and red, spotted and striped, he shot pool balls into pockets as deep and black and silent as the cellars of his consciousness. He was not now quarry that his mind chased, but an actor, a willer, a doer, a man in command. By an act of will or of flight he focused his whole awareness on the game he played. His mind undertook it with intent concentration. He took pride in little two-cushion banks, little triumphs of accuracy, small successes of foresight. When he had finished one game and the green cloth was bare he dug the balls from the bin under the end of the table and racked them and began another.

Eventually, he knew, nothing would remain in his mind but the clean green cloth traced with running color and bounced by simple problems, and sometime in the middle of an intricately planned combination shot he would pale off into sleep.

At noon, after the rain, the sun seemed very bright. It poured down from a clearing sky, glittered on wet roofs, gleamed in reflection from pavements and sidewalks. On the peaks beyond the city there was a purity of snow.

Coming down the hill, Henry noticed the excessive brightness and could not tell whether it was really as it seemed, or whether his plunge out of the dark and isolated hole of his life had restored a lost capacity to see. A slavery, or a paralysis, was ended; he had been for three hours in the company of a friend; he had been eyed with concern; he had been warmed by solicitude and generosity. In his pocket he had fifty dollars, enough to get him to the coast and let him renew his life. It seemed to him incredible that he had alternated between dismal hotel and dismal poolroom so long. He could not understand why he had not before this moved his legs in the direction of the hill. He perceived that he had been sullen and morbid, and he concluded with some surprise that even Schmeckebier and Edwards and the rest might have found him a difficult companion.

His father too. The fury of the night before had passed, but he knew he would not bend again toward companionship. That antipathy was too deep. He would never think of his father again without getting the whiff of that perfume. Let him have it; it was what he wanted, let him have it. They could part without an open quarrel, maybe, but they would part without love. They could part right now, within an hour.

Two grimy stairways led down into the cellar from the alley he turned into. One went to the furnace room, the other to the poolhall. The iron rail was blockaded with filled ashcans. Descent into Avernus, he said to himself, and went down the left-hand stair.

The door was locked. He knocked, and after some time knocked again. Finally someone pulled on the door from inside. It stuck, and was yanked irritably inward. His father stood there in his shirt sleeves, a cigar in his mouth.

"Oh," he said. "I was wondering what had become of you."

The basement air was foul and heavy, dense with the reek from the toilets. Henry saw as he stepped inside that at the far end only the night light behind the bar was on, but that light was coming from Schmeckebier's door at this end too, the two weak illuminations diffusing in the shadowy poolroom, leaving the middle in almost absolute dark. It was the appropriate time, the appropriate place, the stink of his prison appropriately concentrated. He drew his lungs full of it with a kind of passion, and he said, "I just came down to . . ."

"Who is dot?" Schmeckebier called out. He came to his door, wrapped to the armpits in a bar apron, with a spoon in his hand, and he bent, peering out into the dusk like a disturbed dwarf in an underhill cave. "John? Who? Oh, Henry. Shust in time, shust in time. It is not long now." His lower lip waggled, and he pulled it up, apparently with an effort.

Henry said, "What's not long?"

"Vot?" Schmeckebier said, and thrust his big head far out. "You forgot about it?"

"I must have," Henry said.

"The duck feed," his father said impatiently.

They stood staring at one another in the dusk. The right moment was gone. With a little twitch of the shoulder Henry let it go. He would wait awhile, pick his time. When Schmeckebier went back to his cooking, Henry saw through the doorway the lumpy bed, the big chair with a blanket folded over it, the rolltop desk littered with pots and pans, the green and white enamel of the range. A rich smell of roasting came out and mingled oddly with the chemical stink of toilet disinfectant.

"Are we going to eat in here?" he asked.

His father snorted. "How could we eat in there? Old Maxie lived in the ghetto too damn long. By God, I never saw such a boar's nest."

"Vot's duh matter? Vot's duh matter?" Schmeckebier said. His big lip thrust out, he stooped to look into the oven, and John Lederer went shaking his head up between the tables to the counter. Henry followed him, intending to make the break when he got the old man alone. But he saw the three plates set up on the bar, the three glasses of tomato juice, the platter of olives and celery, and he hesitated. His father reached with a salt shaker and shook a little salt into each glass of tomato juice.

"All the fixings," he said. "Soon as Max gets those birds out of the oven we can take her on."

Now it was easy to say, "As soon as the feed's over I'll be shoving off." Henry opened his mouth to say it, but was interrupted this time by a light tapping at the glass door beyond Sciutti's shop. He swung around angrily and saw duskily beyond the glass the smooth blond hair, the even smile.

"It's Billy," he said. "Shall I let him in?"

"Sure," the old man said. "Tell him to come in and have a duck with us."

But Billy Hammond shook his head when Henry asked him. He was shaking his head almost as he came through the door. "No thanks, I just ate. I'm full of chow mein. This is a family dinner anyway. You go on ahead."

"Got plenty," John Lederer said, and made a motion as if to set a fourth place at the counter.

"Who is dot?" Schmeckebier bawled from the back. "Who come in? Is dot Billy Hammond? Set him up a blate."

"By God, his nose sticks as far into things as his lip," Lederer said. Still holding the plate, he roared back, "Catch up with the parade, for Christ sake, or else tend to your cooking." He looked at Henry and Billy and chuckled.

Schmeckebier had disappeared, but now his squat figure blotted the lighted doorway again. "Vot? Vot you say?"

"Vot?" John Lederer said. "Vot, vot, vot? Vot does it matter vot I said? Get the hell back to your kitchen."

He was, Henry saw, in a high humor. The effect of last night was still with him. He was still playing Mine Host. He looked at the two of them and laughed so naturally that Henry almost joined him. "I think old Maxie's head is full of duck dressing," he said, and leaned on the counter. "I ever tell you about the time we came back from Reno together? We stopped off in the desert to look at a mine, and got lost on a little dirt road so we had to camp. I was trying to figure out where we were, and started looking for stars, but it was clouded over, hard to locate anything. So I ask old Maxie if he can see the Big Dipper anywhere. He thinks about that maybe ten minutes with his lip stuck out and then he says, 'I t'ink it's in duh water bucket.'"

He did the grating gutturals of Schmeckebier's speech so accurately that Henry smiled in spite of himself. His old man made another motion with the plate at Billy Hammond. "Better let me set you up a place."

"Thanks," Billy said. His voice was as polite and soft as his face, and his eyes had the ingenuous liquid softness of a girl's. "Thanks, I really just ate. You go on, I'll shoot a little pool if it's all right."

Now came Schmeckebier with a big platter held in both hands. He bore it smoking through the gloom of the poolhall and up the steps to the counter, and John Lederer took it from him there and with a flourish speared one after another three tight-skinned brown ducks and slid them onto the plates set side by side for the feast. The one frugal light from the backbar shone on them as they sat down. Henry looked over his shoulder to see Billy Hammond pull the cord and flood a table with a sharp-edged cone of brilliance. Deliberately, already absorbed, he chalked a cue. His lips pursed, and he whistled, and whistling, bent to take aim.

Lined up in a row, they were not placed for conversation, but John Lederer kept attempting it, leaning forward over his plate to see Schmeckebier or Henry. He filled his mouth with duck and dressing and chewed, shaking his head with pleasure, and snapped off a bite of celery with a crack like a breaking stick. When his mouth was clear he leaned and said to Schmeckebier, "Ah, das schmecht gut, hey, Maxie?"

"Ja," Schmeckebier said, and sucked grease off his lip and only then turned in surprise. "Say, you speak German?"

"Sure I speak German," Lederer said. "I worked three weeks once with an old squarehead brick mason that taught me the whole language. He taught me about sehr gut and nicht wahr and besser I bleiben right hier, and he always had his frau make me up a lunch full of kalter aufschnitt and gemixte pickeln. I know all about German."

Schmeckebier stared a moment, grunted, and went back to his eating. He had already stripped the meat from the bones and was gnawing the carcass.

"Anyway," John Lederer said, "es schmecht God damn good." He got up and went around the counter and drew a mug of coffee from the urn. "Coffee?" he said to Henry.

"Please."

His father drew another mug and set it before him. "Maxie?"

Schmeckebier shook his head, his mouth too full for talk. For a minute, after he had set out two little jugs of cream, Lederer stood as if thinking. He was watching Billy Hammond move quietly around the one lighted table, whistling. "Look at that sucker," Lederer said. "I bet he doesn't even know where he is."

By the time he got around to his stool he was back at the German. "*Schmeckebier*," he said. "What's that mean?"

"Uh?"

"What's your name mean? Tastes beer? Likes beer?"

Schmeckebier rolled his shoulders. The sounds he made eating were like sounds from a sty. Henry was half sickened, sitting next to him, and he wished the old man would let the conversation drop. But apparently it had to be a feast, and a feast called for chatter.

"That's a hell of a name, you know it?" Lederer said, and already he was up again and around the end of the counter. "You couldn't get into any church with a name like that." His eyes fastened on the big drooping greasy lip, and he grinned.

"Schmeckeduck, that ought to be your name," he said. "What's German for duck? Vogel? Old Max Schmeckevogel. How about number two?"

Schmeckebier pushed his plate forward and Lederer forked a duck out of the steam table. Henry did not take a second.

"You ought to have one," his father told him. "You don't get grub like this every day."

"One's my limit," Henry said.

For a while they worked at their plates. Back of him Henry heard the clack of balls hitting, and a moment later the rumble as a ball rolled down the chute from a pocket. The thin, abstracted whistling of Billy Hammond broke off, became words:

"Now Annie doesn't live here any more.
So you're the guy that she's been waiting for?
She told me that I'd know you by the blue of your eyes . . ."

"Talk about one being your limit," his father said. "When we lived in Nebraska we used to put on some feeds. You remember anything about Nebraska at all?"

"A little," Henry said. He was irritated at being dragged into reminiscences, and he did not want to hear how many ducks the town hog could eat at a sitting.

"We'd go out, a whole bunch of us," John Lederer said. "The sloughs were black with ducks in those days. We'd come back with a buggyful, and the womenfolks'd really put us on a feed. Fifteen, twenty, thirty people. Take a hundred ducks to fill 'em up." He was silent a moment, staring across the counter, chewing. Henry noticed that he had tacked two wings of a teal up on the frame of the backbar mirror, small, strong bows with a band of bright blue half hidden in them. The old man's eyes slanted over, caught Henry's looking at the wings.

"Doesn't seem as if we'd had a duck feed since we left there," he said. His forehead wrinkled; he rubbed his neck, leaning forward over his plate, and his eyes met Henry's in the backbar mirror. He spoke to the mirror, ignoring

the gobbling image of Schmeckebier between his own reflection and Henry's.

"You remember that set of china your mother used to have? The one she painted herself? Just the plain white china with the one design on each plate?"

Henry sat stiffly, angry that his mother's name should even be mentioned between them in this murky hole, and after what had passed. Gabble, gabble, gabble, he said to himself. If you can't think of anything else to gabble about, gabble about your dead wife. Drag her through the poolroom too. Aloud he said, "No, I guess I don't."

"Blue-wing teal," his father said, and nodded at the wings tacked to the mirror frame. "Just the wings, like that. Awful pretty. She thought a teal was about the prettiest little duck there was."

His vaguely rubbing hand came around from the back of his neck and rubbed along the cheek, pulling the slack flesh and distorting the mouth. Henry said nothing, watching the pouched hound eyes in the mirror.

It was a cold, skin-tightening shock to realize that the hound eyes were cloudy with tears. The rubbing hand went over them, shaded them like a hatbrim, but the mouth below remained distorted. With a plunging movement his father was off the stool.

"Oh, God damn!" he said in a strangling voice, and went past Henry on hard, heavy feet, down the steps and past Billy Hammond, who neither looked up nor broke the sad thin whistling.

Schmeckebier had swung around. "Vot's duh matter? Now vot's duh matter?"

With a short shake of the head, Henry turned away from him, staring after his father down the dark poolhall. He felt as if orderly things were breaking and flying apart in his mind; he had a moment of white blind terror that this whole scene upon whose reality he counted was really only a dream, something conjured up out of the bottom of his consciousness where he was accustomed to comfort himself into total sleep. His mind was still full of the anguished look his father had hurled at the mirror before he ran.

The hell with you, the look had said. The hell with you, Schmeckebier, and you, my son Henry. The hell with your ignorance, whether you're stupid or whether you just don't know all you think you know. You don't know enough to kick dirt down a hole. You know nothing at all, you knew less than nothing because you know things wrong.

He heard Billy's soft whistling, saw him move around his one lighted table —a well-brought-up boy from some suburban town, a polite soft gentle boy lost and wandering among pimps and prostitutes, burying himself for some reason among people who never even touched his surface. Did he shoot pool in his bed at night, tempting sleep, as Henry did? Did his mind run carefully to angles and banks and englishes, making a reflecting mirror of them to keep from looking through them at other things?

by Wallace Stegner

Almost in terror he looked out across the sullen cave, past where the light came down in an intense isolated cone above Billy's table, and heard the lugubrious whistling that went on without intention of audience, a recurrent and deadening and only half-conscious sound. He looked toward the back, where his father had disappeared in the gloom, and wondered if in his bed before sleeping the old man worked through a routine of little jobs: cleaning the steam table, ordering a hundred pounds of coffee, jacking up the janitor about the mess in the hall. He wondered if it was possible to wash yourself to sleep with restaurant crockery, work yourself to sleep with chores, add yourself to sleep with columns of figures, as you could play yourself to sleep with a pool cue and a green table and fifteen colored balls. For a moment, in the sad old light with the wreckage of the duck feast at his elbow, he wondered if there was anything more to his life, or his father's life, or Billy Hammond's life, or anyone's life, than playing the careful games that deadened you into sleep.

Schmeckebier, beside him, was still groping in the fog of his mind for an explanation of what had happened. "Vere'd he go?" he said, and nudged Henry fiercely. "Vot's duh matter?"

Henry shook him off irritably, watching Billy Hammond's oblivious bent head under the light. He heard Schmeckebier's big lip flop and heard him sucking his teeth.

"I tell you," the guttural voice said. "I got somet'ing dot fixes him if he feels bum."

He too went down the stairs past the lighted table and into the gloom at the back. The light went on in his room, and after a minute or two his voice was shouting, "John! Say, come here, uh? Say, John!"

Eventually John Lederer came out of the toilet and they walked together between the tables. In his fist Schmeckebier was clutching a square bottle. He waved it in front of Henry's face as they passed, but Henry was watching his father. He saw the crumpled face, oddly rigid, like the face of a man in the grip of a barely controlled rage, but his father avoided his eyes.

"Kümmel," Schmeckebier said. He set four ice cream dishes on the counter and poured three about a third full of clear liquor. His squinted eyes lifted and peered toward Billy Hammond, but Henry said, on an impulse, "Let him alone. He's walking in his sleep."

So there were only the three. They stood together a moment and raised their glasses. "Happy days," John Lederer said automatically. They drank.

Schmeckebier smacked his lips, looked at them one after another, shook his head in admiration of the quality of his kümmel, and waddled back toward his room with the bottle. John Lederer was already drawing hot water to wash the dishes.

In the core of quiet which even the clatter of crockery and the whistling

of Billy Hammond did not break into, Henry said what he had to say. "I'll be leaving," he said. "Probably tonight."

But he did not say it in anger, or with the cold command of himself that he had imagined in advance. He said it like a cry, and with the feeling he might have had on letting go the hand of a friend too weak and too exhausted to cling any longer to their inadequate shared driftwood in a wide cold sea.

1951: *from Epoch*

THE HUNTERS

by Harris Downey, who appeared in the O. Henry collection for 1949 with "The Mulhausen Girls," one of his first published stories. Born and brought up in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, he was educated at Louisiana State University and New York University. He is now assistant professor of English at L.S.U. He served four years with the Air Corps in World War II, principally in the European theater. In addition to his short stories, he has published poetry and critical articles in a number of magazines.

Private Meadows was lost. He had no idea which way his outfit had gone, had ever intended to go.

They were moving into France from the north. Naturally, their progress would be to the south. But during their fighting from Cherbourg they had moved in all directions. He did not know how long it had been since they left Cherbourg—three weeks, four weeks. It was some long, undeterminable stretch of time. Nor did he know how many miles they had come—forty, fifty, maybe two hundred. They had come through villages—slowly, ferreting snipers from the ruins that their own artillery made. Someone had named the names of the villages but he had not understood. He had asked the names again and again, feeling that he should establish something familiar in his memory, feeling that he might come to understand where he was going, what he was doing. But between question and answer he would

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fall back into the torpor that his life had been since Cherbourg. The answer, like a fragment slanting a helmet, would strike his mind obliquely and deflect away into the noisy and flashing anonymity of war.

He had traversed plow-furrowed fields when silence, imminent with violence, weighted him down like a pack. He had traversed shell-pelleted fields when fear tangled his legs like a barricade. He had seen his enemy and his comrades sprawled grotesque and cold in the neutrality of death, as impersonal as the cows among them, angling stiff legs to the sky. He had thrown grenades at hidden men; and once, staring into wide, stark eyes down the bead of his aim, he had sighed out his breath toward a union more intimate than love—and more treacherous than its denial. He had seen a dog, tethered at the gate, howl at the noise of destruction and die in terror; had seen bees swarm from their hives at the ground shake of cannon and hang in the air, directionless. He had seen Frenchmen return to their villages to gesticulate the glory of victory and, sobering, to peer from behind a silly grin at the rubbish that had been their homes. But these things had not touched him. He had left himself somewhere, and the farther he walked the terrain of war, the farther he went from himself.

He heard the spasmodic eruptions of war. He listened to silence hissing like the quick fuse of a bomb. Yet he felt nothing—unless it was weariness. He walked under the high fire of artillery as though it were a canopy against the rain. At first he had been unhappy and afraid; and perhaps, in the static musing, in the constant but unapprehended memory that was himself, he was yet unhappy and afraid.

Casually walking, talking to his friends, or running, crawling, squirming on his belly, looking ahead for cover, he had followed his leaders from sector to sector. The sun had come up on his left, on his right, from behind him, had sheered through the odd geometry of fields and had slid down the high summer clouds behind him, in front of him—always in a new tangent to the hedgerow. Twelve times, twenty times. How many times had he seen the sun point a surprising direction that was the west?

That morning he had seen the sun come up in the direction they were to move. Lying against the massed roots, he had looked through an opening of the hedgerow over a pasture that ran a quarter of a mile to a woods.

There near the woods he saw a farmhouse with spindly trees growing around it like a fence. He lay still, watching the sun slip above the treetops. To the right of him lay Barr, a replacement who had been in the company only a week or so, a talkative fellow who somehow managed to hold his happiness and his identity about him. Beyond Barr lay Pederson, whose twin brother had been wounded in his first skirmish and sent back. To the left of him was Harrod, whom Private Meadows had been with since induction. And beyond Harrod was Walton, a slow-talking, card-playing soldier who

had come in with Barr. These men were his friends; by virtue of their position in the squad, they were his friends.

All along the row men lay with their heads in their helmets. Soon, from somewhere behind him, an order would be given and everyone would begin to move. But he would not comprehend the order. Even when it was passed on to him and he in turn passed it on, he would not consider its meaning. He had given up trying to understand words—orders, directions, cautions. He moved and lived in a channel of sounds, but his mind took them in as involuntarily as his lungs breathed the air. It was his eyes that activated him. He watched his leaders and his comrades. He followed. He did what they did. He listened acutely and unendingly but never accepted the meaning of sound. Consciously, he heard only silence—that dead silence which makes one feel that he has gone deaf.

As he looked through the hedgerow at the sun, he began to hear the silence gather. Even the men behind him, the lieutenant, the sergeants, had become silent. He could feel the silence creep along the hedgerow, turning the heads of his comrades. The sun, having cleared the trees, seemed to stick in the silence. The silence grew heavy. He could feel it on his back pressing him against the earth. The grass in the field was still, as though the silence were barrier against the wind. The silence swelled, grew taut, then violently burst.

It was the artillery from his own lines. The barrage was steady and strong. From beyond the woods the fire was returned, its shells falling short in the field. The cows in the field had lifted their heads and now stood as still as stone. Two horses from the farmyard thundered across the level terrain. A fox bounding from the woods reached the clearing and raced round in a circle.

Private Meadows pulled his head away from the opening of the hedgerow and leaned back against the embankment of roots. His unit began to move down the hedgerow. He followed, on his hands and knees, dragging the butt of his rifle.

When they came to the end of the row, they bounded into the woods at the south. There in the woods they dispersed and moved to the east. It was there in the woods that he got lost. He had followed the others for a time and then, of a sudden, he was alone. The artillery had stopped. It was the silence that called him to consciousness. He walked on, listening. He could hear nothing but the crackle of twigs under his feet. There was no firing even in the distance. And but for the noise he himself made, the woods were quiet—no wind in the trees, no birds even. He sat down, leaned against the trunk of a tree, crossed his piece over his thighs, his finger on the trigger, and waited. He waited for a sound.

He had expected that other men would come from the direction he had

come. But somewhere, skirting the trees, he must have got out of the line of advance, for no men came.

The woods were eerie. It seemed that all the men had walked off into another world, leaving him alone. He didn't like the silence. He got up and began to walk, taking a direction half left to the one that brought him to his silent place. He came to a cart path. But he would not enter it. He stayed in the woods, keeping the path in sight, following it; it was angling him again to the left. He walked slowly, cautiously, wondering whether he were approaching the enemy line. The woods were thick and dark. Each tree was watching him, listening to the sounds he made. Each step was a deepening into fear. It was not the sort of fear he knew under fire. There he was scared, but this was a worse fear—unrelenting and conscious.

He hardly moved at all, putting one foot carefully before him and looking about, listening with all his body to the silence, before he brought the other foot forward. Then he stopped still, like a man yelled into a brace. He had heard a voice. His heartbeat pounded the silence. Then, directionless, whispered, he heard distinctly: "Hey." It was an American word, he guessed. But German snipers used American words as traps. He started to walk on, and then a little louder this time: "Hey." The word spiraled through the silence like a worm in wood. He halted again. He was afraid to turn. He dared not lift his rifle. Whoever called had a bead on him. Tentatively he put a foot forward, took a step. "Hey." He was playing with him as a cat does a rat, teasing him before he put the bullet in his back or between his eyes, waiting for him to make some particular move—to run, or turn, or lift his rifle, or gaze up into the barrel tracing him.

His enemy was all around him, saw him at every angle. He stood motionless, as though immobility forestalled the shot. He felt the sweat burst on his forehead. He was weak. In his memory he reviewed the sound, trying to divine its direction; and the voice came again. While he was listening to the voice in his memory, it came again, confusing him: "Hey there." It came from all sides of him, the voice of the forest itself. "Put down your gun." The command was clear and slow—behind him. He lowered his rifle to the ground, stepped backward, waited. "Turn aroun'." He turned slowly, holding his breath. He saw no one.

He watched the trunks of trees, expecting a head—and a gun—to slip round into the open. "Where you goin', bud?" At the foot of a tree to his left oblique, partly concealed under a bush, sat a man on his haunches, leaning forward on his rifle. It was an American: the helmet, the green jacket. "Whatcha scared of, bud?" The man stretched a foot forward and rose clear of the brush.

Private Meadows stood still. Was it a joke? He rather expected others to appear from the forest—from out of the brush, from behind the trees; ex-

pected all his lost comrades to appear from the silence that had swallowed them. He wondered whether he had not been lost in meditation; whether, as he followed his comrades through the trees, he had not fallen into a fearful dream and was now emerging into reality as one of his friends shook his shoulder, urging him on. He had been hypnotized by his fear. He wanted to cry but was too much exhausted to cry. The man standing before him, touching his shoulder with a thick, hairy hand, was strange. He and the man were alone. And the silence was real. "Come out of it, bud." But the man was not concerned. A grin stretched over his fat face like a painted mouth stretching over a tight balloon. He was enjoying the joke he had played. "Whatcha doin' here, soldier?" The voice was as cold as authority.

"I got lost," Private Meadows said.

Then the voice was as hooligan as persecution: "That's misbehavior before the enemy. They'd hang you for that. That's desertion."

Private Meadows didn't know the ensign of the man before him. Nor did he attempt to surmise it. It would be whatever the manner suggested it to be. In the man's manner there was some kind of authority. So Private Meadows answered with the only defense he knew: "I was lost."

"Me too," the man said. "*I'm* lost."

The man pointed to the gun on the ground. Private Meadows picked it up. Then he looked at the man squarely. Vaguely in his mind were the questions: *Why did you make me put it down? Why did you scare me?* But he never uttered them. They hung wordless in his mind, expressed only as the straight, surprised, and momentary stare. Then they faded into his real being, that shadowy, remote musing, progressively growing dark since Cherbourg—and inaccessible. He looked off, into the direction he had been walking. "What are we gonna do?" he asked.

The man walked forward. His answer was a command: "Take it easy—till we know what's up."

Private Meadows put his arm through the sling, settled his rifle behind his shoulder, and followed. He was over his fright now, the weakness gone from his knees. He was safe again in the guidance of the Army.

He saw the broad round shoulders before him humping the air like an elephant's flanks and the heavy field boots scraping through the brush, flushing the silence. The noise of their progress was to Private Meadows an easeful shelter, like a low roof on a rainy night. Then there was a burst of a cannon—the slamming of a door in the giant structure of war, shattering the silence of the endless chambers that, for a moment, Private Meadows had forgot.

"A eighty-eight," the man said. They had both stopped at the cannon burst, had looked at each other and then in the direction of the sound. The burst came again, then again, as they stood motionless, listening. Then came

the sound of rifle fire, pelleting the continuing bursts of the cannon. "Well, now we know where we are." The man spoke softly, his head, poked forward on the thick neck, malling up and down—a mechanical ram impelled by words. "Let's go," he said. He changed the direction nearly full right. They came to a dirt road. "You been on that road?" he asked. Private Meadows shook his head. "Must be mined. Or we'd be using it," the man said. "Sump'n comin'." Down the road, winding out from the trees, came a cart. They drew back, settled themselves behind a bush, and waited. The cart came slowly by, going in the direction from which they had come. A man walked beside the horse and from time to time put his hand at the bridle. In the seat of the cart was a woman holding a baby. In the back, among some baggage, sat a child, leaning her head against a mattress.

After the cart was out of sight, the two soldiers went again to the edge of the road. "Guess it ain't mined," the big one said. His eyes, nearly obscured under the net-covered helmet, were two little mice peering from under a crib. His grin was the lifting of a rake, and the mice scurried back into their holes. "Let's go," he said. He jumped the ditch and ran across the road.

Mechanically Private Meadows followed him. "Ain't we gonna try to get back?" he asked.

The man turned sharply and looked at him distrustfully. "You don't wanna go now, do you?"

"I don't know," Private Meadows said.

"We getting back, see. But we takin' the long way roun'." Private Meadows shrugged his shoulders. He was tired. The man had struck his great round face close to his and was staring into his eyes. Private Meadows held his face against the stare but wearily closed his eyes. Sleep covered him like a breaker. His body swayed. Then he shook his head and opened his eyes. "Come on," the man said.

They walked through the woods, keeping within sight of the road. The distant rifle fire was continuous. The artillery had begun again, and from time to time a great cannon jolted all the other sounds to silence. Though they were walking oblique from the firing, Private Meadows wondered whether, on the tangent of their direction, they might not be approaching the enemy's lines. But this wonder was fleeting, like the recurrent sleep that blacked him out whenever he closed his eyes. Responsibility had gone the way of his fear; he was automaton again. He was following.

The man, who had been walking ahead, jumped to cover behind a tree, at the same time wagging a fat hand around his waist in signal to Private Meadows. Private Meadows was behind a tree almost as quickly as the man, and then, peering around, he saw the cause of alarm. A German soldier was coming toward them. He was unhelmeted, a cap pulled low over his forehead. Slung over his shoulder and hanging at his waist was a leather case.

"Hey," the big man called in the whispering voice. The German was startled by the sight of the man even before he heard the voice; for at the utterance he had already stopped, gazing first at the face and then at the rifle pointing from the fat round hip. "Hey," the man repeated—needlessly, for the German was standing frozen in the first attitude of shock.

Without turning his gaze from the German, the man called out to Private Meadows: "Is it clear?"

"Looks clear," Private Meadows said, shuttling his gaze among the trees.

The man approached the German until he stood within a few feet of him. "Search him," he said.

Private Meadows, holding his rifle at the waist, came beside the German, with his left hand felt the pockets of the uniform and, walking behind him, lifted the leather case from his shoulder.

"What's in it?" the man asked, still gazing at the German, thrusting the muzzle of his gun forward. The German, who had stood listless, his hands dropping to his sides after Private Meadows lifted the case from his shoulder, stared at his victor, as though in the uncomprehended words there was a new terror. Then quickly, as though guessing the meaning, he lifted his hands shoulder high in surrender. "Higher, you sonofabitch." The man motioned with the muzzle of his gun. The German understood the motion and lifted his hands above his head. "What's in it?" This time the voice was different. The German understood that the words were not for him. He cupped his hands behind his head.

"It's money," Private Meadows said. He held a handful of the bills in front of his companion.

"Christ! Kraut money," the big man said.

"It's filled with it," Private Meadows said, sliding the money back into the case.

"Where'd you get that money, bud?" the man said. The German became rigid. The terror returned to his eyes, but with it there seemed to be another feeling—of impatience, perhaps of injustice. "Where'd you steal that money, Kraut?" And at the question there came into the German's face a sense of outrage. The big man saw it. "You bastard," he said. "Can't you speak English?"

"*Nein*," the German said quickly. And he shook his head, "Nein."

"Nein, nein!" The man mocked him. "You dumb bastard." He lifted the muzzle of his gun and twice thrust it forward in the direction from which the German had come. "Get goin'," he said. "Vamoose." The German was doubtful. He turned his body slowly but kept shuttling his gaze from the gun to the fat, dark face above it. "Get the hell goin'." The German took a step tentatively, looked once at the fair-faced soldier who was adjusting the leather case at his waist. But in his eyes there was neither help nor corrobo-

ration—only indecision and doubt as great as his own. He started walking slowly away, his hands still cupped over his head. Then, just as he took the first step that was quicker and surer than the rest, the shot cracked through the woods. He fell forward on his face.

The big man lowered his rifle. Private Meadows, his mouth wide open, watched him open the bolt and push it forward again. He looked down at the ejected cartridge case, awesomely, as though it were a rabbit out of a hat, surprising and not quite convincing.

"Let's get the hell outa here," the man said. He walked quickly past Private Meadows.

Private Meadows looked again where the German had fallen. He saw an arm lifted, like a swimmer's in arrested motion. He saw it fall forward. He turned and followed his leader.

They came to a clearing, a series of fields surrounded by hedgerows and forming a rolling terrain.

"Better not go out there," the man said. Yet, if they followed through the woods, along the edge of the clearing, they would approach too directly the enemy line. "We gone far enough anyways." He listened to the distant crack of the rifles. He sat down and pulled his rifle over his fat legs crossed like a sawbuck. "Let's see that money." Private Meadows handed him the case and sat down beside him. The man dumped the contents on the ground. There was a tablet of forms printed in German. He tossed it away. "Musta been a pay sergeant . . . Suppose he was payin' men out on the goddamned *firin'* line?" The money was taped in seven tight bundles. "That sonofabitch was makin' way with somethin', you can bet your hat on that." He studied the numerals on the bills. He divided the money into two stacks and handed one stack to Private Meadows. He held up the case. "Want it?" Private Meadows looked at the case and then into the lariat eyes hesitantly. He shook his head. The man tossed the case beside the forms.

They both sat looking at the money in their hands. "Suppose it's any good?"

"It's German," Private Meadows said.

"Yeah, I guess so. But francs are good. We gonna get paid in francs. If ever we get paid."

"Maybe when we get to Germany——" Private Meadows said.

"Not me. I ain't go'n *get* that far," the man said. "Not me. Je-e-esus! Not me." He spread out his thick legs before him. "Look at them goats!"

In the clearing there were three goats. They had come through a break in the hedgerow or had climbed up some unnoticeable ravine, for they had not been there when the men first looked out. They neither grazed nor moved. It seemed that they were listening to the sounds of the firing.

"I'll take the one on the left," the man said. "You take the one on the right. And I'll bet you my stack of tens against it." He chunked out a bundle of the little bills.

Private Meadows spread the bundles of money fan-fashion, selected a bundle, threw it out, then turned toward the man—his look bending under the helmet to ask: *Now what?*

"We'll have to fire together or they'll be to hell and gone. Yours on the right." The man caracoled his arm into the sling and was adjusting himself to fire from the sitting position. Then Private Meadows understood.

"I . . . I don't think——" But the man was in position. Private Meadows thrust his arm through his sling quickly.

"Are you ready?"

"Say, do you think——?"

"Are you ready?"

Private Meadows jerked himself to the kneeling position and slid the gun butt into his shoulder, his face tight against the stock. He squinted his eyes as he leveled the sight. "O.K."

The man muzzled against his gun, and each of his commands was whispered in the respiration of a breath: "Ready—aim—fire."

The rifles cracked. The right goat fell, its front legs bending before it. The left goat sprang into the air, like a horse rearing, then rushed forward and crashed face first into the ground. The middle goat lifted his head as though sniffing the air but did not move from where it stood.

"Look at that dumb bastard," the man said. He humped his shoulders over his rifle. "I bet I get him first shot." He turned his head toward Private Meadows, his chin sliding along the gun stock. "O.K.?" he asked impatiently.

"I——" But the man was straining in a flesh-taut position, ready to fire. "O.K.," Private Meadows said.

The man took aim. The goat started walking forward, his nose still in the air. The man shifted his gun, aimed again, fired. The goat bleated once, turned, and ran. The man shot again. The goat fell, gave three long trembling bleats, and was silent.

"Well, it's yours," the man said. He leaned back, picked up the money, and threw it to Private Meadows. "That bastard." He crawled back against the tree, put his gun on the ground beside him, and pulled a package from his knapsack. "Got a ration?" he asked.

"I got some choc'late," Private Meadows said. He stood up, holding the money out from him as if he might throw it back to the man or fling it into the woods. He looked down at the notes in his hand—thoughtfully, as though trying to recall how they came to be there. Then he slipped them into his jacket pocket. He sat down again and took out his chocolate. He

took a bite of the hard cube, lay back on the ground, and immediately fell asleep.

"Hey. Hey, bud." The man was pushing his boot into Private Meadows's side. "Get up. The artillery's stopped."

Private Meadows sat up. The firing had almost stopped. "We musta taken the hill," he said.

"It's a town," the man said. "A village. We were after a village."

Private Meadows stood up. "You suppose we really took it?"

"Sounds like it," the man said. "We better get goin'. We better start findin' ourselves." He started walking down the edge of the clearing. The hulking form, moored to some narrow gaze, rode the slow steps heavily, in strenuous swells and sudden falls. Private Meadows followed. To their right the sun was halfway down the sky.

They came in view of a farmhouse. It stood in the clearing about fifty yards away. "Looks deserted," the man said. They stood looking over the field at the small squat house. "We'll see," the man said. He lifted his rifle and fired. Then they waited, but there was no sign of life from the house. "Can't tell if I even hit." He fired again. And as they stood waiting for whatever they expected might happen, an airplane loomed from the south. They ducked quickly into the woods and there from among the trees watched the plane. It was flying low and unsteadily. "Damned thing's fallin'," the man said. And as he spoke, they saw a figure drop from the plane—and then another. A parachute opened and then fell into the jolt of full bloom. The second opened, leapt up at the hinges of the air, jolted. Then a third. They had not seen the third drop from the plane but there it moved, in echelon, with the others.

"Brother!" the man said, lifting his rifle. "I'll take the one on the left again. Same bet."

Private Meadows stared as the man pivoted his gun on the floating figure and fired.

"Quick, you bastard," the man said, stepping closer to him, his mouth curling down from the utterance in anger. The impatient words were command.

Private Meadows shouldered his gun and, while still leveling the figure into his sight, fired. He saw a body twitch, the hands fall from the cords, the head lean back. As he lowered his gun across his chest, he drew his heels together and stood straight and stiff, gaping at what he had done.

"Same again on the middle one," the man said. He lifted his gun, but his target was already falling beyond the roof of the house. "God damn," he said, dropping his gun from his shoulder. "He's outa sight 'cause you waited so long. What were you waitin' for?"

"You don't shoot men when they're parachutin'."

"My ass! You don't shoot *prisoners*, do you?"

"You sure they were Germans?" His voice was almost supplication.

"How do I know?" He started walking into the woods. "Let's get the hell away from here."

Private Meadows stood holding his gun over his chest, his hand on the bolt. He looked over the field. The two white chutes, now lying on the ground, were barely visible. He drew his bolt, ejecting the cartridge case; thrust the bolt forward again; and, yet holding the gun across his chest, followed the man into the woods.

"Suppose they were *Americans!*" he called out.

The man stopped, turned back—the accusing, distrustful look again in his eyes. "American, French, Kraut, whatever they are, they're fly boys, playin' games in the air and sleepin' in a bed at night." His helmet was almost touching Private Meadows's own. "Look, bud, you shoot first and *suppose* afterward, or you'll get lead between your own eyes." He drew back a step. "Ain't you killed any before?"

Private Meadows remembered the terrified eyes staring into his own. He answered doubtfully, in the voice of conjecture: "But I knew who I was killin'."

The fat lips drew tight round a sibilant of contempt. Then, "Killin's killin'," he said. "How long you been in this push anyways?"

"Since Cherbourg."

The man looked him up and down. "It's a wonder you lasted this long."

Through woods, over the dirt road, and through woods again to the first fields. Down a hedgerow cautiously. Debris of the advance: cartridge belts, helmets, clips yet filled with bullets, a knit cap, a dog lying dead, a deck of cards scattered, and letters. The wounded and dead removed, but the signs of death in the wreckage. And then the main road, from which the night before they had deployed. Now an ambulance passing, now a jeep. A squad of soldiers, bearded, and fatuous with grime, shoveling dirt from an embankment to cover the carcass of a cow. Salvage of tanks and trucks. Trees broken and charred. A column of medics, walking with stooped weariness, into a side road. Trucks, filled with infantrymen, coming up from the rear. Then the village: "This town off limits for all military personnel." Really no village at all, only rubble: a tall mahogany armoire standing erect and unscratched among bricks and nameless jointures of wood like an exaggerated product in an advertisement; the horseshoe arches of four windows, like a backstage flat, signifying a church; the graveyard, a grotesquerie of holes, stone, and upturned coffins; and, sitting atop a fallen door, a yellow-and-white kitten washing an outstretched paw.

by Harris Downey

At the entrance of the village and even in the street beyond the off-limits sign there were soldiers. They stood in groups, but they were quiet, looking over the ruins of the village or down the wreckage-strewn road they had traversed, staring vacantly at the interpreter talking to a group of five Nazi officers or at the Military Police helping a sergeant line up a lengthening formation of prisoners. The scene was almost still, like a rehearsal of a play where everyone waits for the director to reach a decision.

The two soldiers stopped by an off-limits sign and surveyed the scene. "I gotta find my company," the big man said. He went up to a group of soldiers. Private Meadows watched him a moment and then followed after. He saw one of the soldiers answering the big man's question, pointing away from the village. And before Private Meadows reached the group the big man walked away. Private Meadows stopped, ready to lift his hand in farewell, but the man went lunging on without looking back—the heavy body, in its laboring gait, an enemy to the air it humped and to the ground it scuffed: the beast that walks alone, that—among all the animals of the forest and in the meeting of its kind—is yet alone, the stalker of secret places, the hunter. Private Meadows sensed the solitariness, but he thought it was the realization of his own loneliness that made him shudder.

He approached the group of soldiers and asked the whereabouts of his company. All the men looked at him blankly. And then one, interpreting the silence of the group, answered: "I don't know."

Private Meadows turned away. Beyond the formation of prisoners he saw some French civilians crossing the street. A fat woman, carrying a hamper, walked down the side of the formation, a little white dog following her, scurrying from one side to the other to sniff at the boots of the prisoners or at something in the rubble.

He was alone again. He was lost.

At home he had often had a dream of being late for school. The scenes of the dream were always different, but the dream was always the same. An unsuccessful effort to get to school: the determination, the hurry; running down the street, then caught in some void where time passed and he stood still; or still discovering himself at a strange corner, not knowing the direction, not knowing how he came to be there. The remembrance of the dream was fleeting but the familiar hopeless feeling of it remained. He felt that no one here would know his company, that his company would be in a distant place maneuvering through some different duty. He had left his company that very same morning after sunrise and only now was the sun beginning to set. But his calculation gave him no assurance. He felt that he had been separated from his comrades for a campaign of time. And this—this feeling —was his real knowledge.

He went from soldier to soldier, from group to group, asking the position of his company—his question automatic and hopeless, but persistent like a sick man's fancy. And when a soldier answered "Yes" and named the directions, his mind was filled with only the realization of the soldier's knowing, so that he had to ask again.

His company was bivouacked less than a mile from the village. It was still twilight when he walked among his platoon.

"Meadows! Man, I thought you'd found your number." It was Barr. He was sitting on the ground, leaning against the wood fence. He touched the ground beside him in invitation for Meadows to sit.

"What happened to you?" Harrod, too, was leaning against the fence. He was smoking a cigarette. His face was black with grease and dirt.

"Guess I musta got lost," Private Meadows said. He leaned his gun against the fence, dropping his helmet to the ground, and sat down.

Without looking around Barr stretched his hand to his left and said: "They got Pederson." Private Meadows looked up at him. "And Walton was shot in the hip but he'll get all right, lucky dog." He put his feet out before him, crossed them at the ankles, said wearily: "We 'bout all would have got it if it wasn't for those bombers. Zoom. Bang. And not another eighty-eight booped after that."

"Those *what?*" Private Meadows asked.

"The bombers. The lucky dogs. Sleeping in England tonight."

"I got lost," Private Meadows said.

Harrod and Barr both looked at him.

"Well, you're home now, chum," Barr said. "Good ole Easy Company. Gonna have hot stuff tonight—outa mess kit. And a sleep, I-hope-I-hope-I-hope, here against a soft, warm fence."

"Wish they'd hurry with chow," Harrod said. "If I close my eyes, I'll never make it. . . . How much longer they gonna keep us in the line anyhow?"

"Couple of more days, I guess," Barr said. His tone was now flat, as if he had no interest in what he said.

"I wonder if I'll live that long," Harrod said. There was nothing in his voice; it sounded like a routine speculation, as if he wondered whether he would be in town long enough to send his clothes to the laundry.

It was almost dark.

Private Meadows was bent forward, his arms lying against his thighs, his eyes pressed against his wrists. Barr noticed that each hand clutched a stack of notes and, as he started to ask what they were, he heard the sobbing. It simpered like a fuse and then burst. The shoulders shook convulsively. "What the hell, kid?" Barr sidled close to him and put his hand on his arm.

by Harris Downey

Harrod looked over at him, then flipped away the dead cigarette that he had been absently holding between his fingers. A whistle blew.

"Snap out of it, kid," Barr said, rising. "It's time for chow." He stepped back and picked up his mess kit. Then he and Harrod stood on each side of Private Meadows and waited.

1954: *from the Sewanee Review*

THE INDIAN FEATHER

by Thomas Dabney Mabry. Formerly executive director of the Museum of Modern Art, New York, Mr. Mabry was also originator and director of Life *magazine's photographic exhibits and film strips. He is a Harvard graduate, has a Master's degree from Vanderbilt, and at the present time is teaching at the State University of Iowa in the Writers' Workshop.*

"You may as well go on and go," his father said, sitting up a little and shoving another pillow behind him. "I'm not all that sick."

At the other end of the room his mother was pulling down the ivory-colored shades one by one. She looked at him over her shoulder and her eyes said he is very sick indeed and if you had any consideration for me you would not be going off somewhere.

"It's just for the afternoon," he said quickly, turning his face away from the tall windows that were closed against the spring sunshine. In the dimmed room his father's bed had resumed its consequential air. An extra quilt lay folded over the sturdy foot and the carvings of the high headboard twisted and turned in fixed and sculptured ambiguity.

His mother came back and stood beside the bed and her fingers smoothed a pillow's white monogram.

He watched her small hand finally come to rest on his father's arm. Then he said, "But I'll be glad to stay if you want me to . . . if there's anything you want me to do for you down at the factory."

His father smiled. "No sense in your sitting around down there on a sunny Saturday afternoon," he said, "without a blame thing to do."

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The room's even light warmed, burgeoned to yellow and paused. It glowed intensely for a moment and sank back suddenly to grey again, and he felt the whole outside rush of shadow against the drawn shades. ". . . Besides," his father was saying, "Kirk is more likely to stay sober if he's with you. And I'll need him bad Monday if it rains and we have a good season."

"Yes sir," he said, and hoped the clouds he had noticed that morning were the usual kind, and not rain clouds.

Again the shades went luminous with the shifting sunlight and the walnut bed in front of him turned gold. Against the wall the sculptured wood shone for an instant in the travelling light like an ancient and beneficent face.

The smile lingered: "I'll need you too," his father said. "No telling how much tobacco'll come pouring in next week." The expression darkened. "But I'll be up from here by Monday," he added, and put his hand under the pillow for his watch. "Go on and have a good time."

His mother relaxed into her wicker rocking chair and looked forlornly at him through her glasses. He tried not to understand the look. From the distant dining-room he could hear Stella clearing off the table. He glanced at the tray of uneaten food that still weighted his father's legs into two straight sticks under the sheets.

He backed to the open door. Through his sneakers the sill was hard against the arch of his foot and from the hall floor behind him a coolness crept up under his pants and caressed the calves of his legs behind his knees. He kept his eyes on his father's face. "Are you sure there's nothing I can do for you?" he asked again, and when a faint "No" formed on the grey lips he said, "I hope you'll feel better, Father."

He let his foot slip off the sill into the hall, and backed away not looking at his mother. But from the closing crack of the door he saw her pretty arm reach out to the tray, saw his father turn his head toward the curtained windows and the unseen spring trees.

The front door was open; the May air filled the dark hall. He took his cap off the hat-rack—the one he called his hunting cap—and pulled his rifle out of the umbrella stand where he had stored it before lunch, took a handful of cartridges from the hat-rack drawer, and went out into the driveway and climbed into his old Ford.

Mr. Kirk was waiting outside the gate when he drove up, leaning against the wire fence in front of the one-story brick house that he rented from the boy's father for $10 a month. Mr. Kirk's wife and his three daughters were sitting on the porch silently looking out at the afternoon. He tipped his hat to them. The two younger girls and Mrs. Kirk were barefooted, but the eldest daughter wore high-heeled shoes.

"How's J.J. today, J.D.?" Mr. Kirk asked, opening the car door.

"Better, I think," he said.

"Would you mind dropping my Ellen Alice up town?" Mr. Kirk asked. "It won't be out of our way none."

"Glad to," he said.

Mr. Kirk raised his voice and without looking back called out, "Come on here, girl."

She came running, her heels clicking on the brick walk. She opened the door and squeezed into the narrow space beside her father. "I don't want to crowd you," she said as the car moved forward. Her high smooth pompadour gleamed yellow like glue and the smell of her perfume filled the space between them, its heavy fugitive odor lingering in little waves even after the car had gathered speed.

At the corner of First and Franklin he slowed down and stopped at the newly installed traffic light in front of the Lillian Theatre. The electric bulbs that studded the theatre entrance and that at night seemed to pierce the sky with their brilliance now struggled weakly in the dry white sunlight. Ellen Alice leaned out to gaze. "I'll just get out here," she said, and got out. "I'm certainly much obliged."

The traffic light changed and he started to pull away from the curb.

"Hold on, J.D.," Mr. Kirk said suddenly in a low voice.

He put on the brakes again and as he did so a man in worn blue overalls and mud-dry shoes leaned into the car and slowly placed his hand over Mr. Kirk's knee.

"Hi, friend," Mr. Kirk said with composure.

The man stood waiting, as if certain Mr. Kirk had more to say. Mr. Kirk looked up. "You class that tobacco clean before you bring it in to me, you hear?" he said, and felt in his coat pocket for a match and stuck the end of it in his ear. He twisted it around, pulled it out and threw it away. It landed at the feet of the man who still stood close beside him. "You class it clean, mister," Mr. Kirk said, thrusting his head out through the car door, "or I'll dock you so much you won't have enough gimmie left to take your old lady a sack of candy."

The man's lips smiled around his teeth that were clenched on a chew of tobacco. His eyes, under the red hairs of his eyebrows, narrowed in the sunlight. "You can't take nothing from nothing," he said, and turned away, still smiling, to touch the arm of another acquaintance and move with him slowly down the street.

Mr. Kirk spat on the curb and pulled his head back in.

"If I had half what that old feller's got salted away," he said, "I'd have me a Christmas dinner every Sunday. Let's go, J.D."

They rolled away from the curb and along Franklin and up to the Square. At the Square they turned down the rocky hill behind the tobacco warehouses. When they reached the bottom of the hill he drove across the Ten-

nessee Central tracks (rusty and abandoned except for a weekly freight from Kentucky) and parked on the cinder gravel in the hot treeless glare of the sun. Below them, forty feet down the sloping bank, stretched the river: silent and deep, shining with the pale yellow of suspended mud. At the water's edge a narrow unpainted skiff lay almost beached, dry at one end and half full of water at the other. It was tied to a stake and over the stake an upside-down tin can, glittering silver, jabbed their eyes as they walked down the steep incline.

"We'll have to bail her out," Mr. Kirk said.

"I'll do it," J.D. said, and knelt on the weathered board. An empty minnow bucket lay on its side and a dead minnow sloshed back and forth in the warm muddy water. A few dried fish scales speckled the narrow plank seats, and along the edges of the seats were black pencil-like scars where burning cigarettes had lain too long.

After a few minutes he said, "I'd like to have a boat like this."

Mr. Kirk was sitting down carefully on the bank. "We'll make you one out at the factory when things slow down," he said. "We'll get a nigger to help us and it won't take no time with all them hogshead staves lying around out there doing nobody no good."

"You mean you made this one?" he asked, and raised his head.

"Ten years ago," Mr. Kirk said, flipping away a cigarette butt and looking down at him from above, "and it's still holding up."

He dipped in the can and poured out the pale water—in and out, in and out. The smell filled him with a deep excitement: a smell of mud and warmth and wetness, a smell from the roots of plants.

"I'd sure appreciate your helping me build one," he said.

Mr. Kirk stood up and brushed the dust off his pants. "That'll do," he said. "Now you get up there in front."

J.D. sat down on the bow seat and they were quickly out in the middle of the river. Nothing was in sight on the smooth surface. The skiff moved silently with the unseen current. Above them, rich bottom land full of new corn stretched away on both sides until far, far down at the bend the river narrowed, and a line of bluff rose in chalky haze. From where he sat, close to the water, it looked a long way.

He hoped his father was asleep by now. He wondered if they would get back by dark. Maybe if Mr. Kirk didn't take too long they would get back in time for him to see his father a little while before supper. But the bluff was miles in the distance. They would hardly reach it much before sundown, and it might be night before Mr. Kirk got ready for the long pull home. If he could turn around now, immediately, and start back, before the current had carried them out of sight . . .

He heard Mr. Kirk say, "Well, how do you like the tobacco business, J.D.?"

"All right," he answered, "but I don't know much about it yet. But I like it fine."

"You've learned a lot for a young feller that just works in the afternoons after school," Mr. Kirk said.

He looked back toward town. Most of it had already disappeared. Even the high courthouse tower had sunk below the green crowding tree-tops, and the Presbyterian Church steeple as well. Only the tall smokestacks of the outlying water-works rose in lonely isolation against the cloudless sky and he could still tell, by the sprinkling of tiny white dots far out on the edge of town, where a corner of the City Graveyard came over the hill. He turned and faced forward, and the sun glistened on the water in front of him.

"I told J.J. the other day," Mr. Kirk was saying. "I said, 'J.J., you've got a boy what'll make a better tobacco man than you and me both.' "

"Did you, sure enough?" he said.

"Yes sir, I did. And you know what J.J. said? He said, 'Well, Kirk, teach him all you know. I'm building it up so he can take it over.' "

"Did he, sure enough?" he said, and shivered and suddenly felt warm again.

The banks of the river were thick with willows. The green spears of canes grew rank close to the water's edge, but between the canes and the river lay a narrow band of cracked mud, treacherous and barren, a place for cotton-mouths to lie in the sun and shed their last year's skins. He was surprised to see how wide the river was, now that the small boat was out in the middle of it. It occurred to him that he couldn't have recognized anybody standing on the bank. His fingers closed over the rifle across his knees.

The soft thrust of Mr. Kirk's paddle sent them forward at a good speed. Alone in the low flat trough of water they smelled but could not see the new corn in the endless fields above them. It was a little after two o'clock and no shade anywhere. But the bend of the river was getting nearer. By the time they would reach it there would be shade close to the bluff side.

"Yes sir," Mr. Kirk said, "you'll be better'n your daddy and me both if you keep on like you started. You're a pretty good judge of tobacco already." The skiff slowed for a moment while he lit a cigarette. "You have to watch them farmers, though."

"Why?" he asked.

"They'll cheat you every time if you give them half a chance."

He was silent for a minute. Then he said, "How can they cheat you?"

"They'll class their lugs with their seconds and their seconds with their prime leaf," Mr. Kirk said. "Then they'll wet it all down till it looks like first-class tobacco." He jabbed his paddle deep into the yellow water. "And

what's more," he said, "they'll set up nights thinking up new ways to skin you."

He made no reply to this but kept his eyes on the smooth expanse in front of them. He doubted if he'd ever be able to dock a farmer the way Mr. Kirk could do it. His mind went back to the long line of wagons at the factory door, the four-mule team wagons standing all day in line, waiting to be unloaded. His job had been to help unload, and he remembered how often he had climbed up on the wagon and knelt on the great mound of tobacco—his knees crowding those of the farmer and of the farmer's sons and his Negro sharecroppers, lifting it down to the waiting dollies at the door—he remembered how Mr. Kirk would step up and pull out from the middle of the load below them an armful of the sweet odorous leaf. He would hold it up to the light in brief and critical appraisal, the farmer meanwhile still kneeling on the unloaded part, darting a quick glance down at Mr. Kirk, who, turning round and jerking his chin up in a beckoning command, would say, "Come here, my friend. Let me see you a minute, please sir." The crouched figure would rise, wordless, and slide down from the top of the load, hands slowly falling to his sides, and Mr. Kirk would look at him for a minute in thoughtful silence. "I can't accept this, my friend," he would then say with soft solicitude. "Here, feel this here. It's as wet as a new-born kitten. Smell it," and Mr. Kirk would stick it under his nose. "It's as high as a kite; I can't bulk it in this condition, and it will cost me big money to spread it out. Twon't be no good anyhow after what you done to it. I'll have to dock you." And the farmer would stand silently waiting, or maybe would say in a low whispering voice, "It warn't wet none when we loaded up last night," while above on the brown piled wagon the other faces stared down, the hands having slowed and come to a hesitant stop. "Well, boys, what do you want to do?" the farmer would say. "Take it back home?" And finally out of the silence the muttered reply would come: "Reckon he might as well take it on off the wagon. Ain't no place else to carry it." And the hands would begin again, now moving more slowly, moving this time in bitterness and hate.

The bluff rose in rocky layers above them on their left. Oaks and hickories leaned out along the ledges. Now and then a small spring trickled over the moss and slid without noise from one ledge to another and vanished into the river. This was the place where Mr. Kirk shot squirrels.

"Be right quiet now, J.D.," he said, and headed the boat toward the bluff. He laid his paddle down and they drifted slowly inward, and as the skiff moved noiselessly over the opaque surface of the water he picked up his rifle. "There's plenty of squirrels in them trees," Mr. Kirk said, and raised the rifle to his shoulder.

Almost instantly he fired, and a furry body fell from a high limb, hit another lower one, bounced among still lower branches, and thumped to a rocky slab near the water's edge.

"We'll drift a little farther down now, and pick him up on our way back," Mr. Kirk said.

"I don't see how you'll remember where he is," he said.

Mr. Kirk laughed. "Boy, what are you talking about! I never lost no squirrel yet."

At last there was shade in front of them. They slipped into it and at once the air from the water was cool and fresh. They were so close to the rocks that he could see the maiden's hair fern and the wild sweet-william and the yellow violets that grew in the earthy crevices. Mounting overhead, the arching trees hung out, while the boat, undirected by Mr. Kirk, was pulled fitfully onward by deep and invisible strings. Mr. Kirk fired again; a second squirrel fell upon a mossy ledge, crawled a few feet and was still.

"There's another little bastard; get it, boy, quick!"

"Where?" he asked, looking up into the green forest, turning his head this way and that, his hands gripping his rifle. For answer, Mr. Kirk's shot splintered the air behind him and he was aware of its brittle echo darting back from across the river.

"We might as well pick them two up now," Mr. Kirk said, and laid his gun down on the middle plank and made a few quick thrusts of the paddle.

The skiff nosed the bank and J.D. jumped out and scrambled over the rocks. He picked up one squirrel and shoved it in his pants pocket. He moved up the bank toward the second squirrel. It lay full length yet seemed to crouch a little, its open sightless eyes fixed on something bright caught under the outstretched claws. He paused, curious, and bending over saw that the object was only a feather. Yet it looked as if the squirrel's last faint throb of energy had been spent to reach the bright immaculate blue. He picked up the body by the tail, and as he did so the feather swung in the air, suspended by a single claw. Suddenly it fell; he caught it with his hand as it floated downward, and stuck it in his cap and climbed back into the boat and sat facing Mr. Kirk.

Mr. Kirk winked at him and said, "I used to play with them things when I was a kid. I called them Indian feathers. I'd get me a couple of bluebirds and make a whole Indian hat out of them. Yes sir. . . ." He leaned back, "Youngsters will do anything."

J.D. pulled the feather from his cap and held it in his fingers. The color lifted with the river breeze. Mr. Kirk stopped paddling. "It's right pretty," he said, smiling. Then, as J.D. was about to drop it into the water, he added, "Why don't you keep it?"

J.D. looked up, and thrust the feather back under the band of his cap.

The current, stronger at the bend, caught at the skiff and bore them out toward the middle once more.

"Your daddy likes squirrel meat, don't he?" Mr. Kirk asked suddenly.

"Yes sir, I think so," he said.

"Well, I'll tell you what to do. You give them squirrels to your mamma and tell her to cook them for your daddy's supper."

"Thank you, sir, that's mighty nice," he said, "but I don't think Father could eat but one of them."

"Go ahead and take them," Mr. Kirk said. "Maybe he'll eat with a growing appetite. Besides which," he added, "there ain't nothing I wouldn't do for your daddy."

"Well, I certainly do thank you," he said.

Mr. Kirk looked at the sky. "I guess by the time we pick up that first one it'll be time to start moving along home."

With a deft twist of the paddle he turned the skiff round and they moved with stealth back along the way they'd come, keeping far enough away from the bank to see the tree-tops easily: maybe he would get another shot. But all unkilled squirrels on that part of the bluff had fled, and presently Mr. Kirk bore toward the bank.

The bow of the little boat was like a telescope. Perched in the center of its expanding eye, he watched earth, sky and water shift, blur, turn and focus again; watched gradually appear a fern or flower or fallen rock, a single blade of grass or wandering butterfly. The bluff was thirty feet away but seemed so close he might have touched it with his hand.

"I don't see how you remember the place," he said.

"I mark it with my eyes," said Mr. Kirk. "That little cedar yonder, sticking out crooked from the bluff, you see where it is?"

"Yes sir," he said.

"Well, that's the place."

They reached the spot and J.D. jumped again upon the land, upon the protruding rock, and Mr. Kirk sat in the skiff waiting. The squirrel lay only a few yards away on the flat ledge where it had fallen.

"Do you see him?" Mr. Kirk asked.

He walked forward, stooped and stretched out his hand, and on the instant his exploding heart froze him to stillness.

The dead squirrel lay on its side, its mouth slightly open and its teeth exposed. A little blood had dripped from the nostrils and congealed into a red button on the rock. Just beyond—a foot away—disturbed, jerked crookedly back, and rigid in sunlight, was a copperhead.

"Don't you see the squirrel, J.D.?"

He stood unable to open his lips, his knees half bent and his thin arm aching in slow spasms of recoiling blood. This noiseless confrontation was

the evil so often warned against, the dream now suddenly become more real than all the hideous nights of dreaming ever made it.

Back in town, behind the closed windows, his father would be turning his head in restless sleep upon the walnut bed and his mother, opening doors softly, would softly close them and go upstairs and sit whispering in the dark corner at the telephone, and outside, above the roof, the maples would stir and lean against the house, and blocks away the courthouse clock would strike the slow deliberate hour. But here . . . but here . . . the ancient head, the dusty obsidian stare, that long ago had marked his fear and doomed his warm and vulnerable flesh.

If he could cry out through the dry erasure of his lips. If he could cry, "Help me, Help me! . . ." But the cry remained a voiceless echo in the back of his head and, acknowledging already the stinging venomous blow, he fell backward, as the rifle shot cracked behind him, spinning the raised snake in the air, knocking it across the rock where it lay and twisted in harmless subsiding grace. He snatched up the squirrel and ran back down to the river's edge.

Mr. Kirk was standing in the middle of the skiff, still holding his rifle up. His hat had fallen into the water and was floating a few feet from the bank.

"You have to watch out for them copperheads," he said, frowning hard at him. "I should of recollected this old bluff."

Mr. Kirk reached over with his paddle and pulled in his hat and then held the skiff steady while J.D. climbed in. He sat down in the bow as before, his rifle across his knees. He had not had a shot all afternoon. "I guess I'm not much good at shooting squirrels from a boat," he said.

"It's a lazy man's way," said Mr. Kirk.

"Don't you want me to paddle some?" he asked, turning his head back and looking into Mr. Kirk's grey-blue eyes. "I'll be glad to."

"Naw, son, naw. You just set there. I need the exercise."

By this time the whole length of the river was in shade and the drops of water from the paddle that touched his face now and then were cooler than they had been before. A few birds were starting up. Crows called to one another from the invisible corn fields, and a kingfisher spread its wings high over their heads, gently banking against the motionless air.

Mr. Kirk stopped paddling and glanced up toward the sky. "Looking for his supper," he said.

The river still belonged to them. No other craft was in sight. Behind, the bluff was gradually sinking, and far ahead he could just make out the distant smokestacks of the town water-works. In the late high afterlight of the sun, between and all around, the water was turning a pale green. From beyond the new corn, at the edge of an unseen woods, there came three falling sing-song notes, the long seductive drawn-out call of a Negro, walking across the

fields to supper and to sleep, the warm-throated sound at the end of day. He shut his eyes and saw the little line of dust rising behind in the path, smelled the supper smell of wood smoke as he neared the cabin, saw the bare feet and beaten ground, and now saw the smoke itself lift above the chimney, stretch out in horizontal veil and fade upward into sky. . . . You couldn't thank anybody for maybe saving your life. You couldn't thank a marksman for his aim. You couldn't thank him for the casual tone, for the grey embracing eyes. All you could do was to swear a silent oath to learn to shoot like that, to train your eye and your hand; to stand beside him in any danger, to be ready if he should ever, someday, need you. . . .

The roofs of the buildings on the Square were still touched with amber light. They climbed up the long bank and as he opened the car door the metal was warm under his hand. He could see the flame now as Mr. Kirk struck a match when he lit a cigarette. He looked down toward the water and as he turned it seemed to him that they had brought a little of the river air back up the hill with them. Mr. Kirk threw the three squirrels on the floor of the car.

"I'll ride on out to the house with you for a minute," Mr. Kirk said, "and see how J.J.'s coming along."

"All right, sir," he said.

The afternoon had altogether faded now. The streets were vacant and only a few empty cars were nosed to the curb. The Capitol Cafe's neon sign and the bubbling electric spelling of LILLIAN announced the end of the day to silent pavements. The town was briefly at supper, and its country visitors, scattered over the roads and hunched together on seats, were heading homeward through the rising dew.

In front of his house they saw the doctor's car. "Aw-aw," said Mr. Kirk, "ain't that Dr. Dan's car?"

"Yes sir, but that don't necessarily mean anything. Uncle Dan is just as liable to be coming to supper as anything else," he said, feeling a glow of family importance: his uncle, so desperately, so constantly sought by the rest of the town, often came to sit and talk and eat the evening meal at his house.

Dr. Dan was standing just inside the screen door in the unlighted hall, holding his black satchel and talking in a low voice. Mr. Kirk took off his hat and stood at the bottom of the porch steps. "You got all three of them squirrels, J.D.?" he whispered.

"Yes sir," he said, and turned toward the half-open door, waiting. Presently his uncle came down the steps. "Aren't you going to stay to supper, Uncle Dan?" he said.

"Not tonight, young feller. I've got to go clear to Kentucky and back before suppertime."

"How's Mr. Bradbury, Doctor?" asked Mr. Kirk.

"Mr. Bradbury's right bad off, Kirk, right bad off."

"I'm mighty sorry to hear that, Doctor," said Mr. Kirk.

His mother did not open the screen door.

"Well, I'll be going on home," said Mr. Kirk. "You give them squirrels to your mamma, J.D., and tell her what I told you."

"All right," he said, hoping his mother was going to open the door and speak to Mr. Kirk. He started up the steps, stopped and turned round. Mr. Kirk was halfway to the street. "Mr. Kirk," he called out, "don't you want me to run you home?"

"You get them squirrels started, J.D. And telephone me if you need me, you hear?"

"Yes sir, I will," he called back, and went on up the steps.

He pushed the screen door open and entered the hall. His mother's hand reached out in the gloom and closed over his bare arm. She stood for a moment leaning silently upon him before she looked up.

"Uncle Dan says John is not going to get well," she whispered.

He glanced beyond her through the dark hallway toward the closed door. "No," he said.

She bent her head again, her soft hair brushing his cheek. "Yes," she said. "Yes, Son."

The blood pumped cold and sodden under his chest, and he tried to swallow the dry pain in his throat. He backed against the doorframe, but she followed and pressed close to him. Pinning his arms at his sides, she leaned out and away to look up into his face, at the hair falling over his forehead, at his flushed cheeks, his eyes, at his open lips. "You will have to take over responsibilities," she said in the same intimate whisper.

He met her gaze at last. "What responsibilities, Mother?" he asked. And when she did not answer he repeated the question. "What responsibilities do you mean?"

She was looking at him in a way he had never seen her look before.

"What responsibilities, Mother?"

Her nails tightened on his flesh. "Many," she said.

He pulled away from her and had got as far as the stairs.

"Son!"

He turned round. She was still standing by the door.

"How can you treat me this way? How can you?" she said in a low vibrant voice.

He went back and picked up his rifle that he had left leaning against the wall beside the screen door, and turned without speaking and went up the stairs and into his room and hung the rifle on the nail above his bureau. He washed his face and combed his wet hair straight back over his forehead. The little mole on his cheek, just under his eye, was surrounded by the pink

glow that shone through his smooth, tan skin. He still had the squirrels with him, so he went downstairs again and into the dining-room where he stood looking at the waiting supper table. The swinging door pushed open and Stella put her head in. "Tell your mamma supper's ready," she said.

"Here's some squirrels for Father," he said, holding them out to her. "Mr. Kirk shot them for him."

"Who's gonna clean um for him?" she said, and closed the door.

He followed her out into the kitchen. "I'll leave them here," he said, and laid them tenderly on the marble top of the beaten-biscuit table.

Stella glanced at him and suddenly the kitchen was filled with the sound of her voice: "Don't you leave them things on my table!"

He picked them up and held them to his chest.

"You ought to knowed better than to bring them things home with all I got to do."

She paused, straightened up and turned to stare at him as though she had never seen him before.

"Put um there on the drain board."

He went back into the dining-room and began to eat his supper. After a while his mother came in and sat down at the end of the table. She put her elbows on the white cloth and covered her face with her hands. The coils of her brown, voluptuous hair tilted forward.

He kept his eyes on his plate, and after he had finished eating he rose and went to his father's room. He opened the door gently into the darkness.

"Are you asleep, Father?" he asked in a low voice.

"Come in, Son," his father said, and roused himself to receive the guest. "Glad to see you."

He felt his way over and sat down in his mother's small rocking chair, his knees wedged tight against the hard side of the bed. In the subdued light its massive frame seemed to fill the long room.

"Well, Son," his father said, "it looks like you're going to have to take charge of things for a while."

"Yes sir," he said.

His father reached out and touched him with his hand. After a minute he said, "Your mother forgot to turn on the light. Switch it on, will you, Son?"

He got up and walked to the door, turned on the light and came back to the rocking chair.

"You can ask Kirk anything you want to know," his father said, as if at the end of a long conversation. "He's a right good judge of tobacco. He'll be a help to you."

"Yes sir," he said. He was conscious of a knot under his right buttock, and felt back and pulled his hunting cap out of his back pocket. The feather

was bent but still sticking under the band. He smoothed out the rumpled blue.

"You'll make a good tobacco man, Son, if you keep on like you started," he heard his father say.

He looked up, "Yes sir," he said again.

"I wish Kirk was a little more dependable, though," his father said, and laid a strange white hand on the sheet.

"He shot three squirrels this afternoon, Father."

His father closed his eyes.

He leaned closer. "And, Father, besides that, Father, he killed . . ." But his father's eyes had opened again at the sound of the door, and his mother came in carrying a cup on a tray.

"Here's some freshly made chicken broth," she said.. "I asked Stella to make it especially for you."

"Thank you," his father said, "I'm not hungry."

"You must try to eat something," his mother said.

He stood up and watched her come over to the chair. She waited to sit down until he held it steady for her. She sat far forward and pushed the cup toward the bed.

He looked over her head at his father's face. "I think I'll walk down to the factory, Father, and see if the doors are locked up all right," he said.

"That's a good idea, Son," his father said. "The keys are there on the bureau."

He went over to the bureau and separated the keys from his father's watch, a thin gold watch with a black silk watch-fob to which was attached a gold pendant. He put the keys in his pocket.

Out on the porch he sat for a moment on the steps and looked down the street. He could not see any farther than the haw tree in the edge of the yard, but the corner street lights, marking the blocks, disappeared in the distance, telling him like a familiar code of all the houses between his own and town. He was still holding his cap so he put it on, spreading out the feather again, and slid down the steps.

From across the black grass, lights gleamed from the houses, and at the edges of the yards the night-filled trees made a dark and fragrant tunnel. He moved through it along the pavement, and as he walked fallen maple wings broke with occasional sound beneath the soles of his sneakers.

He crossed to Commerce Street and stopped at the top of the hill. Halfway down on the right the black expanse of the factory roof reflected the night sky. Low, one-story Negro cabins surrounded the large frame building. From where he stood the roof was a dim lake of tar whose obscure shores twinkled smokily from flickering lamps lit in the single rooms.

His feet lifted with pleasure at the answering movements of his ankles down the long slope. And as he moved the factory took form and shape: the roof disappeared, the clapboard walls appeared: and then he was standing at the office door next to the overhanging roofs of the sheds above the big doors where load after load of tobacco had been handed down, and weighed and wheeled away to bulks and handed up again to mountainous piles, built carefully, a handful at a time.

The factory loomed close above him like a benevolent monster, dark, inactive, silent: its deep interiors bulging with the brown sweet-smelling leaf. He leaned against the door, his hand on the knob, inhaling the smell.

He turned the key and stepped inside and walked through the office to the inner door that opened into the huge storage space. He held this door open and listened. Here the stronger odor of tobacco made his nostrils tingle. He heard nothing except from high overhead the faint cracking of the tin roof, cooling in the night. He smiled in the aromatic darkness. Things would be taken care of properly. He and Mr. Kirk would see to that.

He was about to switch on the lights to find the wooden steps that led to the floor below, but he decided to reach the lower floor from outside, down the hill in the rear. So he went back through the office and out into the street again. It was cool after the close heat of the factory. He stood, feeling the air around him, and heard the courthouse clock strike nine. He looked overhead. There were no stars. Heavy clouds had come up since supper.

He walked along the front of the building until he reached the alley that led to the rear. He turned down into this passage on the right and walked somewhat hesitantly until he came to the back corner where he turned right again and passed the big shipping door which opened waist high from the ground. It seemed to be pulled tightly shut so far as he could tell. This was the door where the hogsheads, full of the steamed and packed tobacco and weighing two thousand pounds each, were loaded behind mule teams and hauled to distant warehouses. Oh, the whole intricate process was there in his mind. He would surprise even Mr. Kirk with his knowledge.

The last thing to check was the small glass door of the prizing-room where during the day Negro girls stood at long tables under the horizontal windows, classing the different grades—the leaf, the seconds, and the lugs—all into three neat piles.

He put his hand on the doorknob and pressed his face close against the glass of the door. For an instant he thought he was looking at his own reflection. But the face shifted, its luminous head took form, moved forward, floating, swelling out toward him until, nose pressed to nose and eyes to eyes, it peered out through the vague light with only the thin dirty panes between them.

by Thomas Dabney Mabry

He could not move, transfixed, turned to stone, by the same fatal stare, poised but this time closer, closer, boring into the center of his brain. And surrounding his skull the tender skin, exposed, began to edge in immemorial response, and his ears pounded with the trebled beating of his heart. Then the door opened and a voice, embarrassed, a new voice, spoke.

"That you, J.D.?"

The fear subsided, leaving him chill. "You kind of scared me," he said.

The door opened wider. "Come on in."

He stepped inside. "Sir?" he asked. "Is anything the matter?"

Mr. Kirk's grey hair was neatly parted and brushed flat slick on his large round head. Even in the dim light that filtered through the prizing-room windows his shirt looked white and clean, his trousers sleekly pressed.

"Ain't nothing the matter," he said, and paused: "I just thought for a minute you was that little gal. . . ."

"Sir?" he said.

Mr. Kirk spat noiselessly into the soft tobacco trash on the floor. ". . . that little high yaller I'm waiting for—the one what classes next to Aunt Emma." He nodded toward the empty classing tables. "Yes, sir," he said, laughing, "I sure thought for a minute you was that little gal."

His father's keys were heavy in his pocket. "I was just seeing if everything was locked up," he said, and glanced at the door.

Mr. Kirk sat down on one of the empty dollies. "Well, now you're here," he said, "set down and rest yourself."

"Father says we'll have to attend to things for a while," he said.

"Unh-huh," Mr. Kirk said.

J.D. walked beyond Mr. Kirk and leaned against a tobacco bulk, his shoulder making a burrow in the soft leaf.

"Father said what you said, Mr. Kirk. He said I'd make a good tobacco man if I keep on like I started." He paused, and swallowed. Then he said, "I've already been upstairs to see if the doors were all locked."

Mr. Kirk struck a match. "That so?" he said, and held out his hand. In the small flare he was holding an object, a Gargantuan rod of rounded, smoothed tobacco, skillfully, unmistakably shaped. He looked up inquiringly, his eyes yellow in the matchlight. "Ever see one of these here things, J.D.?"

Slowly the hot blood climbed all the way up to his cheeks. "No," he said.

The match went out. In the black silence there came from somewhere in the rear the soft swish of falling tobacco, inexpertly bulked, sliding to the floor. It would be stepped on Monday morning probably and the good cigar leaf crushed and ruined.

"Them gals are always making these things," Mr. Kirk said, and struck another match.

"Father doesn't want any doors left unlocked," he said slowly, staring at Mr. Kirk's hand.

There was a pause. Mr. Kirk stood up, thrust the brown rod in his pocket and pinched out the flame. He walked rapidly to the door and stuck his head out.

"What time is it?" he demanded, peering out into the alley.

J.D. followed him to the door. "I just heard the courthouse clock strike nine a few minutes ago," he said. The outside air was soft with the coming rain. It sucked past him into the prizing-room, and he could almost hear the thousands of leaves relaxing from its dampness. His father had been right. Next week would be a good tobacco season. By Monday the leaves would be pliable and easy to work with.

Mr. Kirk stood in the door and looked up at the sky. "It's on the way all right," he said, and pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and blew his nose, and as he flipped the white square back into a neat cone there rose from it an odor of perfume, filling the air between them as it had filled the car that afternoon, yet now mixing also with a faint and acrid smell of whiskey. He turned back into the prizing-room. "Damn that gal," he muttered, and went over to one of the classing-tables where his coat lay folded as neatly as if upon a bed.

A sudden swirl of cinder dust swept in upon them from the path, and the first heavy rain drops clicked against the long rows of window panes that lined the wall above the tables.

Mr. Kirk picked up his coat and looked at the boy. From across the room the words cut through the quiet air: "You're in a pretty big hurry, ain't you, Mister J.D., to close things up?" He paused, and tenderly unfolded his coat. Then he said: "I guess you sort of think you're looking after things around here now."

He met Mr. Kirk's stare. "I just promised Father I'd see if the doors were all locked," he said once more.

Mr. Kirk was shoving his arms into his coat sleeves. "Sure," he said. "Yes siree. And while you're at it you better take a look at all them windows."

"Windows?" J.D. asked.

"Sure," Mr. Kirk said. "Windows need locks, don't they?"

"Father didn't say anything. . . ."

"He must of forgot, then," Mr. Kirk said. "They been needing locks bad all year."

The grey light darkened, and the rain wavered and slowed against the glass and settled to a more regular beat. In the open doorway the form of a woman appeared. It paused for an instant before it slipped into the deeper shadow of the tobacco bulks.

Mr. Kirk's arms stopped in mid air, his sleeves dangling, and the coat slid

back and fell to the floor. He leaned over slowly and picked it up, brushed it off with deliberate care and folded it over his arm.

"Sure," he said again, in a different tone. "Sure. . . ."

Then he was hurrying over to J.D., his eyes glittering with impatience. ". . . but them windows can wait now, Son," he whispered hoarsely. "I'll take care of them. And the doors too."

The boy turned and stared at the man. Even in the faint light he could see that Mr. Kirk was queerly smiling. He looked away, toward the waiting tables and the vacant dollies, toward the half-filled hogsheads and shadowy mounds of tobacco, and still turning, his gaze shifted to the door where outside the sharp rain was rapidly changing the cinder path to mud. It was raining harder now. It was raining on the Negro houses across the alley, and on the yard at home. It was raining on the whole town, raining on the little skiff tied at the dark water's edge and on the twisting glassy river itself. And far away, down at the river's bend, it was raining on the long bluff.

He roused himself and turned to speak again to Mr. Kirk. But Mr. Kirk had already disappeared among the bulks of tobacco. He took a step forward and hesitated. Then, as he stood trying to see through the dim light, he heard Mr. Kirk's voice call out to him softly.

"J.D. . . ."

And suddenly, from somewhere back in the shadows, a long sibilant sound that must have been laughter filled the low room.

A second gust of wind swept through the doorway, billowing his shirt and almost lifting his cap from his head. His hand flew up to catch too late at the falling feather. He stooped down in the gloom and felt around him on the littered floor. He leaned farther over to reach a wider circle but his searching fingers still touched only nails and bits of wood and broken tobacco stalks, and he heard again the sound of his name called softly before the door banged shut, closing him into the black and pungent room.

1955: *from The New Yorker*

IN THE ZOO

by Jean Stafford, who rose to immediate literary prominence with the publication of her first novel, Boston Adventure, *in 1944. Two others,* The Mountain Lion *and* The Catherine Wheel, *followed in 1950. Her stories have appeared regularly in* The New Yorker *and similar magazines, and a collection,* Children Are Bored on Sundays, *was published in 1953. She is also represented in both the 1956 and 1957 volumes of the O. Henry Memorial Awards. Born in 1915, in Covina, California, she was educated at the University of California and at the University of Heidelberg. She has received two Guggenheims (in 1945 and 1948), as well as a grant from the National Institute of Arts and Letters.*

Keening harshly in his senility, the blind polar bear slowly and ceaselessly shakes his head in the stark heat of the July and mountain noon. His open eyes are blue. No one stops to look at him; an old farmer, in passing, sums up the old bear's situation by observing, with a ruthless chuckle, that he is a "back number." Patient and despairing, he sits on his yellowed haunches on the central rock of his pool, his huge toy paws wearing short boots of mud.

The grizzlies to the right of him, a conventional family of father and mother and two spring cubs, alternately play the clown and sleep. There is a blustery, scoundrelly, half-likable bravado in the manner of the black bear on the polar's left; his name, according to the legend on his cage, is Clancy, and he is a rough-and-tumble, brawling blowhard, thundering continually as he paces back and forth, or pauses to face his audience of children and mothers and release from his great, gray-tongued mouth a perfectly Vesuvian roar. If he were to be reincarnated in human form, he would be a man of action, possibly a football coach, probably a politician. One expects to see his black hat hanging from a branch of one of his trees; at any moment he will light a cigar.

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by Jean Stafford

The polar bear's next-door neighbors are not the only ones who offer so sharp and sad a contrast to him. Across a reach of scrappy grass and litter is the convocation of conceited monkeys, burrowing into each other's necks and chests for fleas, picking their noses with their long, black, finicky fingers, swinging by their gifted tails on the flying trapeze, screaming bloody murder. Even when they mourn—one would think the male orangutan was on the very brink of suicide—they are comedians; they only fake depression, for they are firmly secure in their rambunctious tribalism and in their appalling insight and contempt. Their flibbertigibbet gambolling is a sham, and, stealthily and shiftily, they are really watching the pitiful polar bear ("Back number," they quote the farmer. "That's *his* number all right," they snigger), and the windy black bear ("Life of the party. Gasbag. Low I.Q.," they note scornfully on his dossier), and the stupid, bourgeois grizzlies ("It's feed the face and hit the sack for them," the monkeys say). And they are watching my sister and me, two middle-aged women, as we sit on a bench between the exhibits, eating popcorn, growing thirsty. We are thoughtful.

A chance remark of Daisy's a few minutes before has turned us to memory and meditation. "I don't know why," she said, "but that poor blind bear reminds me of Mr. Murphy." The name "Mr. Murphy" at once returned us both to childhood, and we were floated far and fast, our later lives diminished. So now we eat our popcorn in silence with the ritualistic appetite of childhood, which has little to do with hunger; it is not so much food as a sacrament, and in tribute to our sisterliness and our friendliness I break the silence to say that this is the best popcorn I have ever eaten in my life. The extravagance of my statement instantly makes me feel self-indulgent, and for some time I uneasily avoid looking at the blind bear. My sister does not agree or disagree; she simply says that popcorn is the only food she has ever really liked. For a long time, then, we eat without a word, but I know, because I know her well and know her similarity to me, that Daisy is thinking what I am thinking; both of us are mournfully remembering Mr. Murphy, who, at one time in our lives, was our only friend.

This zoo is in Denver, a city that means nothing to my sister and me except as a place to take or meet trains. Daisy lives two hundred miles farther west, and it is her custom, when my every-other-year visit with her is over, to come across the mountains to see me off on my eastbound train. We know almost no one here, and because our stays are short, we have never bothered to learn the town in more than the most desultory way. We know the Burlington uptown office and the respectable hotels, a restaurant or two, the Union Station, and, beginning today, the zoo in the city park.

But since the moment that Daisy named Mr. Murphy by name our situation in Denver has been only corporeal; our minds and our hearts are in Adams, fifty miles north, and we are seeing, under the white sun at its piti-

less meridian, the streets of that ugly town, its parks and trees and bridges, the bandstand in its dreary park, the roads that lead away from it, west to the mountains and east to the plains, its mongrel and multitudinous churches, its high school shaped like a loaf of bread, the campus of its college, an oasis of which we had no experience except to walk through it now and then, eying the woodbine on the impressive buildings. These things are engraved forever on our minds with a legibility so insistent that you have only to say the name of the town aloud to us to rip the rinds from our nerves and leave us exposed in terror and humiliation.

We have supposed in later years that Adams was not so bad as all that, and we know that we magnified its ugliness because we looked upon it as the extension of the possessive, unloving, scornful, complacent foster mother, Mrs. Placer, to whom, at the death of our parents within a month of each other, we were sent like Dickensian grotesqueries—cowardly, weak-stomached, given to tears, backward in school. Daisy was ten and I was eight when, unaccompanied, we made the long trip from Marblehead to our benefactress, whom we had never seen and, indeed, never heard of until the pastor of our church came to tell us of the arrangement our father had made on his deathbed, seconded by our mother on hers. This man, whose name and face I have forgotten and whose parting speeches to us I have not forgiven, tried to dry our tears with talk of Indians and of buffaloes; he spoke, however, at much greater length, and in preaching cadences, of the Christian goodness of Mrs. Placer. She was, he said, childless and fond of children, and for many years she had been a widow, after the lingering demise of her tubercular husband, for whose sake she had moved to the Rocky Mountains. For his support and costly medical care, she had run a boarding house, and after his death, since he had left her nothing, she was obliged to continue running it. She had been a girlhood friend of our paternal grandmother, and our father, in the absence of responsible relatives, had made her the beneficiary of his life insurance on the condition that she lodge and rear us. The pastor, with a frankness remarkable considering that he was talking to children, explained to us that our father had left little more than a drop in the bucket for our care, and he enjoined us to give Mrs. Placer, in return for her hospitality and sacrifice, courteous help and eternal thanks. "Sacrifice" was a word we were never allowed to forget.

And thus it was, in grief for our parents, that we came cringing to the dry Western town and to the house where Mrs. Placer lived, a house in which the square, uncushioned furniture was cruel and the pictures on the walls were either dour or dire and the lodgers, who lived in the upper floors among shadowy wardrobes and chiffoniers, had come through the years to resemble their landlady in appearance as well as in deportment.

After their ugly-colored evening meal, Gran—as she bade us call her—and

her paying guests would sit, rangy and acquiline, rocking on the front porch on spring and summer and autumn nights, tasting their delicious grievances: those slights delivered by ungrateful sons and daughters, those impudences committed by trolley-car conductors and uppity salesgirls in the ready-to-wear, all those slurs and calculated elbow-jostlings that were their daily crucifixion and their staff of life. We little girls, washing the dishes in the cavernous kitchen, listened to their even, martyred voices, fixed like leeches to their solitary subject and their solitary creed—that life was essentially a matter of being done in, let down, and swindled.

At regular intervals, Mrs. Placer, chairwoman of the victims, would say, "Of course, I don't care; I just have to laugh," and then would tell a shocking tale of an intricate piece of skulduggery perpetrated against her by someone she did not even know. Sometimes, with her avid, partial jury sitting there on the porch behind the bitter hopvines in the heady mountain air, the cases she tried involved Daisy and me, and, listening, we travailed, hugging each other, whispering, "I wish she wouldn't! Oh, how did she find out?" How *did* she? Certainly we never told her when we were snubbed or chosen last on teams, never admitted to a teacher's scolding or to the hoots of laughter that greeted us when we bit on silly, unfair jokes. But she knew. She knew about the slumber parties we were not invited to, the beefsteak fries at which we were pointedly left out; she knew that the singing teacher had said in so many words that I could not carry a tune in a basket and that the sewing superintendent had said that Daisy's fingers were all thumbs. With our teeth chattering in the cold of our isolation, we would hear her protestant, litigious voice defending our right to be orphans, paupers, wholly dependent on her—except for the really ridiculous pittance from our father's life insurance—when it was all she could do to make ends meet. She did not care, but she had to laugh that people in general were so small-minded that they looked down on fatherless, motherless waifs like us and, by association, looked down on her. It seemed funny to her that people gave her no credit for taking on these sickly youngsters who were not even kin but only the grandchildren of a friend.

If a child with braces on her teeth came to play with us, she was, according to Gran, slyly lording it over us because our teeth were crooked, but there was no money to have them straightened. And what could be the meaning of our being asked to come for supper at the doctor's house? Were the doctor and his la-di-da New York wife and those pert girls with their solid-gold barrettes and their Shetland pony going to shame her poor darlings? Or shame their poor Gran by making them sorry to come home to the plain but honest life that was all she could provide for them?

There was no stratum of society not reeking with the effluvium of fraud and pettifoggery. And the school system was almost the worst of all: if we

could not understand fractions, was that not our teacher's fault? And therefore what right had she to give us F? It was as plain as a pikestaff to Gran that the teacher was only covering up her own inability to teach. It was unlikely, too—highly unlikely—that it was by accident that time and time again the free medical clinic was closed for the day just as our names were about to be called out, so that nothing was done about our bad tonsils, which meant that we were repeatedly sick in the winter, with Gran fetching and carrying for us, climbing those stairs a jillion times a day with her game leg and her heart that was none too strong.

Steeped in these mists of accusation and hidden plots and double meanings, Daisy and I grew up like worms. I think no one could have withstood the atmosphere in that house where everyone trod on eggs that a little bird had told them were bad. They spied on one another, whispered behind doors, conjectured, drew parallels beginning "With all due respect . . ." or "It is a matter of indifference to *me* but . . ." The vigilantes patrolled our town by day, and by night returned to lay their goodies at their priestess's feet and wait for her oracular interpretation of the innards of the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker, the soda jerk's girl, and the barber's unnatural deaf white cat.

Consequently, Daisy and I also became suspicious. But it was suspicion of ourselves that made us mope and weep and grimace with self-judgment. Why were we not happy when Gran had sacrificed herself to the bone for us? Why did we not cut dead the paper boy who had called her a filthy name? Why did we persist in our willful friendliness with the grocer who had tried, unsuccessfully, to overcharge her on a case of pork and beans?

Our friendships were nervous and surreptitious; we sneaked and lied, and as our hungers sharpened, our debasement deepened; we were pitied; we were shifty-eyed, always on the lookout for Mrs. Placer or one of her tattletale lodgers; we were hypocrites.

Nevertheless, one thin filament of instinct survived, and Daisy and I in time found asylum in a small menagerie down by the railroad tracks. It belonged to a gentle alcoholic ne'er-do-well, who did nothing all day long but drink bathtub gin in rickeys and play solitaire and smile to himself and talk to his animals. He had a little, stunted red vixen and a deodorized skunk, a parrot from Tahiti that spoke Parisian French, a woebegone coyote, and two capuchin monkeys, so serious and humanized, so small and sad and sweet, and so religious-looking with their tonsured heads that it was impossible not to think their gibberish was really an ordered language with a grammar that someday some philologist would understand.

Gran knew about our visits to Mr. Murphy and she did not object, for it gave her keen pleasure to excoriate him when we came home. His vice was not a matter of guesswork; it was an established fact that he was half-

seas over from dawn till midnight. "With the black Irish," said Gran, "the taste for drink is taken in with the mother's milk and is never mastered. Oh, I know all about those promises to join the temperance movement and not to touch another drop. The way to Hell is paved with good intentions."

We were still little girls when we discovered Mr. Murphy, before the shattering disease of adolescence was to make our bones and brains ache even more painfully than before, and we loved him and we hoped to marry him when we grew up. We loved him, and we loved his monkeys to exactly the same degree and in exactly the same way; they were husbands and fathers and brothers, these three little, ugly, dark, secret men who minded their own business and let us mind ours. If we stuck our fingers through the bars of the cage, the monkeys would sometimes take them in their tight, tiny hands and look into our faces with a tentative, somehow absent-minded sorrow, as if they terribly regretted that they could not place us but were glad to see us all the same. Mr. Murphy, playing a solitaire game of cards called "once in a blue moon" on a kitchen table in his back yard beside the pens, would occasionally look up and blink his beautiful blue eyes and say, "You're peaches to make over my wee friends. I love you for it." There was nothing demanding in his voice, and nothing sticky; on his lips the word "love" was jocose and forthright, it had no strings attached. We would sit on either side of him and watch him regiment his ranks of cards and stop to drink as deeply as if he were dying of thirst and wave to his animals and say to them, "Yes, lads, you're dandies."

Because Mr. Murphy was as reserved with us as the capuchins were, as courteously noncommittal, we were surprised one spring day when he told us that he had a present for us, which he hoped Mrs. Placer would let us keep; it was a puppy, for whom the owner had asked him to find a home—half collie and half Labrador retriever, blue-blooded on both sides.

"You might tell Mrs. Placer—" he said, smiling at the name, for Gran was famous in the town. "You might tell Mrs. Placer," said Mr. Murphy, "that this lad will make a fine watchdog. She'll never have to fear for her spoons again. Or her honor." The last he said to himself, not laughing but tucking his chin into his collar; lines sprang to the corners of his eyes. He would not let us see the dog, whom we could hear yipping and squealing inside his shanty, for he said that our disappointment would weigh on his conscience if we lost our hearts to the fellow and then could not have him for our own.

That evening at supper, we told Gran about Mr. Murphy's present. A dog? In the first place, why a dog? Was it possible that the news had reached Mr. Murphy's ears that Gran had just this very day finished planting her spring garden, the very thing that a rampageous dog would have in his mind to destroy? What sex was it? A male! Females, she had heard, were more

trustworthy; males roved and came home smelling of skunk; such a consideration as this, of course, would not have crossed Mr. Murphy's fuddled mind. Was this young male dog housebroken? We had not asked? That was the limit!

Gran appealed to her followers, too raptly fascinated by Mr. Murphy's machinations to eat their Harvard beets. "Am I being farfetched or does it strike you as decidedly queer that Mr. Murphy is trying to fob off on my little girls a young cur that has not been trained?" she asked them. "If it were housebroken, he would have said so, so I feel it is safe to assume that it is not. Perhaps cannot *be* housebroken. I've heard of such cases."

The fantasy spun on, richly and rapidly, with all the skilled helping hands at work at once. The dog was tangibly in the room with us, shedding his hair, biting his fleas, shaking rain off himself to splatter the walls, dragging some dreadful carcass across the floor, chewing up slippers, knocking over chairs with his tail, gobbling the chops from the platter, barking, biting, fathering, fighting, smelling to high heaven of carrion, staining the rug with his muddy feet, scratching the floor with his claws. He developed rabies; he bit a child, two children! Three! Everyone in town! And Gran and her poor darlings went to jail for harboring this murderous, odoriferous, drunk, Roman Catholic dog.

And yet, astoundingly enough, she came around to agreeing to let us have the dog. It was, as Mr. Murphy had predicted, the word "watchdog" that deflected the course of the trial. The moment Daisy uttered it, Gran halted, marshalling her reverse march; while she rallied and tacked and reconnoitred, she sent us to the kitchen for the dessert. And by the time this course was under way, the uses of a dog, the enormous potentialities for investigation and law enforcement in a dog trained by Mrs. Placer, were being minutely and passionately scrutinized by the eight upright bloodhounds sitting at the table wolfing their brown Betty as if it were fresh-killed rabbit. The dog now sat at attention beside his mistress, fiercely alert, ears cocked, nose aquiver, the protector of widows, of orphans, of lonely people who had no homes. He made short shrift of burglars, homicidal maniacs, Peeping Toms, gypsies, bogus missionaries, Fuller Brush men with a risqué spiel. He went to the store and brought back groceries, retrieved the evening paper from the awkward place the boy had meanly thrown it, rescued cripples from burning houses, saved children from drowning, heeled at command, begged, lay down, stood up, sat, jumped through a hoop, ratted.

Both times—when he was a ruffian of the blackest delinquency and then a pillar of society—he was full-grown in his prefiguration, and when Laddy appeared on the following day, small, unsteady, and whimpering lonesomely, Gran and her lodgers were taken aback; his infant, clumsy paws embarrassed them, his melting eyes were unapropos. But it could never be said of Mrs.

by Jean Stafford

Placer, as Mrs. Placer her own self said, that she was a woman who went back on her word, and her darlings were going to have their dog, soft-headed and feckless as he might be. All the first night, in his carton in the kitchen, he wailed for his mother, and in the morning, it was true, he had made a shambles of the room—fouled the floor, and pulled off the tablecloth together with a ketchup bottle, so that thick gore lay everywhere. At breakfast, the lodgers confessed they had had a most amusing night, for it had actually been funny the way the dog had been determined not to let anyone get a wink of sleep. After that first night, Laddy slept in our room, receiving from us, all through our delighted, sleepless nights, pats and embraces and kisses and whispers. He was our baby, our best friend, the smartest, prettiest, nicest dog in the entire wide world. Our soft and rapid blandishments excited him to yelp at us in pleased bewilderment, and then we would playfully grasp his muzzle, so that he would snarl, deep in his throat like an adult dog, and shake his head violently, and, when we freed him, nip us smartly with great good will.

He was an intelligent and genial dog and we trained him quickly. He steered clear of Gran's radishes and lettuce after she had several times given him a brisk comeuppance with a strap across the rump, and he soon left off chewing shoes and the laundry on the line, and he outgrew his babyish whining. He grew like a weed; he lost his spherical softness, and his coat, which had been sooty fluff, came in stiff and rusty black; his nose grew aristocratically long, and his clever, pointed ears stood at attention. He was all bronzy, lustrous black except for an Elizabethan ruff of white and a tip of white at the end of his perky tail. No one could deny that he was exceptionally handsome and that he had, as well, great personal charm and style. He escorted Daisy and me to school in the morning, laughing interiorly out of the enormous pleasure of his life as he gracefully cantered ahead of us, distracted occasionally by his private interest in smells or unfamiliar beings in the grass but, on the whole, engrossed in his role of chaperon. He made friends easily with other dogs, and sometimes he went for a long hunting weekend into the mountains with a huge and bossy old red hound named Mess, who had been on the county most of his life and had made a good thing of it, particularly at the fire station.

It was after one of these three-day excursions into the high country that Gran took Laddy in hand. He had come back spent and filthy, his coat a mass of cockleburs and ticks, his eyes bloodshot, loud *râles* in his chest; for half a day he lay motionless before the front door like someone in a hangover, his groaning eyes explicitly saying "Oh, for God's sake, leave me be" when we offered him food or bowls of water. Gran was disapproving, then affronted, and finally furious. Not, of course, with Laddy, since all inmates of her house enjoyed immunity, but with Mess, whose caddish character,

together with that of his nominal masters, the firemen, she examined closely under a strong light, with an air of detachment, with her not caring but her having, all the same, to laugh. A lodger who occupied the back west room had something to say about the fire chief and his nocturnal visits to a certain house occupied by a certain group of young women, too near the same age to be sisters and too old to be the daughters of the woman who claimed to be their mother. What a story! The exophthalmic librarian—she lived in one of the front rooms—had some interesting insinuations to make about the deputy marshal, who had borrowed, significantly, she thought, a book on hypnotism. She also knew—she was, of course, in a most useful position in the town, and from her authoritative pen in the middle of the library her mammiform and azure eyes and her eager ears missed nothing—that the fire chief's wife was not as scrupulous as she might be when she was keeping score on bridge night at the Sorosis.

There was little at the moment that Mrs. Placer and her disciples could do to save the souls of the Fire Department and their families, and therefore save the town from holocaust (a very timid boarder—a Mr. Beaver, a newcomer who was not to linger long—had sniffed throughout this recitative as if he were smelling burning flesh), but at least the unwholesome bond between Mess and Laddy could and would be severed once and for all. Gran looked across the porch at Laddy, who lay stretched at full length in the darkest corner, shuddering and baying abortively in his throat as he chased jack rabbits in his dreams, and she said, "A dog can have morals like a human." With this declaration Laddy's randy, manly holidays were finished. It may have been telepathy that woke him; he lifted his heavy head from his paws, laboriously got up, hesitated for a moment, and then padded languidly across the porch to Gran. He stood docilely beside her chair, head down, tail drooping as if to say, "O.K., Mrs. Placer, show me how and I'll walk the straight and narrow."

The very next day, Gran changed Laddy's name to Caesar, as being more dignified, and a joke was made at the supper table that he had come, seen, and conquered Mrs. Placer's heart—for within her circle, where the magnanimity she lavished upon her orphans was daily demonstrated, Mrs. Placer's heart was highly thought of. On that day also, although we did not know it yet, Laddy ceased to be our dog. Before many weeks passed, indeed, he ceased to be anyone we had ever known. A week or so after he became Caesar, he took up residence in her room, sleeping alongside her bed. She broke him of the habit of taking us to school (temptation to low living was rife along those streets; there was a chow—well, never mind) by the simple expedient of chaining him to a tree as soon as she got up in the morning. This discipline, together with the stamina-building cuffs she gave his sensitive ears from time to time, gradually but certainly remade his character. From a

sanguine, affectionate, easygoing Gael (with the fits of melancholy that alternated with the larkiness), he turned into an overbearing, military, efficient, loud-voiced Teuton. His bark, once wide of range, narrowed to one dark, glottal tone.

Soon the paper boy flatly refused to serve our house after Caesar efficiently removed the bicycle clip from his pants leg; the skin was not broken, or even bruised, but it was a matter of principle with the boy. The milkman approached the back door in a seizure of shakes like St. Vitus's dance. The metermen, the coal men, and the garbage collector crossed themselves if they were Catholics and, if they were not, tried whistling in the dark. "Good boy, good Caesar," they carolled, and, unctuously lying, they said they knew his bark was worse than his bite, knowing full well that it was not, considering the very nasty nip, requiring stitches, he had given a representative of the Olson Rug Company, who had had the folly to pat him on the head. Caesar did not molest the lodgers, but he disdained them and he did not brook being personally addressed by anyone except Gran. One night, he wandered into the dining room, appearing to be in search of something he had mislaid, and, for some reason that no one was ever able to divine, suddenly stood stock-still and gave the easily upset Mr. Beaver a long and penetrating look. Mr. Beaver, trembling from head to toe, stammered, "Why—er, hello there, Caesar, old boy, old boy," and Caesar charged. For a moment, it was touch and go, but Gran saved Mr. Beaver, only to lose him an hour later when he departed, bag and baggage, for the Y.M.C.A. This rout and the consequent loss of revenue would more than likely have meant Caesar's downfall and his deportation to the pound if it had not been that a newly widowed druggist, very irascible and very much Gran's style, had applied for a room in her house a week or so before, and now he moved in delightedly, as if he were coming home.

Finally, the police demanded that Caesar be muzzled and they warned that if he committed any major crime again—they cited the case of the Olson man—he would be shot on sight. Mrs. Placer, although she had no respect for the law, knowing as much as she did about its agents, obeyed. She obeyed, that is, in part; she put the muzzle on Caesar for a few hours a day, usually early in the morning when the traffic was light and before the deliveries had started, but the rest of the time his powerful jaws and dazzling white sabre teeth were free and snapping. There was between these two such preternatural rapport, such an impressive conjugation of suspicion, that he, sensing the approach of a policeman, could convey instantly to her the immediate necessity of clapping his nose cage on. And the policeman, sent out on the complaint of a terrorized neighbor, would be greeted by this law-abiding pair at the door.

Daisy and I wished we were dead. We were divided between hating Caesar

and loving Laddy, and we could not give up the hope that something, someday, would change him back into the loving animal he had been before he was appointed vice-president of the Placerites. Now at the meetings after supper on the porch he took an active part, standing rigidly at Gran's side except when she sent him on an errand. He carried out these assignments not with the air of a servant but with that of an accomplice. "Get me the paper, Caesar," she would say to him, and he, dismayingly intelligent and a shade smart-alecky, would open the screen door by himself and in a minute come back with the *Bulletin*, from which Mrs. Placer would then read an item, like the Gospel of the day, and then read between the lines of it, scandalized.

In the deepening of our woe and our bereavement and humiliation, we mutely appealed to Mr. Murphy. We did not speak outright to him, for Mr. Murphy lived in a state of indirection, and often when he used the pronoun "I," he seemed to be speaking of someone standing a little to the left of him, but we went to see him and his animals each day during the sad summer, taking what comfort we could from the cozy, quiet indolence of his back yard, where small black eyes encountered ours politely and everyone was half asleep. When Mr. Murphy inquired about Laddy in his bland, inattentive way, looking for a strategem whereby to shift the queen of hearts into position by the king, we would say, "Oh, he's fine," or "Laddy is a nifty dog." And Mr. Murphy, reverently slaking the thirst that was his talent and his concubine, would murmur, "I'm glad."

We wanted to tell him, we wanted his help, or at least his sympathy, but how could we cloud his sunny world? It was awful to see Mr. Murphy ruffled. Up in the calm clouds as he generally was, he could occasionally be brought to earth with a thud, as we had seen and heard one day. Not far from his house, there lived a bad, troublemaking boy of twelve, who was forever hanging over the fence trying to teach the parrot obscene words. He got nowhere, for she spoke no English and she would flabbergast him with her cold eye and sneer, "*Tant pis.*" One day, this boorish fellow went too far; he suddenly shot his head over the fence like a jack-in-the-box and aimed a water pistol at the skunk's face. Mr. Murphy leaped to his feet in a scarlet rage; he picked up a stone and threw it accurately, hitting the boy square in the back, so hard that he fell right down in a mud puddle and lay there kicking and squalling and, as it turned out, quite badly hurt. "If you ever come back here again, I'll kill you!" roared Mr. Murphy. I think he meant it, for I have seldom seen an anger so resolute, so brilliant, and so voluble. "How dared he!" he cried, scrambling into Mallow's cage to hug and pet and soothe her. "He must be absolutely mad! He must be the Devil!" He did not go back to his game after that but paced the yard, swearing a blue streak and only pausing to croon to his animals, now as frightened by him

as they had been by the intruder, and to drink straight from the bottle, not bothering with fixings. We were fascinated by this unfamiliar side of Mr. Murphy, but we did not want to see it ever again, for his face had grown so dangerously purple and the veins of his forehead seemed ready to burst and his eyes looked scorched. He was the closest thing to a maniac we had ever seen. So we did not tell him about Laddy; what he did not know would not hurt him, although it was hurting us, throbbing in us like a great, bleating wound.

But eventually Mr. Murphy heard about our dog's conversion, one night at the pool hall, which he visited from time to time when he was seized with a rare but compelling garrulity, and the next afternoon when he asked us how Laddy was and we replied that he was fine, he tranquilly told us, as he deliberated whether to move the jack of clubs now or to bide his time, that we were sweet girls but we were lying in our teeth. He did not seem at all angry but only interested, and all the while he questioned us, he went on about his business with the gin and the hearts and spades and diamonds and clubs. It rarely happened that he won the particular game he was playing, but that day he did, and when he saw all the cards laid out in their ideal pattern, he leaned back, looking disappointed, and he said, "I'm damned." He then scooped up the cards, in a gesture unusually quick and tidy for him, stacked them together, and bound them with a rubber band. Then he began to tell us what he thought of Gran. He grew as loud and apoplectic as he had been that other time, and though he kept repeating that he knew *we* were innocent and he put not a shred of the blame on us, we were afraid he might suddenly change his mind, and, speechless, we cowered against the monkeys' cage. In dread, the monkeys clutched the fingers we offered to them and made soft, protesting noises, as if to say, "Oh, stop it, Murphy! Our nerves!"

As quickly as it had started, the tantrum ended. Mr. Murphy paled to his normal complexion and said calmly that the only practical thing was to go and have it out with Mrs. Placer. "At once," he added, although he said he bitterly feared that it was too late and there would be no exorcising the fiend from Laddy's misused spirit. And because he had given the dog to us and not to her, he required that we go along with him, stick up for our rights, stand on our mettle, get up our Irish, and give the old bitch something to put in her pipe and smoke.

Oh, it was hot that day! We walked in a kind of delirium through the simmer, where only the grasshoppers had the energy to move, and I remember wondering if ether smelled like the gin on Mr. Murphy's breath. Daisy and I, in one way or another, were going to have our gizzards cut out along with our hearts and our souls and our pride, and I wished I were as drunk as Mr. Murphy, who swam effortlessly through the heat, his lips parted com-

fortably, his eyes half closed. When we turned in to the path at Gran's house, my blood began to scald my veins. It was so futile and so dangerous and so absurd. Here we were on a high moral mission, two draggletailed, gumptionless little girls and a toper whom no one could take seriously, partly because he was little more than a gurgling bottle of booze and partly because of the clothes he wore. He was a sight, as he always was when he was out of his own yard. There, somehow, in the carefree disorder, his clothes did not look especially strange, but on the streets of the town, in the barbershop or the post office or on Gran's path, they were fantastic. He wore a pair of hound's-tooth pants, old but maintaining a vehement pattern, and with them he wore a collarless blue flannelette shirt. His hat was the silliest of all, because it was a derby three sizes too big. And as if Shannon, too, was a part of his funny-paper costume, the elder capuchin rode on his shoulder, tightly embracing his thin red neck.

Gran and Caesar were standing side by side behind the screen door, looking as if they had been expecting us all along. For a moment, Gran and Mr. Murphy faced each other across the length of weedy brick between the gate and the front porch, and no one spoke. Gran took no notice at all of Daisy and me. She adjusted her eyeglasses, using both hands, and then looked down at Caesar and matter-of-factly asked, "Do you want out?"

Caesar flung himself full-length upon the screen and it sprang open like a jaw. I ran to meet and head him off, and Daisy threw a library book at his head, but he was on Mr. Murphy in one split second and had his monkey off his shoulder and had broken Shannon's neck in two shakes. He would have gone on nuzzling and mauling and growling over the corpse for hours if Gran had not marched out of the house and down the path and slapped him lightly on the flank and said, in a voice that could not have deceived an idiot, "Why, Caesar, you scamp! You've hurt Mr. Murphy's monkey! Aren't you ashamed!"

Hurt the monkey! In one final, apologetic shudder, the life was extinguished from the little fellow. Bloody and covered with slather, Shannon lay with his arms suppliantly stretched over his head, his leather fingers curled into loose, helpless fists. His hind legs and his tail lay limp and helter-skelter on the path. And Mr. Murphy, all of a sudden reeling drunk, burst into the kind of tears that Daisy and I knew well—the kind that time alone could stop. We stood aghast in the dark-red sunset, killed by our horror and our grief for Shannon and our unforgivable disgrace. We stood upright in a dead faint, and an eon passed before Mr. Murphy picked up Shannon's body and wove away, sobbing, "I don't believe it! I don't *believe* it!"

The very next day, again at morbid, heavy sunset, Caesar died in violent convulsions, knocking down two tall hollyhocks in his throes. Long after his heart had stopped, his right hind leg continued to jerk in aimless reflex.

Madly methodical, Mr. Murphy had poisoned some meat for him, had thoroughly envenomed a whole pound of hamburger, and early in the morning, before sunup, when he must have been near collapse with his hangover, he had stolen up to Mrs. Placer's house and put it by the kitchen door. He was so stealthy that Caesar never stirred in his fool's paradise there on the floor by Gran. We knew these to be the facts, for Mr. Murphy made no bones about them. Afterward, he had gone home and said a solemn Requiem for Shannon in so loud a voice that someone sent for the police, and they took him away in the Black Maria to sober him up on strong green tea. By the time he was in the lockup and had confessed what he had done, it was far too late, for Caesar had already gulped down the meat. He suffered an undreamed-of agony in Gran's flower garden, and Daisy and I, unable to bear the sight of it, hiked up to the red rocks and shook there, wretchedly ripping to shreds the sand lilies that grew in the cracks. Flight was the only thing we could think of, but where could we go? We stared west at the mountains and quailed at the look of the stern white glacier; we wildly scanned the prairies for escape. "If only we were something besides kids! Besides girls!" mourned Daisy. I could not speak at all; I huddled in a niche of the rocks and cried.

No one in town, except, of course, her lodgers, had the slightest sympathy for Gran. The townsfolk allowed that Mr. Murphy was a drunk and was fighting Irish, but he had a heart and this was something that could never be said of Mrs. Placer. The neighbor who had called the police when he was chanting the "Dies Irae" before breakfast in that deafening monotone had said, "The poor guy is having some kind of a spell, so don't be rough on him, hear?" Mr. Murphy became, in fact, a kind of hero; some people, stretching a point, said he was a saint for the way that every day and twice on Sunday he sang a memorial Mass over Shannon's grave, now marked with a chipped, cheap plaster figure of Saint Francis. He withdrew from the world more and more, seldom venturing into the streets at all, except when he went to the bootlegger to get a new bottle to snuggle into. All summer, all fall, we saw him as we passed by his yard, sitting at his dilapidated table, enfeebled with gin, graying, withering, turning his head ever and ever more slowly as he maneuvered the protocol of the kings and the queens and the knaves. Daisy and I could never stop to visit him again.

It went on like this, year after year. Daisy and I lived in a mesh of lies and evasions, baffled and mean, like rats in a maze. When we were old enough for beaux, we connived like sluts to see them, but we would never admit to their existence until Gran caught us out by some trick. Like this one, for example: Once, at the end of a long interrogation, she said to me, "I'm more relieved than I can tell you that you *don't* have anything to do with

Jimmy Gilmore, because I happen to know that he is after only one thing in a girl," and then, off guard in the loving memory of sitting in the movies the night before with Jimmy, not even holding hands, I defended him and defeated myself, and Gran, smiling with success, said, "I *thought* you knew him. It's a pretty safe rule of thumb that where there's smoke there's fire." That finished Jimmy and me, for afterward I was nervous with him and I confounded and alarmed and finally bored him by trying to convince him, although the subject had not come up, that I did not doubt his good intentions.

Daisy and I would come home from school, or, later, from our jobs, with a small triumph or an interesting piece of news, and if we forgot ourselves and, in our exuberance, told Gran, we were hustled into court at once for cross-examination. Once, I remember, while I was still in high school, I told her about getting a part in a play. How very nice for me, she said, if that kind of make-believe seemed to me worth while. But what was my role? An old woman! A widow woman believed to be a witch? She did not care a red cent, but she did have to laugh in view of the fact that Miss Eccles, in charge of dramatics, had almost run her down in her car. And I would forgive her, would I not, if she did not come to see the play, and would not think her eccentric for not wanting to see herself ridiculed in public?

My pleasure strangled, I crawled, joy-killed, to our third-floor room. The room was small and its monstrous furniture was too big and the rag rugs were repulsive, but it was bright. We would not hang a blind at the window, and on this day I stood there staring into the mountains that burned with the sun. I feared the mountains, but at times like this their massiveness consoled me; they, at least, could not be gossiped about.

Why did we stay until we were grown? Daisy and I ask ourselves this question as we sit here on the bench in the municipal zoo, reminded of Mr. Murphy by the polar bear, reminded by the monkeys not of Shannon but of Mrs. Placer's insatiable gossips at their postprandial feast.

"But how could we have left?" says Daisy, wringing her buttery hands. "It was the depression. We had no money. We had nowhere to go."

"All the same, we could have gone," I say, resentful still of the waste of all those years. "We could have come here and got jobs as waitresses. Or prostitutes, for that matter."

"I wouldn't have wanted to be a prostitute," says Daisy.

We agree that under the circumstances it would have been impossible for us to run away. The physical act would have been simple, for the city was not far and we could have stolen the bus fare or hitched a ride. Later, when we began to work as salesgirls in Kress's it would have been no trick at all to vanish one Saturday afternoon with our week's pay, without so much as going home to say goodbye. But it had been infinitely harder than that,

for Gran, as we now see, held us trapped by our sense of guilt. We were vitiated, and we had no choice but to wait, flaccidly, for her to die.

You may be sure we did not unlearn those years as soon as we put her out of sight in the cemetery and sold her house for a song to the first boob who would buy it. Nor did we forget when we left the town for another one, where we had jobs at a dude camp—the town where Daisy now lives with a happy husband and two happy sons. The succubus did not relent for years, and I can still remember, in the beginning of our days at the Lazy S 3, overhearing an edgy millionaire say to his wife, naming my name, "That girl gives me the cold shivers. One would think she had just seen a murder." Well, I had. For years, whenever I woke in the night in fear or pain or loneliness, I would increase my suffering by the memory of Shannon, and my tears were as bitter as poor Mr. Murphy's.

We have never been back to Adams. But we see that house plainly, with the hopvines straggling over the porch. The windows are hung with the cheapest grade of marquisette, dipped into coffee to impart to it an unwilling color, neither white nor tan but individual and spitefully unattractive. We see the wicker rockers and the swing, and through the screen door we dimly make out the slightly veering corridor, along one wall of which stands a glass-doored bookcase; when we were children, it had contained not books but stale old cardboard boxes filled with such things as W.C.T.U. tracts and anticigarette literature and newspaper clippings related to sexual sin in the Christianized islands of the Pacific.

Even if we were able to close our minds' eyes to the past, Mr. Murphy would still be before us in the apotheosis of the polar bear. My pain becomes intolerable, and I am relieved when Daisy rescues us. "We've got to go," she says in a sudden panic. "I've got asthma coming on." We rush to the nearest exit of the city park and hail a cab, and, once inside it, Daisy gives herself an injection of adrenalin and then leans back. We are heartbroken and infuriated, and we cannot speak.

Two hours later, beside my train, we clutch each other as if we were drowning. We ought to go out to the nearest policeman and say, "We are not responsible women. You will have to take care of us because we cannot take care of ourselves." But gradually the storm begins to lull.

"You're sure you've got your ticket?" says Daisy. "You'll surely be able to get a roomette once you're on."

"I don't know about that," I say. "If there are any V.I.P.s on board, I won't have a chance. 'Spinsters and Orphans Last' is the motto of this line."

Daisy smiles. "I didn't care," she says, "but I had to laugh when I saw that woman nab the redcap you had signalled to. I had a good notion to give her a piece of my mind."

"It will be a miracle if I ever see my bags again," I say, mounting the

steps of the train. "Do you suppose that blackguardly porter knows about the twenty-dollar gold piece in my little suitcase?"

"Anything's possible!" cries Daisy, and begins to laugh. She is so pretty, standing there in her bright-red linen suit and her black velvet hat. A solitary ray of sunshine comes through a broken pane in the domed vault of the train shed and lies on her shoulder like a silver arrow.

"So long, Daisy!" I call as the train begins to move.

She walks quickly along beside the train. "Watch out for pickpockets!" she calls.

"You, too!" My voice is thin and lost in the increasing noise of the speeding train wheels. "Goodbye, old dear!"

I go at once to the club car and I appropriate the writing table, to the vexation of a harried priest, who snatches up the telegraph pad and gives me a sharp look. I write Daisy approximately the same letter I always write her under this particular set of circumstances, the burden of which is that nothing for either of us can ever be as bad as the past before Gran mercifully died. In a postscript I add: "There is a Roman Catholic priest (that is to say, he is *dressed* like one) sitting behind me although all the chairs on the opposite side of the car are empty. I can only conclude that he is looking over my shoulder, and while I do not want to cause you any alarm, I think you would be advised to be on the lookout for any appearance of miraculous medals, scapulars, papist booklets, etc., in the shops in your town. It really makes me laugh to see the way he is pretending that all he wants is for me to finish this letter so that he can have the table."

I sign my name and address the envelope, and I give up my place to the priest, who smiles nicely at me, and then I move across the car to watch the fields as they slip by. They are alfalfa fields, but you can bet your bottom dollar that they are chockablock with marijuana.

I begin to laugh. The fit is silent but it is devastating; it surges and rattles in my rib cage, and I turn face to the window to avoid the narrow gaze of the Filipino bar boy. I must think of something sad to stop this unholy giggle, and I think of the polar bear. But even his bleak tragedy does not sober me. Wildly I fling open the newspaper I have brought and I pretend to be reading something screamingly funny. The words I see are in a Hollywood gossip column: "How a well-known starlet can get a divorce in Nevada without her crooner husband's consent, nobody knows. It won't be worth a plugged nickel here."

1956: *from The New Yorker*

THE COUNTRY HUSBAND

by John Cheever, who is no stranger to the O. Henry Memorial Award series. In addition to being the 1956 and 1964 first-prize winner he has also appeared in the 1941, 1950, 1955, and 1957 volumes. His stories have appeared in The New Yorker, Harper's Bazaar, Mademoiselle, Collier's, The Atlantic Monthly, New Republic, *and others. A native of Quincy, Massachusetts, and a graduate of Thayer Academy in Braintree, Mr. Cheever now spends most of his time in New York and Washington. He is the author of* The Wapshot Chronicle, *which was awarded the national book award in 1958.*

To begin at the beginning, the airplane from Minneapolis in which Francis Weed was travelling East ran into heavy weather. The sky had been a hazy blue, with the clouds below the plane lying so close together that nothing could be seen of the earth. Then mist began to form outside the windows, and they flew into a white cloud of such density that it reflected the exhaust fires. The color of the cloud darkened to grey, and the plane began to rock. Francis had been in heavy weather before, but he had never been shaken up so much. The man in the seat beside him pulled a flask out of his pocket and took a drink. Francis smiled at his neighbor, but the man looked away; he wasn't sharing his painkiller with anyone. The plane had begun to drop and flounder wildly. A child was crying. The air in the cabin was overheated and stale, and Francis' left foot went to sleep. He read a little from a paper book that he had bought at the airport, but the violence of the storm divided his attention. It was black outside the ports. The exhaust fires blazed and shed sparks in the dark, and, inside, the shaded lights, the stuffiness, and the window curtains gave the cabin an atmosphere of intense and misplaced domesticity. Then the lights flickered and went out. "You know what I've always wanted to do?" the man beside Francis said suddenly. "I've always wanted to buy a farm in New Hampshire and raise cattle beef." The stewardess announced that they were going to make an emergency landing. All but the child saw in their minds the spreading wings of the Angel of

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Death. The pilot could be heard singing faintly, "I've got sixpence, jolly, jolly sixpence. I've got sixpence to last me all my life . . ." There was no other sound.

The loud groaning of the hydraulic valves swallowed up the pilot's song, and there was a shrieking high in the air, like automobile brakes, and the plane hit flat on its belly in a cornfield and shook them so violently that an old man up forward howled, "Me kidneys! Me kidneys!" The stewardess flung open the doors, and someone opened an emergency door at the back, letting in the sweet noise of their continuing mortality—the idle splash and smell of a heavy rain. Anxious for their lives, they filed out of the doors and scattered over the cornfield in all directions, praying that the thread would hold. It did. Nothing happened. When it was clear that the plane would not burn or explode, the crew and the stewardess gathered the passengers together and led them to the shelter of a barn. They were not far from Philadelphia, and in a little while a string of taxis took them into the city. "It's just like the Marne," someone said, but there was surprisingly little relaxation of that suspiciousness with which many Americans regard their fellow-travellers.

In Philadelphia, Francis Weed got a train to New York. At the end of that journey, he crossed the city and caught, just as it was about to pull out, the commuting train that he took five nights a week to his home in Shady Hill.

He sat with Trace Bearden. "You know, I was in that plane that just crashed outside Philadelphia," he said. "We came down in a field . . ." He had travelled faster than the newspapers or the rain, and the weather in New York was sunny and mild. It was a day in late September, as fragrant and shapely as an apple. Trace listened to the story, but how could he get excited? Francis had no powers that would let him re-create a brush with death—particularly in the atmosphere of a commuting train, journeying through a sunny countryside where already, in the slum gardens, there were signs of harvest. Trace picked up his newspaper, and Francis was left alone with his thoughts. He said good night to Trace on the platform at Shady Hill and drove in his second-hand Volkswagen up to the Blenhollow neighborhood, where he lived.

The Weed's Dutch Colonial house was larger than it appeared to be from the driveway. The living room was spacious and divided like Gaul into three parts. Around an ell to the left as one entered from the vestibule was the long table, laid for six, with candles and a bowl of fruit in the centre. The sounds and smells that came from the open kitchen door were appetizing, for Julia Weed was a good cook. The largest part of the living room centered around a fireplace. On the right were some bookshelves and a piano. The room was polished and tranquil, and from the windows that opened

to the west there was some late-summer sunlight, brilliant and as clear as water. Nothing here was neglected; nothing had not been burnished. It was not the kind of household where, after prying open a stuck cigarette box, you would find an old shirt button and a tarnished nickel. The hearth was swept, the roses on the piano were reflected in the polish of the broad top, and there was an album of Schubert waltzes on the rack. Louisa Weed, a pretty girl of nine, was looking out the western windows. Her younger brother Henry was standing beside her. Her still younger brother, Toby, was studying the figures of some tonsured monks drinking beer on the polished brass of the wood box. Francis, taking off his hat and putting down his paper, was not consciously pleased with the scene; he was not that reflective. It was his element, his creation, and he returned to it with that sense of lightness and strength with which any creature returns to its home. "Hi, everybody," he said. "The plane from Minneapolis . . ."

Nine times out of ten, Francis would be greeted with affection, but tonight the children are absorbed in their own antagonisms. Francis has not finished his sentence about the plane crash before Henry plants a kick in Louisa's behind. Louisa swings around saying "*Damn* you!" Francis makes the mistake of scolding Louisa for bad language before he punishes Henry. Now Louisa turns on her father and accuses him of favoritism. Henry is always right; she is persecuted and lonely; her lot is hopeless. Francis turns to his son, but the boy has justification for the kick—she hit him first; she hit him on the ear, which is dangerous. Louisa agrees with this passionately. She hit him on the ear, and she *meant* to hit him on the ear, because he messed up her china collection. Henry says that this is a lie. Little Toby turns away from the wood box to throw in some evidence for Louisa. Henry claps his hands over little Toby's mouth. Francis separates the two boys but accidentally pushes Toby into the wood box. Toby begins to cry. Louisa is already crying. Just then, Julia Weed comes into that part of the room where the table is laid. She is a pretty, intelligent woman, and the white in her hair is premature. She does not seem to notice the fracas. "Hello, darling," she says serenely to Francis. "Wash your hands, everyone. Dinner is ready." She strikes a match and lights the six candles in this vale of tears.

This simple announcement, like the war cries of the Scottish chieftains, only refreshes the ferocity of the combatants. Louisa gives Henry a blow on the shoulder. Henry, although he seldom cries, has pitched nine innings and is tired. He bursts into tears. Little Toby discovers a splinter in his hand and begins to howl. Francis says loudly that he had been in a plane crash and that he is tired. Julia appears again, from the kitchen, and, still ignoring the chaos, asks Francis to go upstairs and tell Helen that everything is ready. Francis is happy to go; it is like getting back to headquarters company. He is planning to tell his oldest daughter about the airplane crash, but Helen is

lying on her bed reading a *True Romance* magazine, and the first thing Francis does is to take the magazine from her hand and remind Helen that he has forbidden her to buy it. She did not buy it, Helen replies. It was given to her by her best friend, Bessie Black. Everybody reads *True Romance.* Bessie Black's father reads *True Romance.* There isn't a girl in Helen's class who doesn't read *True Romance.* Francis expresses his detestation of the magazine and then tells her that dinner is ready—although from the sounds downstairs it doesn't seem so. Helen follows him down the stairs. Julia has seated herself in the candlelight and spread a napkin over her lap. Neither Louisa nor Henry has come to the table. Little Toby is still howling, lying face down on the floor. Francis speaks to him gently: "Daddy was in a plane crash this afternoon, Toby, don't you want to hear about it?" Toby goes on crying. "If you don't come to the table now, Toby," Francis says, "I'll have to send you to bed without any supper." The little boy rises, gives him a cutting look, flies up the stairs to his bedroom, and slams the door. "Oh dear," Julia says, and starts to go after him. Francis says that she will spoil him. Julia says that Toby is ten pounds underweight and has to be encouraged to eat. Winter is coming, and he will spend the cold months in bed unless he has his dinner. Julia goes upstairs. Francis sits down at the table with Helen. Helen is suffering from the dismal feeling of having read too intently on a fine day, and she gives her father and the room a jaded look. She doesn't understand about the plane crash, because there wasn't a drop of rain in Shady Hill.

Julia returns with Toby, and they all sit down and are served. "Do I have to look at that big, fat slob?" Henry says of Louisa. Everybody but Toby enters into this skirmish, and it rages up and down the table for five minutes. Toward the end, Henry puts his napkin over his head and tries to eat that way, spills spinach all over his shirt. Francis asks Julia if the children couldn't have their dinner earlier. Julia's guns are loaded for this. She can't cook two dinners and lay two tables. She paints with lightning strokes that panorama of drudgery in which her youth, her beauty, and her wit have been lost. Francis says that he must be understood; he was nearly killed in an airplane crash, and he doesn't like to come home every night to a battlefield. Now Julia is deeply committed. Her voice trembles. He doesn't come home every night to a battlefield. The accusation is stupid and mean. Everything was tranquil until he arrived. She stops speaking, puts down her knife and fork, and looks into her plate as if it is a gulf. She begins to cry. "Poor Mummy!" Toby says, and when Julia gets up from the table, Toby goes to her side. "Poor Mummy," he says. "Poor Mummy!" And they climb the stairs together. The other children drift away from the battlefield, and Francis goes into the back garden for a cigarette and some air.

It was a pleasant garden, with walks and flower beds and places to sit.

by John Cheever

The sunset had nearly burned out, but there was still plenty of light. Put into a thoughtful mood by the crash and the battle, Francis listened to the evening sounds of Shady Hill. "Varmits! Rascals!" old Mr. Nixon shouted to the squirrels in his bird-feeding station. "Avaunt and quit my sight!" A door slammed. Someone was playing tennis on the Babcock's court; someone was cutting grass. Then Donald Goslin, who lived at the corner, began to play the "Moonlight Sonata." He did this nearly every night. He threw the tempo out the window and played it *rubato* from beginning to end, like an outpouring of tearful petulance, lonesomeness, and self-pity—of everything it was Beethoven's greatness not to know. The music rang up and down the street beneath the trees like an appeal for love, for tenderness, aimed at some lonely housemaid—some fresh-faced, homesick girl from Galway, looking at old snapshots in her third-floor room. "Here, Jupiter, here, Jupiter," Francis called to the Mercers' retriever. Jupiter crashed through the tomato vines with the remains of a felt hat in his mouth.

Jupiter was an anomaly. His retrieving instincts and his high spirits were out of place in Shady Hill. He was as black as coal, with a long, alert, intelligent, rakehell face. His eyes gleamed with mischief, and he held his head high. It was the fierce, heavily collared dog's head that appeared in heraldry, in tapestry, and that used to appear on umbrella handles and walking sticks. Jupiter went where he pleased, ransacking wastebaskets, clotheslines, garbage pails, and shoe bags. He broke up garden parties and tennis matches, and got mixed up in the processional at Christ's Church on Sunday, barking at the men in red dresses. He crashed through old Mr. Nixon's rose garden two or three times a day, cutting a wide swath through the Condesa de Sastagos, and as soon as Donald Goslin lighted his barbecue fire on Thursday nights, Jupiter would get the scent. Nothing the Goslins did could drive him away. Sticks and stones and rude commands only moved him to the edge of the terrace, where he remained, with his gallant and heraldic muzzle, waiting for Donald Goslin to turn his back and reach for the salt. Then he would spring onto the terrace, lift the steak lightly off the fire, and run away with the Goslins' dinner. Jupiter's days were numbered. The Wrightsons' German gardener or the Farquarsons' cook would soon poison him. Even old Mr. Nixon might put some arsenic in the garbage that Jupiter loved. "Here, Jupiter, Jupiter!" Francis called, but the dog pranced off, shaking the hat in his white teeth. Looking in at the windows of his house, Francis saw Julia had come down and was blowing out the candles.

Julia and Francis Weed went out a great deal. Julia was well liked and gregarious, and her love of parties sprang from a most natural dread of chaos and loneliness. She went through her morning mail with real anxiety, looking for invitations, and she usually found some, but she was insatiable, and

if she had gone out seven nights a week, it would not have cured her of a reflective look—the look of someone who hears distant music—for she would always suppose that there was a more brilliant party somewhere else. Francis limited her to two week-night parties, putting a flexible interpretation on Friday, and rode through the weekend like a dory in a gale. The day after the airplane crash, the Weeds were to have dinner with the Farquarsons.

Francis got home late from town, and Julia got the sitter while he dressed, and then hurried him out of the house. The party was small and pleasant, and Francis settled down to enjoy himself. A new maid passed the drinks. Her hair was dark, and her face was round and pale and seemed familiar to Francis. He had not developed his memory as a sentimental faculty. Wood smoke, lilac, and other such perfumes did not stir him, and his memory was something like his appendix—a vestigial repository. It was not his limitation at all to be unable to escape the past; it was perhaps his limitation that he had escaped it so successfully. He might have seen the maid at other parties, he might have seen her taking a walk on Sunday afternoons, but in either case he would not be searching his memory now. Her face was, in a wonderful way, a moon face—Norman or Irish—but it was not beautiful enough to account for his feeling that he had seen her before, in circumstances that he ought to be able to remember. He asked Nellie Farquarson who she was. Nellie said that the maid had come through an agency, and that her home was Trénon, in Normandy—a small place with a church and a restaurant that Nellie had once visited. While Nellie talked on about her travels abroad, Francis realized where he had seen the woman before. It had been at the end of the war. He had left a replacement depot with some other men and taken a three-day pass in Trénon. On their second day, they had walked out to a crossroads to see the public chastisement of a young woman who had lived with the German commandant during the Occupation.

It was a cool morning in the fall. The sky was overcast, and poured down onto the dirt crossroads a very discouraging light. They were on high land and could see how like one another the shapes of the clouds and the hills were as they stretched off toward the sea. The prisoner arrived sitting on a three-legged stool in a farm cart while the mayor read the accusation and the sentence. Her head was bent and her face was set in that empty half smile behind which the whipped soul is suspended. When the mayor was finished, she undid her hair and let it fall across her back. A little man with a grey mustache cut off her hair with shears and dropped it on the ground. Then, with a bowl of soapy water and a straight razor, he shaved her skull clean. A woman approached and began to undo the fastenings of her clothes, but the prisoner pushed her aside and undressed herself. When she pulled the chemise over her head and threw it on the ground, she was naked. The women jeered; the men were still. There was no change in the

falseness or the plaintiveness of the prisoner's smile. The cold wind made her white skin rough and hardened the nipples of her breasts. The jeering ended gradually, put down by the recognition of their common humanity. One woman spat on her, but some inviolable grandeur in her nakedness lasted through the ordeal. When the crowd was quiet, she turned—she had begun to cry—and with nothing on but a pair of worn black shoes and stockings, walked down the dirt road alone, away from the village. The round white face had aged a little, but there was no question but that the maid who passed his cocktails and later served Francis his dinner was the woman who had been punished at the crossroads.

The war now seemed so distant and that world where the cost of partisanship had been death or torture so long ago. Francis had lost track of the men who had been with him in Vésey. He could not count on Julia's discretion. He could not tell anyone. And if he had told the story now, at the dinner table, it would have been a social as well as a human error. The people in the Farquarsons' living room seemed united in their tacit claim that there had been no past, no war—that there was no danger or trouble in the world. In the recorded history of human arrangements, this extraordinary meeting would have fallen into place, but the atmosphere of Shady Hill made the memory unseemly and impolite. The prisoner withdrew after passing the coffee, but the encounter left Francis feeling languid; it had opened his memory and his senses, and left them dilated. He and Julia drove home when the party ended, and Julia went into the house. Francis stayed in the car to take the sitter home.

Expecting to see Mrs. Henlein, the old lady who usually stayed with the children, he was surprised when a young girl opened the door and came out onto the lighted stoop. She stayed in the light to count her textbooks. She was frowning and beautiful. Now, the world is full of beautiful young girls, but Francis saw here the difference between beauty and perfection. All those endearing flaws, moles, birthmarks, and healed wounds were missing, and he experienced in his consciousness that moment when music breaks glass, and felt a pang of recognition as strange, deep, and wonderful as anything in his life. It hung from her frown, from an impalpable darkness in her face—a look that impressed him as a direct appeal for love. When she had counted her books, she came down the steps and opened the car door. In the light, he saw that her cheeks were wet. She got in and shut the door.

"You're new," Francis said.

"Yes. Mrs. Henlein is sick. I'm Anne Murchison."

"Did the children give you any trouble?"

"Oh, no, no." She turned and smiled at him unhappily in the dim dashboard light. Her light hair caught on the collar of her jacket, and she shook her head to set it loose.

"You've been crying."

"Yes."

"I hope it was nothing that happened in our house."

"No, no, it was nothing that happened in your house." Her voice was bleak. "It's no secret. Everybody in the village knows. Daddy's an alcoholic, and he just called me from some saloon and gave me a piece of his mind. He thinks I'm immoral. He called just before Mrs. Weed came back."

"I'm sorry."

"Oh, *Lord!*" she gasped and began to cry. She turned toward Francis, and he took her in his arms and let her cry on his shoulder. She shook in his embrace, and this movement accentuated his sense of the fineness of her flesh and bone. The layers of their clothing felt thin, and when her shuddering began to diminish, it was so much like a paroxysm of love that Francis lost his head and pulled her roughly against him. She drew away. "I live on Belleview Avenue," she said. "You go down Lansing Street to the railroad bridge."

"All right." He started the car.

"You turn left at that traffic light. . . . Now you turn right here and go straight on toward the tracks."

The road Francis took brought him right out of his own neighborhood, across the tracks, and toward the river, to a street where the near-poor lived, in houses whose peaked gables and trimmings of wooden lace conveyed the purest feelings of pride and romance, although the houses themselves could not have offered much privacy or comfort, they were all so small. The street was dark, and, stirred by the grace and beauty of the troubled girl, he seemed, in turning into it, to have come to the deepest part of some submerged memory. In the distance, he saw a porch light burning. It was the only one, and she said that the house with the light was where she lived. When he stopped the car, he could see beyond the porch light into a dimly lighted hallway with an old-fashioned clothes tree. "Well, here we are," he said, conscious that a young man would have said something different.

She did not move her hands from the books, where they were folded, and she turned and faced him. There were tears of lust in his eyes. Determinedly —not sadly—he opened the door on his side and walked around to open hers. He took her free hand, letting his fingers in between hers, climbed at her side the two concrete steps, and went up a narrow walk through a front garden where dahlias, marigolds, and roses—things that had withstood the light frosts—still bloomed, and made a bittersweet smell in the night air. At the steps, she freed her hand and then turned and kissed him swiftly. Then she crossed the porch and shut the door. The porch light went out, then the light in the hall. A second later, a light went on upstairs at the side of the house, shining into a tree that was still covered with leaves. It

took her only a few minutes to undress and get into bed, and then the house was dark.

Julia was asleep when Francis got home. He opened a second window and got into bed to shut his eyes on that night, but as soon as they were shut—as soon as he had dropped off to sleep—the girl entered his mind, moving with perfect freedom through its shut doors and filling chamber after chamber with her light, her perfume, and the music of her voice. He was crossing the Atlantic with her on the old Mauretania and, later, living with her in Paris. When he woke from his dream, he got up and smoked a cigarette at the open window. Getting back into bed, he cast around in his mind for something he desired to do that would injure no one, and he thought of skiing. Up through the dimness in his mind rose the image of a mountain deep in snow. It was late in the day. Wherever his eyes looked, he saw broad and heartening things. Over his shoulder, there was a snow-filled valley, rising into wooded hills where the trees dimmed the whiteness like a sparse coat of hair. The cold deadened all sound but the loud, iron clanking of the lift machinery. The light on the trails was blue, and it was harder than it had been a minute or two earlier to pick the turns, harder to judge—now that the snow was all deep blue—the crust, the ice, the bare spots, and the deep piles of dry powder. Down the mountain he swung, matching his speed against the contours of a slope that had been formed in the first ice age, seeking with ardor some simplicity of feeling and circumstance. Night fell then, and he drank a Martini with some old friend in a dirty country bar.

In the morning, Francis' snow-covered mountain was gone, and he was left with vivid memories of Paris and the Mauretania. He had been bitten gravely. He washed his body, shaved his jaws, drank his coffee, and missed the seven-thirty-one. The train pulled out just as he brought his car to the station, and the longing he felt for the coaches as they drew stubbornly away from him reminded him of the humors of love. He waited for the eight-two, on what was now an empty platform. It was a clear morning; the morning seemed thrown like a gleaming bridge of light over his mixed affairs. His spirits were feverish and high. The image of the girl seemed to put him into a relationship to the world that was mysterious and enthralling. Cars were beginning to fill up the parking lot, and he noticed that those that had driven down from the high land above Shady Hill were white with hoarfrost. This first clear sign of autumn thrilled him. An express train—a night train from Buffalo or Albany—came down the tracks between the platforms, and he saw that the roofs of the foremost cars were covered with a skin of ice. Struck by the miraculous physicalness of everything, he smiled at the passengers in the dining car, who could be seen eating eggs and wiping their mouths with napkins as they travelled. The sleeping-car compartments, with their soiled bed linen, trailed through the fresh morning like a string of rooming-house

windows. Then he saw an extraordinary thing; at one of the bedroom windows sat an unclothed woman of exceptional beauty, combing her golden hair, and Francis followed her with his eyes until she was out of sight. Then old Mrs. Wrightson joined him on the platform and began to talk.

"Well, I guess you must be surprised to see me here the third morning in a row," she said, "but because of my window curtains I'm becoming a regular commuter. The curtains I bought on Monday I returned on Tuesday, and the curtains I bought Tuesday I'm returning today. On Monday, I got exactly what I wanted—it's a wool tapestry with roses and birds—but when I got them home, I found they were the wrong length. Well, I exchanged them yesterday, and when I got them home, I found they were still the wrong length. Now I'm praying to high Heaven that the decorator will have them in the right length, because you know my house, you *know* my living-room windows, and you can imagine what a problem they present. I don't know what to do with them."

"I know what to do with them," Francis said.

"What?"

"Paint them black on the inside, and shut up."

There was a gasp from Mrs. Wrightson, and Francis looked down at her to be sure that she knew he meant to be rude. She turned and walked away from him, so damaged in spirit that she limped. A wonderful feeling enveloped him, as if light were being shaken about him, and he thought again of Venus combing and combing her hair as she drifted through the Bronx. The realization of how many years had passed since he had enjoyed being deliberately impolite sobered him. Among his friends and neighbors, there were brilliant and gifted people—he saw that—but many of them, also, were bores and fools, and he had made the mistake of listening to them all with equal attention. He had confused a lack of discrimination with Christian love, and the confusion seemed general and destructive. He was grateful to the girl for this bracing sensation of independence. Birds were singing—cardinals and the last of the robins. The sky shone like enamel. Even the smell of ink from his morning paper honed his appetite for life, and the world that was spread out around him was plainly a paradise.

If Francis believed in some hierarchy of love—in spirits armed with hunting bows, in the capriciousness of Venus or Eros—or even in magical potions, philtres, and stews, in scapulae and quarters of the moon, it might have explained his susceptibility and his feverish high spirits. The autumnal loves of middle age are well publicized, and he guessed he was face to face with one of these, but there was not a trace of autumn in what he felt. He wanted to sport in the green woods, scratch where he itched, and drink from the same cup.

His secretary, Miss Rainey, was late that morning—she went to a psychia-

trist three mornings a week—and when she came in, Francis wondered what advice a psychiatrist would have for him. But the girl promised to bring back into his life something like the sound of music. The realization that this music might lead him straight to a trial at the county courthouse collapsed his happiness. The photograph of his four children laughing into the camera on the beach at Gay Head reproached him. On the letterhead of his firm there was a drawing of the Laocoön, and the figure of the priest and his sons in the coils of the snake appeared to him to have the deepest meaning.

He had lunch with Pinky Trabert, who told him a couple of dirty stories. At a conversational level, the mores of his friends were robust and elastic, but he knew that the moral card house would come down on them all—on Julia and the children as well—if he got caught taking advantage of a baby sitter. Looking back over the recent history of Shady Hill for some precedent, he found there was none. There was no turpitude; there had not been a divorce since he lived there; there had not even been a breath of scandal. Things seemed arranged with more propriety even than in the Kingdom of Heaven. After leaving Pinky, Francis went to a jeweller's and bought the girl a bracelet. How happy this clandestine purchase made him, how stuffy and comical the jeweller's clerks seemed, how sweet the women who passed at his back smelled! On Fifth Avenue, passing Atlas with his shoulders bent under the weight of the world, Francis thought of the strenuousness of containing his physicalness within the patterns he had chosen.

He did not know when he would see the girl next. He had the bracelet in his inside pocket when he got home. Opening the door of his house, he found her in the hall. Her back was to him, and she turned when she heard the door close. Her smile was open and loving. Her perfection stunned him like a fine day—a day after a thunderstorm. He seized her and covered her lips with his, and she struggled but she did not have to struggle for long, because just then little Gertrude Flannery appeared from somewhere and said, "Oh, Mr. Weed . . ."

Gertrude was a stray. She had been born with a taste for exploration, and she did not have it in her to centre her life with her affectionate parents. People who did not know the Flannerys concluded from Gertrude's behavior that she was the child of a bitterly divided family, where drunken quarrels were the rule. This was not true. The fact that little Gertrude's clothing was ragged and thin was her own triumph over her mother's struggle to dress her warmly and neatly. Garrulous, skinny, and unwashed, she drifted from house to house around the Blenhollow neighborhood, forming and breaking alliances based on an attachment to babies, animals, children her own age, adolescents, and sometimes adults. Opening your front door in the morning, you would find Gertrude sitting on your stoop. Going into the bathroom to shave, you would find Gertrude using the toilet. Looking into your son's crib,

you would find it empty, and, looking further, you would find that Gertrude had pushed him in his baby carriage into the next village. She was helpful, pervasive, honest, hungry and loyal. She never went home of her own choice. When the time to go arrived she was indifferent to all its signs. "Go home, Gertrude" people could be heard saying in one house or another, night after night. "Go home, Gertrude." "It's time for you to go home now, Gertrude." "You had better go home and get your supper, Gertrude." "I told you to go home twenty minutes ago, Gertrude." "Your mother will be worrying about you, Gertrude." "Go home, Gertrude, go home."

There are times when the lines around the human eye seem like shelves of eroded stone and when the staring eye itself strikes us with such a wilderness of animal feeling that we are at a loss. The look Francis gave the little girl was ugly and queer, and it frightened her. He reached into his pocket—his hands were shaking—and took out a quarter. "Go home, Gertrude, go home, and don't tell anyone, Gertrude. Don't—" He choked and ran into the living room as Julia called down to him from upstairs to hurry up and dress.

The thought that he would drive Anne Murchison home later that night ran like a golden thread through the events of the party that Francis and Julia went to, and he laughed uproariously at dull jokes, dried a tear when Mabel Mercer told him about the death of her kitten, and stretched, yawned, sighed, and grunted like any other man with a rendezvous at the back of his mind. The bracelet was in his pocket. As he sat talking, the smell of grass was in his nose, and he was wondering where he would park the car. Nobody lived in the old Parker mansion, and the driveway was used as a lover's lane. Townsend Street was a dead end, and he could park there, beyond the last house. The old lane that used to connect Elm Street to the riverbanks was overgrown, but he had walked there with his children, and he could drive his car deep enough into the brushwoods to be concealed.

The Weeds were the last to leave the party, and their host and hostess spoke of their own married happiness while they all four stood in the hallway saying good night. "She's my girl," their host said, squeezing his wife. "She's my blue sky. After sixteen years, I still bite her shoulders. She makes me feel like Hannibal crossing the Alps."

The Weeds drove home in silence. Francis brought his car up to the driveway and sat still, with the motor running. "You can put the car in the garage," Julia said as she got out. "I told the Murchison girl she could leave at eleven. Someone drove her home." She shut the door, and Francis sat in the dark. He would be spared nothing then, it seemed, that a fool was not spared: ravening, lewdness, jealousy, this hurt to his feelings that put tears in his eyes, even scorn—for he could see clearly the image he now presented, his arms spread over the steering wheel and his head buried in them for love.

by John Cheever

Francis had been a dedicated Boy Scout when he was young, and, remembering the precepts of his youth, he left his office early the next afternoon and played some round-robin squash, but, with his body toned up by exercise and a shower, he realized that he might better have stayed at his desk. It was a frosty night when he got home. The air smelled sharply of change. When he stepped into the house, he sensed an unusual stir. The children were in their best clothes, and when Julia came down she was wearing a lavender dress and her diamond sunburst. She explained the stir: Mr. Hubber was coming at seven to take their photograph for the Christmas card. She had put out Francis' blue suit and a tie with some color in it, because the picture was going to be in color this year. Julia was light-hearted at the thought of being photographed for Christmas. It was the kind of ceremony she enjoyed.

Francis went upstairs to change his clothes. He was tired from the day's work and tired with longing, and sitting on the edge of the bed had the effect of deepening his weariness. He thought of Anne Murchison, and the physical need to express himself, instead of being restrained by the pink lamps on Julia's dressing table, engulfed him. He went to Julia's desk, took a piece of writing paper, and began to write on it. "Dear Anne, I love you, I love you, I love you . . ." No one would see the letter, and he used no restraint. He used phrases like "Heavenly bliss," and "love nest." He salivated, sighed, and trembled. When Julia called him to come down, the abyss between his fantasy and the practical world opened so wide that he felt it affect the muscles of his heart.

Julia and the children were on the stoop, and the photographer and his assistant had set up a double battery of floodlights to show the family and architectural beauty of the entrance to their house. People who had come home on a late train slowed their cars to see the Weeds being photographed for their Christmas card. A few waved and called to the family. It took half an hour of smiling and wetting their lips before Mr. Hubber was satisfied. The heat of the lights made an unfresh smell in the frosty air, and when they were turned off, they lingered on the retina of Francis' eyes.

Later that night, while Francis and Julia were drinking their coffee in the living room, the doorbell rang. Julia answered the door and let in Clayton Thomas. He had come to pay her for some theatre tickets that she had given his mother some time ago, and that Helen Thomas had scrupulously insisted on paying for, though Julia had asked her not to. Julia invited him in to have a cup of coffee. "I won't have any coffee," Clayton said, "but I will come in for a minute." He followed her into the living room, said good evening to Francis, and sat down awkwardly in a chair.

Clayton's father had been killed in the war, and the young man's fatherlessness surrounded him like an element. This may have been conspicuous

in Shady Hill because the Thomases were the only family that lacked a piece; all the other marriages were intact and productive. Clayton was in his second or third year of college, and he and his mother lived alone in a large house which she hoped to sell. Clayton had once made some trouble. Years ago, he had stolen some money and run away; he had got to California before they caught up with him. He was tall and homely, wore horn-rimmed glasses, and spoke in a deep voice.

"When do you go back to college, Clayton?" Francis asked.

"I'm not going back," Clayton said. "Mother doesn't have the money, and there's no sense in all this pretense. I'm going to get a job, and if we sell the house, we'll take an apartment in New York."

"Won't you miss Shady Hill?" Julia asked.

"No," Clayton said. "I don't like it."

"Why not?" Francis asked.

"Well, there's a lot here I don't approve of," Clayton said gravely. "Things like the club dances. Last Saturday night, I looked in toward the end and saw Mr. Granner trying to put Mrs. Minot into the trophy case. They were both drunk. I disapprove of so much drinking."

"It was Saturday night," Francis said.

"And all the dovecotes are phony," Clayton said. "And the way people clutter up their lives. I've thought about it a lot, and what seems to me to be really wrong with Shady Hill is that it doesn't have any future. So much energy is spent in perpetuating the place—in keeping out undesirables, and so forth—that the only idea of the future anyone has is just more and more commuting trains and more parties. I don't think that's healthy. I think people ought to be able to dream big dreams about the future. I think people ought to be able to dream great dreams."

"It's too bad you couldn't continue with college," Julia said.

"I wanted to go to divinity school," Clayton said.

"What's your church?" Francis asked.

"Unitarian, Theosophist, Transcendentalist, Humanist," Clayton said.

"Wasn't Emerson a transcendentalist?" Julia asked.

"I mean the English transcendentalists." Clayton said. "All the American transcendentalists were goops."

"What kind of job do you expect to get?" Francis asked.

"Well, I'd like to work for a publisher," Clayton said. "But everyone tells me there's nothing doing. But it's the kind of thing I'm interested in. I'm writing a long verse play about good and evil. Uncle Charlie might get me into a bank, and that would be good for me. I need the discipline. I have a long way to go in forming my character. I have some terrible habits. I talk too much. I think I ought to take vows of silence. I ought to try not to speak

for a week, and discipline myself. I've thought of making a retreat at one of the Episcopalian monasteries, but I don't like Trinitarianism."

"Do you have any girl friends?" Francis asked.

"I'm engaged to be married," Clayton said. "Of course, I'm not old enough or rich enough to have my engagement observed or respected or anything, but I bought a simulated emerald for Anne Murchison with the money I made cutting lawns this summer. We're going to be married as soon as she finishes school."

Francis recoiled at the mention of the girl's name. Then a dingy light seemed to emanate from his spirit, showing everything—Julia, the boy, the chairs—in their true colorlessness. It was like a bitter turn of the weather.

"We're going to have a large family," Clayton said. "Her father's a terrible rummy, and I've had my hard times, and we want to have lots of children. Oh, she's wonderful, Mr. and Mrs. Weed, and we have so much in common. We like all the same things. We sent out the same Christmas card last year without planning it, and we both have an allergy to tomatoes, and our eyebrows grow together in the middle. Well, good night."

Julia went to the door with him. When she returned, Francis said that Clayton was lazy, irresponsible, affected, and smelly. Julia said that Francis seemed to be getting intolerant; the Thomas boy was young and should be given a chance. Julia had noticed other cases where Francis had been short-tempered. "Mrs. Wrightson has asked everyone in Shady Hill to her anniversary party but us," she said.

"I'm sorry, Julia."

"Do you know why they didn't ask us?"

"Why?"

"Because you insulted Mrs. Wrightson."

"Then you know about it?"

"June Masterson told me. She was standing behind you."

Julia walked in front of the sofa with a small step that expressed, Francis knew, a feeling of anger.

"I did insult Mrs. Wrightson, Julia, and I meant to. I've never liked her parties, and I'm glad she's dropped us."

"What about Helen?"

"How does Helen come into this?"

"Mrs. Wrightson's the one who decides who goes to assemblies."

"You mean she can keep Helen from going to the dances?"

"Yes."

"I hadn't thought of that."

"Oh, I knew you hadn't thought of it," Julia cried thrusting hilt-deep into this chink of his armor. "And it makes me furious to see this kind of stupid thoughtlessness wreck everyone's happiness."

"I don't think I've wrecked anyone's happiness."

"Mrs. Wrightson runs Shady Hill and has run it for the last forty years. I don't know what makes you think that in a community like this you can indulge every impulse you have to be insulting, vulgar, and offensive."

"I have very good manners," Francis said, trying to give the evening a turn toward the light.

"Damn you, Francis Weed!" Julia cried, and the spit of her words struck him in the face. "I've worked hard for the social position we enjoy in this place, and I won't stand by and see you wreck it. You must have understood when you settled here that you couldn't expect to live like a bear in a cave."

"I've got to express my likes and dislikes."

"You can conceal your dislikes. You don't have to meet everything head-on, like a child. Unless you're anxious to be a social leper. It's no accident that we get asked out a great deal. It's no accident that Helen has so many friends. How would you like to spend your Saturday nights at the movies? How would you like to spend your Sundays raking up dead leaves? How would you like it if your daughter spent the assembly nights sitting at her window, listening to the music from the club? How would you like it—" He did something then that was, after all, not so unaccountable, since her words seemed to raise up between them a wall so deadening that he gagged: he struck her full in the face. She staggered and then, a moment later, seemed composed. She went up the stairs to their room. She didn't slam the door. When Francis followed, a few minutes later, he found her packing a suitcase.

"Julia, I'm very sorry."

"It doesn't matter," she said. She was crying.

"Where do you think you're going?"

"I don't know. I just looked at the timetable. There's an eleven-sixteen into New York. I'll take that."

"You can't go, Julia."

"I can't stay. I know that."

"I'm sorry about Mrs. Wrightson, Julia, and I'm—"

"It doesn't matter about Mrs. Wrightson. That isn't the trouble."

"What is the trouble?"

"You don't love me."

"I do love you, Julia."

"No, you don't."

"Julia, I do love you, and I would like to be as we were—sweet and bawdy and dark—but now there are so many people."

"You hate me."

"I don't hate you, Julia."

"You have no idea of how much you hate me. I think it's subconscious. You don't realize the cruel things you've done."

"What cruel things, Julia?"

"The cruel acts your subconscious drives you to in order to express your hatred of me."

"What, Julia?"

"I've never complained."

"Tell me."

"Your clothes."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean the way you leave your dirty clothes around in order to express your subconscious hatred of me."

"I don't understand."

"I mean your dirty socks and your dirty pajamas and your dirty underwear and your dirty shirts!" She rose from kneeling by the suitcase and faced him, her eyes blazing and her voice ringing with emotion. "I'm talking about the fact that you've never learned to hang up anything. You just leave your clothes all over the floor where they drop, in order to humiliate me. You do it on purpose!" She fell on the bed, sobbing.

"Julia, darling!" he said, but when she felt his hand on her shoulder she got up.

"Leave me alone," she said. "I have to go." She brushed past him to the closet and came back with a dress. "I'm not taking any of the things you've given me," she said. "I'm leaving my pearls and the fur jacket."

"Oh, Julia!" Her figure, so helpless in its self-deceptions, bent over the suitcase made him nearly sick with pity. She did not understand how desolate her life would be without him. She didn't understand the hours that working women have to keep. She didn't understand that most of her friendships existed within the framework of their marriage, and that without this she would find herself alone. She didn't understand about travel, about hotels, about money. "Julia, I can't let you go! What you don't understand, Julia, is that you've come to be dependent on me."

She tossed her head back and covered her face with her hands. "Did you say I was dependent on *you?*" she asked. "Is that what you said? And who is it that tells you what time to get up in the morning and when to go to bed at night? Who is it that prepares your meals and picks up your dirty closet and invites your friends to dinner? If it weren't for me your neckties would be greasy and your clothing would be full of moth holes. You were alone when I met you, Francis Weed, and you'll be alone when I leave. When mother asked you for a list to send out invitations to our wedding, how many names did you have to give her? Fourteen!"

"Cleveland wasn't my home, Julia."

"And how many of your friends came to the church? Two!

"Since I'm not taking the fur jacket," she said quietly, "you'd better put it back into storage. There's an insurance policy on the pearls that comes due in January. The name of the laundry and the maid's telephone number—all those things are in my desk. I hope you won't drink too much, Francis. I hope that nothing bad will happen to you. If you do get into serious trouble, you can call me."

"Oh my darling, I can't let you go!" Francis said. "I can't let you go, Julia!" He took her in his arms.

"I guess I'd better stay and take care of you for a little while longer," she said.

Riding to work in the morning, Francis saw the girl walk down the aisle of the coach. He was surprised; he hadn't realized that the school she went to was in the city, but she was carrying books, she seemed to be going to school. His surprise delayed his reaction, but then he got up clumsily and stepped into the aisle. Several people had come between them, but he could see her ahead of him, waiting for someone to open the car door, and then, as the train swerved, putting out her hand to support herself as she crossed the platform into the next car. He followed her through that car and halfway through another before calling her name—"Anne! Anne!"—but she didn't turn. He followed her into still another car, and she sat down in an aisle seat. Coming up to her, all his feelings warm and bent in her direction, he put his hand on the back of her seat—even this touch warmed him—and leaning down to speak to her, he saw that it was not Anne. It was an older women wearing glasses. He went on deliberately into another car, his face red with embarrassment and the much deeper feeling of having his good sense challenged; for if he couldn't tell one person from another, what evidence was there that his life with Julia and the children had as much reality as his dreams of iniquity in Paris or the litter, the grass smell, and the cave-shaped trees in Lover's Lane.

Late that afternoon, Julia called to remind Francis that they were going out for dinner. A few minutes later Trace Bearden called. "Look fellar," Trace said. "I'm calling for Mrs. Thomas. You know, Clayton, that boy of hers doesn't seem to be able to get a job and I wondered if you could help. If you'd call Charlie Bell—I know he's indebted to you—and say a good word for the kid, I think Charlie would—"

"Trace, I hate to say this," Francis said, "but I don't feel that I can do anything for that boy. The kid's worthless. I know it's a harsh thing to say, but it's a fact. Any kindness done for him would backfire in everybody's face. He's just a worthless kid, Trace, and there's nothing to be done about it. Even if we got him a job, he wouldn't be able to keep it for a week. I know that to be a fact. It's an awful thing, Trace, and I know it is, but in-

stead of recommending that kid, I'd feel obliged to warn people against him —people who knew his father and would naturally want to step in and do something. I'd feel obliged to warn them. He's a thief . . ."

The moment this conversation was finished, Miss Rainey came in and stood by his desk. "I'm not going to be able to work for you any more, Mr. Weed," she said. "I can stay until the seventeenth if you need me, but I've been offered a whirlwind of a job, and I'd like to leave as soon as possible."

She went out, leaving him to face alone the wickedness of what he had done to the Thomas boy. His children in their photograph laughed and laughed, glazed with all the bright colors of summer, and he remembered that they had met a bagpiper on the beach that day and he had paid the piper a dollar to play them a battle song of the Black Watch. The girl would be at the house when he got home. He would spend another evening among his kind neighbors, picking and choosing dead-end streets, cart tracks, and the driveways of abandoned houses. There was nothing to mitigate his feeling—nothing that laughter or a game of softball with his children would change—and, thinking back over the plane crash, the Farquarsons' new maid, and Anne Murchison's difficulties with her drunken father, he wondered how he could have avoided arriving at just where he was. He was in trouble. He had been lost once in his life, coming back from a trout stream in the north woods, and he had now the same bleak realization that no amount of cheerfulness or hopefulness or valor or perseverance could help him find, in the gathering dark, the path that he had lost. He smelled the forest. The feeling of bleakness was intolerable, and he saw clearly that he had reached the point where he would have to make a choice.

He could go to a psychiatrist, like Miss Rainey; he could go to church and confess his lusts; he could go to a Danish massage parlor in the West Seventies that had been recommended by a salesman; he could rape the girl or trust that he would somehow be prevented from doing this; or he could get drunk. It was his life, his boat, and, like every other man, he was made to be the father of thousands, and what harm could there be in a tryst that would make them both feel more kindly toward the world? This was the wrong train of thought, and he came back to the first, the psychiatrist. He had the telephone number of Miss Rainey's doctor, and he called and asked for an immediate appointment. He was insistent with the doctor's secretary—it was his manner in business—and when she said that the doctor's schedule was full for the next few weeks, Francis demanded an appointment that day and was told to come at five.

The psychiatrist's office was in a building that was used mostly by doctors and dentists and the hallways were filled with the candy smell of mouthwash and the memories of pain. Francis' character had been formed upon a series of private resolves—resolves about cleanliness, about going off the

high diving board or repeating any other feat that challenged his courage, about punctuality, honesty, and virtue. To abdicate the perfect loneliness in which he had made his most vital decisions shattered his concept of character and left him now in a condition that felt like shock. He was stupefied. The scene for his *miserere mei Deus* was, like the waiting room of so many doctors' offices, a crude token gesture toward the sweets of domestic bliss: a place arranged with antiques, coffee tables, potted plants, and etchings of snow-covered bridges and geese in flight, although there were no children, no marriage bed, no stove, even, in this travesty of a house, where no one had ever spent the night and where the curtained windows looked straight onto a dark air shaft. Francis gave his name and address to a secretary and then saw, at the side of the room, a policeman moving toward him. "Hold it, hold it," the policeman said. "Don't move. Keep your hands where they are."

"I think it's all right, Officer," the secretary began. "I think it will be—"

"Let's make sure," the policeman said, and he began to slap Francis' clothes, looking for what—pistols, knives, an icepick? Finding nothing, he went off, and the secretary began a nervous apology: "When you called on the telephone, Mr. Weed, you seemed very excited, and one of the doctor's patients has been threatening his life, and we have to be careful. If you want to go in now?" Francis pushed open a door connected to an electrical chime, and in the doctor's lair sat down heavily, blew his nose into a handkerchief, searched in his pockets for cigarettes, for matches, for something, and said hoarsely, with tears in his eyes, "I'm in love, Dr. Herzog."

It is a week or ten days later in Shady Hill. The seven-fourteen has come and gone, and here and there dinner is finished and the dishes are in the dish washing machine. The village hangs, morally and economically, by its thread in the evening light. Donald Goslin has begun to worry the "Moonlight Sonata" again. *Marcatoma sempre pianissimo!* He seems to be wringing out a wet bath towel, but the housemaid does not heed him. She is writing a letter to Arthur Godfrey. In the cellar of his house, Francis Weed is building a coffee table. Dr. Herzog recommended woodwork as a therapy, and Francis finds some true consolation in the simple arithmetic involved and in the holy smell of new wood. Francis is happy. Upstairs, little Toby is crying, because he is tired. He puts off his cowboy hat, gloves and fringed jacket, unbuckles the belt studded with gold and rubies, the silver bullets and holsters, slips off his suspenders, his checked shirt, and Levis, and sits on the edge of his bed to pull off his high boots. Leaving this equipment in a heap, he goes to the closet and takes his space suit off a nail. It is a struggle for him to get into the long tights, but he succeeds. He loops the magic cape over his shoulders and, climbing onto the footboard of his bed, he

spreads his arms and flies the short distance to the floor, landing with a thump that is audible to everyone in the house but himself.

"Go home, Gertrude, go home," Mrs. Masterson says. "I told you to go home an hour ago, Gertrude. It's way past your suppertime and your mother will be worried. Go home!" A door on the Babcock's terrace flies open, and out comes Mrs. Babcock without any clothes on, pursued by her naked husband. (Their children are away at boarding school, and their terrace is screened by a hedge.) Over the terrace they go and in at the kitchen door, as passionate and handsome a nymph and satyr as you will find on any wall in Venice. Cutting the last of her roses in her garden, Julia hears old Mr. Nixon shouting at the squirrels in his bird-feeding station. "Rapscallions! Varmits! Avaunt and quit my sight!" A miserable cat wanders into the garden, sunk in spiritual and physical discomfort. Tied to its head is a small straw hat—a doll's hat—and it is securely buttoned into a doll's dress, from the skirts of which protrudes its long, hairy tail. As it walks, it shakes its feet, as if it had fallen into water.

"Here, pussy, pussy, pussy!" Julia calls.

"Here, pussy, here, poor pussy!" But the cat gives her a skeptical look and stumbles away in its skirts. The last to come is Jupiter. He prances through the tomato vines, holding in his generous mouth the remains of an evening slipper. Then it is dark; it is a night where kings in golden suits ride elephants over the mountains.

1957: *from The Kenyon Review*

GREENLEAF

by Flannery O'Connor, represents this author's fourth appearance in the O. Henry Memorial Award series. Her 1954 debut ("The Life You Save May Be Your Own") was closely followed in 1955 by her second-prize-winning story, "A Circle in the Fire." Her story, "Everything That Rises Must Converge," won first prize in 1963 and is included in this volume. Miss O'Connor, of Milledgeville, Georgia, is the author of two novels. Wise Blood *and* The Violent Bear It Away, *as well as a volume of short stories,* A Good Man Is Hard to Find. *In 1959 she was awarded a Ford Foundation grant in literature. Miss O'Connor learned, shortly before her death in the summer of 1964, that she was awarded the first prize for 1965.*

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Mrs. May's bedroom window was low and faced on the east and the bull, silvered in the moonlight, stood under it, his head raised as if he listened —like some patient god come down to woo her—for a stir inside the room. The window was dark and the sound of her breathing too light to be carried outside. Clouds crossing the moon blackened him and in the dark he began to tear at the hedge. Presently they passed and he appeared again in the same spot, chewing steadily, with a hedge-wreath that he had ripped loose for himself caught in the tips of his horns. When the moon drifted into retirement again, there was nothing to mark his place but the sound of steady chewing. Then abruptly a pink glow filled the window. Bars of light slid across him as the venetian blind was slit. He took a step backward and lowered his head as if to show the wreath across his horns.

For almost a minute there was no sound from inside, then as he raised his crowned head again, a woman's voice, guttural as if addressed to a dog, said, "Get away from here, Sir!" and in a second muttered, "Some nigger's scrub bull."

The animal pawed the ground and Mrs. May, standing bent forward behind the blind, closed it quickly lest the light make him charge into the shrubbery. For a second she waited, still bent forward, her nightgown hanging loosely from her narrow shoulders. Green rubber curlers sprouted neatly over her forehead and her face beneath them was smooth as concrete with an egg-white paste that drew the wrinkles out while she slept.

She had been conscious in her sleep of a steady rhythmic chewing as if something were eating one wall of the house. She had been aware that whatever it was had been eating as long as she had had the place and had eaten everything from the beginning of her fence line up to the house and now was eating the house and calmly with the same steady rhythm would continue through the house, eating her and the boys, and then on, eating everything but the Greenleafs, on and on, eating everything until nothing was left but the Greenleafs on a little island all their own in the middle of what had been her place. When the munching reached her elbow, she jumped up and found herself, fully awake, standing in the middle of her room. She identified the sound at once: a cow was tearing at the shrubbery under her window. Mr. Greenleaf had left the lane gate open and she didn't doubt that the entire herd was on her lawn. She turned on the dim pink table lamp and then went to the window and slit the blind. The bull, gaunt and long-legged, was standing about four feet from her, chewing calmly like an uncouth country suitor.

For fifteen years, she thought as she squinted at him fiercely, she had been having shiftless people's hogs root up her oats, their mules wallow on her lawn, their scrub bulls breed her cows. If this one was not put up now, he

would be over the fence, ruining her herd before morning—and Mr. Greenleaf was soundly sleeping a half mile down the road in the tenant house. There was no way to get him unless she dressed and got in her car and rode down there and woke him up. He would come but his expression, his whole figure, his every pause, would say: "Hit looks to me like one or both of them boys would not make their maw ride out in the middle of the night thisaway. If hit was my boys, they would have got thet bull up theirself."

The bull lowered his head and shook it and the wreath slipped down to the base of his horns where it looked like a menacing pricky crown. She had closed the blind then; in a few seconds she heard him move off heavily.

Mr. Greenleaf would say, "If hit was my boys they would never have allowed their maw to go after hired help in the middle of the night. They would have did it theirself."

Weighing it, she decided not to bother Mr. Greenleaf. She returned to bed thinking that if the Greenleaf boys had risen in the world it was because she had given their father employment when no one else would have him. She had had Mr. Greenleaf fifteen years but no one else would have had him five minutes. Just the way he approached an object was enough to tell anybody with eyes what kind of a worker he was. He walked with a high-shouldered creep and he never appeared to come directly forward. He walked on the perimeter of some invisible circle and if you wanted to look him in the face, you had to move and get in front of him. She had not fired him because she had always doubted she could do better. He was too shiftless to go out and look for another job; he didn't have the initiative to steal, and after she had told him three or four times to do a thing, he did it; but he never told her about a sick cow until it was too late to call the veterinarian and if her barn had caught on fire, he would have called his wife to see the flames before he began to put them out. And of the wife, she didn't even like to think. Beside the wife, Mr. Greenleaf was an aristocrat.

"If it had been my boys," he would have said, "they would have cut off their right arm before they would have allowed their maw to. . . ."

"If your boys had any pride, Mr. Greenleaf," she would like to say to him some day, "there are many things that they would not *allow* their mother to do."

The next morning as soon as Mr. Greenleaf came to the back door, she told him there was a stray bull on the place and that she wanted him penned up at once.

"Done already been here three days," he said, addressing his right foot which he held forward, turned slightly as if he were trying to look at the sole. He was standing at the bottom of the three back steps while she leaned

out the kitchen door, a small woman with pale nearsighted eyes and grey hair that rose on top like the crest of some disturbed bird.

"Three days!" she said in the restrained screech that had become habitual with her.

Mr. Greenleaf, looking into the distance over the near pasture, removed a package of cigarets from his shirt pocket and let one fall into his hand. He put the package back and stood for a while looking at the cigaret. "I put him in the bull pen but he torn out of there," he said presently. "I didn't see him none after that." He bent over the cigaret and lit it and then turned his head briefly in her direction. The upper part of his face sloped gradually into the lower which was long and narrow, shaped like a rough chalice. He had deep-set fox-colored eyes shadowed under a grey felt hat that he wore slanted forward following the line of his nose. His build was insignificant.

"Mr. Greenleaf," she said, "get that bull up this morning before you do anything else. You know he'll ruin the breeding schedule. Get him up and keep him up and the next time there's a stray bull on this place, tell me at once. Do you understand?"

"Where do you want him put at?" Mr. Greenleaf asked.

"I don't care where you put him," she said. "You are supposed to have some sense. Put him where he can't get out. Whose bull is he?"

For a moment Mr. Greenleaf seemed to hesitate between silence and speech. He studied the air to the left of him. "He must be somebody's bull," he said after a while.

"Yes, he must!" she said and shut the door with a precise little slam.

She went into the dining room where the two boys were eating breakfast and sat down on the edge of her chair at the head of the table. She never ate breakfast but she sat with them to see that they had what they wanted. "Honestly!" she said, and began to tell about the bull, aping Mr. Greenleaf saying, "It must be *somebody's* bull."

Wesley continued to read the newspaper folded beside his plate but Scofield interrupted his eating from time to time to look at her and laugh. The two boys never had the same reaction to anything. They were as different, she said, as night and day. The only thing they did have in common was that neither of them cared what happened on the place. Scofield was a business type and Wesley was an intellectual.

Wesley, the younger child, had had rheumatic fever when he was seven and Mrs. May thought that this was what had caused him to be an intellectual. Scofield, who had never had a day's sickness in his life, was an insurance salesman. She would not have minded his selling insurance if he had sold a nicer kind but he sold the kind that only negroes buy. He was what negroes call a "policy man." He said there was more money in nigger-

insurance than any other kind, and before company, he was very loud about it. He would shout, "Mamma don't like to hear me say it but I'm the best nigger-insurance salesman in this county!"

Scofield was thirty-six and he had a broad pleasant smiling face but he was not married. "Yes," Mrs. May would say, "and if you sold decent insurance, some *nice* girl would be willing to marry you. What nice girl wants to marry a nigger-insurance man? You'll wake up some day and it'll be too late."

And at this Scofield would yodle and say, "Why Mamma, I'm not going to marry until you're dead and gone and then I'm going to marry me some nice fat farm girl that can take over this place!" And once he had added, "—some nice lady like Mrs. Greenleaf." When he had said this, Mrs. May had risen from her chair, her back stiff as a rake handle, and had gone to her room. There she had sat down on the edge of her bed for some time with her small face drawn. Finally she had whispered, "I work and slave, I struggle and sweat to keep this place for them and as soon as I'm dead, they'll marry trash and bring it in here and ruin everything. They'll marry trash and ruin everything I've done," and she had made up her mind at that moment to change her will. The next day she had gone to her lawyer and had had the property entailed so that if they married, they could not leave it to their wives.

The idea that one of them might marry a woman even remotely like Mrs. Greenleaf was enough to make her ill. She had put up with Mr. Greenleaf for fifteen years, but the only way she had endured his wife had been by keeping entirely out of her sight. Mrs. Greenleaf was large and loose. The yard around her house looked like a dump and her five girls were always filthy; even the youngest one dipped snuff. Instead of making a garden or washing their clothes, her preoccupation was what she called "prayer healing."

Every day she cut all the morbid stories out of the newspaper—the accounts of women who had been raped and criminals who had escaped and children who had been burned and of train wrecks and plane crashes and the divorces of movie stars. She took these to the woods and dug a hole and buried them and then she fell on the ground over them and mumbled and groaned for an hour or so, moving her huge arms back and forth under her and out again and finally just lying down flat and, Mrs. May suspected, going to sleep in the dirt.

She had not found out about this until the Greenleafs had been with her a few months. One morning she had been out to inspect a field that she had wanted planted in rye but that had come up in clover because Mr. Greenleaf had used the wrong seeds in the grain drill. She was returning through a wooded path that separated two pastures, muttering to herself and hitting the ground methodically with a long stick she carried in case she saw

a snake. "Mr. Greenleaf," she was saying in a low voice, "I cannot afford to pay for your mistakes. I am a poor woman and this place is all I have. I have two boys to educate. I cannot. . . ."

Out of nowhere a guttural agonized voice groaned, "Jesus! Jesus!" In a second it came again with a terrible urgency. "Jesus! Jesus!"

Mrs. May stopped still, one hand lifted to her throat. The sound was so piercing that she felt as if some violent unleashed force had broken out of the ground and was charging toward her. Her second thought was more reasonable: somebody had been hurt on the place and would sue her for everything she had. She had no insurance. She rushed forward and turning a bend in the path, she saw Mrs. Greenleaf sprawled on her hands and knees off the side of the road, her head down.

"Mrs. Greenleaf!" she shrilled, "what's happened!"

Mrs. Greenleaf raised her head. Her face was a patchwork of dirt and tears and her small eyes, the color of two field peas, were red-rimmed and swollen, but her expression was as composed as a bulldog's. She swayed back and forth on her hands and knees and groaned, "Jesus, Jesus."

Mrs. May winced. She thought the word, Jesus, should be kept inside the church building like other words inside the bedroom. She was a good Christian woman with a large respect for religion, though she did not, of course, believe any of it was true. "What is the matter with you?" she asked sharply.

"You broken my healing," Mrs. Greenleaf said, waving her aside. "I can't talk to you until I finish."

Mrs. May stood, bent forward, her mouth open and her stick raised off the ground as if she were not sure what she wanted to strike with it.

"Oh Jesus, stab me in the heart!" Mrs. Greenleaf shrieked. "Jesus, stab me in the heart!" and she fell back flat in the dirt, a huge human mound, her legs and arms spread out as if she were trying to wrap them around the earth.

Mrs. May felt as furious and helpless as if she had been insulted by a child. "Jesus," she said, drawing herself back, "would be *ashamed* of you. He would tell you to get up from there this instant and go wash your children's clothes!" and she had turned and walked off as fast as she could.

Whenever she thought of how the Greenleaf boys had advanced in the world, she had only to think of Mrs. Greenleaf sprawled obscenely on the ground, and say to herself, "Well, no matter how far they *go*, they *came* from that."

She would like to have been able to put in her will that when she died, Wesley and Scofield were not to continue to employ Mr. Greenleaf. She was capable of handling Mr. Greenleaf; they were not. Mr. Greenleaf had pointed out to her once that her boys didn't know hay from silage. She had pointed out to him that they had other talents, that Scofield was a success-

ful business man and Wesley a successful intellectual. Mr. Greenleaf did not comment, but he never lost an opportunity of letting her see, by his expression or some simple gesture, that he held the two of them in infinite contempt. As scrub-human as the Greenleafs were, he never hesitated to let her know that in any like circumstance in which his own boys might have been involved, they—O. T. and E. T. Greenleaf—would have acted to better advantage.

The Greenleaf boys were two or three years younger than the May boys. They were twins and you never knew when you spoke to one of them whether you were speaking to O.T. or E.T., and they never had the politeness to enlighten you. They were long-legged and raw-boned and red-skinned, with bright grasping fox-colored eyes like their father's. Mr. Greenleaf's pride in them began with the fact that they were twins. He acted, Mrs. May said, as if this were something smart they had thought of themselves. They were energetic and hard-working and she would admit to anyone that they had come a long way—and that the Second World War was responsible for it.

They had both joined the service and, disguised in their uniforms, they could not be told from other people's children. You could tell, of course, when they opened their mouths but they did that seldom. The smartest thing they had done was to get sent overseas and there to marry French wives. They hadn't married French trash either. They had married nice girls who naturally couldn't tell that they murdered the king's English or that the Greenleafs were who they were.

Wesley's heart condition had not permitted him to serve his country but Scofield had been in the army for two years. He had not cared for it and at the end of his military service, he was only a Private First Class. The Greenleaf boys were both some kind of sergeants, and Mr. Greenleaf, in those days, had never lost an opportunity of referring to them by their rank. They had both managed to get wounded and now they both had pensions. Further, as soon as they were released from the army, they took advantage of all the benefits and went to the school of agriculture at the university—the taxpayers meanwhile supporting their French wives. The two of them were living now about two miles down the highway on a piece of land that the government had helped them to buy and in a brick duplex bungalow that the government had helped to build and pay for. If the war had made anyone, Mrs. May said, it had made the Greenleaf boys. They each had three little children apiece, who spoke Greenleaf English and French, and who, on account of their mothers' background, would be sent to the convent school and brought up with manners. "And in twenty years," Mrs. May asked Scofield and Wesley, "do you know what those people will be?

"*Society*," she said blackly.

She had spent fifteen years coping with Mr. Greenleaf and, by now, han-

dling him had become second nature with her. His disposition on any particular day was as much a factor in what she could and couldn't do as the weather was, and she had learned to read his face the way real country people read the sunrise and sunset.

She was a country woman only by persuasion. The late Mr. May, a business man, had bought the place when land was down, and when he died it was all he had to leave her. The boys had not been happy to move to the country to a broken-down farm, but there was nothing else for her to do. She had the timber on the place cut and with the proceeds had set herself up in the dairy business after Mr. Greenleaf had answered her ad. "i seen yor add and i will come have 2 boys," was all his letter said, but he arrived the next day in a pieced-together truck, his wife and five daughters sitting on the floor in the back, himself, and the two boys in the cab.

Over the years they had been on her place, Mr. and Mrs. Greenleaf had aged hardly at all. They had no worries, no responsibilities. They lived like the lilies of the field, off the fat that she struggled to put into the land. When she was dead and gone from overwork and worry, the Greenleafs, healthy and thriving, would be just ready to begin draining Scofield and Wesley.

Wesley said the reason Mrs. Greenleaf had not aged was because she released all her emotions in prayer healing. "You ought to start praying, Sweetheart," he had said in the voice that, poor boy, he could not help making deliberately nasty.

Scofield only exasperated her beyond endurance but Wesley caused her real anxiety. He was thin and nervous and bald and being an intellectual was a terrible strain on his disposition. She doubted if he would marry until she died but she was certain that then the wrong woman would get him. Nice girls didn't like Scofield but Wesley didn't like nice girls. He didn't like anything. He drove twenty miles every day to the university where he taught and twenty miles back every night, but he said he hated the twenty-mile drive and he hated the second-rate university and he hated the morons who attended it. He hated the country and he hated the life he lived; he hated living with his mother and his idiot brother and he hated hearing about the damn dairy and the damn help and the damn broken machinery. But in spite of all he said, he never made any move to leave. He talked about Paris and Rome but he never went even to Atlanta.

"You'd go to those places and you'd get sick," Mrs. May would say. "Who in Paris is going to see that you get a salt-free diet? And do you think if you married one of those odd numbers you take out that *she* would cook a salt-free diet for you? No indeed, she would not!" When she took this line, Wesley would turn himself roughly around in his chair and ignore her. Once when she had kept it up too long, he had snarled, "Well, why don't you do

something practical, Woman? Why don't you pray for me like Mrs. Greenleaf would?"

"I don't like to hear you boys make jokes about religion," she had said. "If you would go to church, you would meet some nice girls."

But it was impossible to tell them anything. When she looked at the two of them now, sitting on either side of the table, neither one caring the least if a stray bull ruined her herd—which was their herd, their future—when she looked at the two of them, one hunched over a paper and the other teetering back in his chair, grinning at her like an idiot, she wanted to jump up and beat her fist on the table and shout, "You'll find out one of these days, you'll find out what *Reality* is when it's too late!"

"Mamma," Scofield said, "don't you get excited now but I'll tell you whose bull that is." He was looking at her wickedly. He let his chair drop forward and he got up. Then with his shoulders bent and his hands held up to cover his head, he tiptoed to the door. He backed into the hall and pulled the door almost to so that it hid all of him but his face. "You want to know, Sugar-pie?" he asked.

Mrs. May sat looking at him coldly.

"That's O.T. and E.T.'s bull," he said. "I collected from their nigger yesterday and he told me they were missing it," and he showed her an exaggerated expanse of teeth and disappeared silently.

Wesley looked up and laughed.

Mrs. May turned her head forward again, her expression unaltered. "I am the only *adult* on this place," she said. She leaned across the table and pulled the paper from the side of his plate. "Do you see how it's going to be when I die and you boys have to handle him?" she began. "Do you see why he didn't know whose bull that was? Because it was theirs. Do you see what I have to put up with? Do you see that if I hadn't kept my foot on his neck all these years, you boys might be milking cows every morning at four o'clock?"

Wesley pulled the paper back toward his plate and staring at her full in the face, he murmured, "I wouldn't milk a cow to save your soul from hell."

"I know you wouldn't," she said in a brittle voice. She sat back and began rapidly turning her knife over at the side of her plate. "O.T. and E.T. are fine boys," she said. "They ought to have been my sons." The thought of this was so horrible that her vision of Wesley was blurred at once by a wall of tears. All she saw was his dark shape, rising quickly from the table. "And you two," she cried, "you two should have belonged to that woman!"

He was heading for the door.

"When I die," she said in a thin voice, "I don't know what's going to become of you."

"You're always yapping about when-you-die," he growled as he rushed out, "but you look pretty healthy to me."

For some time she sat where she was, looking straight ahead through the window across the room into a scene of indistinct greys and greens. She stretched her face and her neck muscles and drew in a long breath but the scene in front of her flowed together anyway into a watery grey mass. "They needn't think I'm going to die any time soon," she muttered, and some more defiant voice in her added: I'll die when I get good and ready.

She wiped her eyes with the table napkin and got up and went to the window and gazed at the scene in front of her. The cows were grazing on two pale green pastures across the road and behind them, fencing them in, was a black wall of trees with a sharp sawtooth edge that held off the indifferent sky. The pastures were enough to calm her. When she looked out any window in her house, she saw the reflection of her own character. Her city friends said she was the most remarkable woman they knew, to go, practically penniless and with no experience, out to a rundown farm and make a success of it. "Everything is against you," she would say, "the weather is against you and the dirt is against you and the help is against you. They're all in league against you. There's nothing for it but an iron hand!"

"Look at Mamma's iron hand!" Scofield would yell and grab her arm and hold it up so that her delicate blue-veined little hand would dangle from her wrist like the head of a broken lily. The company always laughed.

The sun, moving over the black and white grazing cows, was just a little brighter than the rest of the sky. Looking down, she saw a darker shape that might have been its shadow cast at an angle, moving among them. She uttered a sharp cry and turned and marched out of the house.

Mr. Greenleaf was in the trench silo, filling a wheelbarrow. She stood on the edge and looked down at him. "I told you to get up that bull. Now he's in with the milk herd."

"You can't do two thangs at oncet," Mr. Greenleaf remarked.

"I told you to do that first."

He wheeled the barrow out of the open end of the trench toward the barn and she followed close behind him. "And you needn't think, Mr. Greenleaf," she said, "that I don't know exactly whose bull that is or why you haven't been in any hurry to notify me he was here. I might as well feed O.T. and E.T.'s bull as long as I'm going to have him here ruining my herd."

Mr. Greenleaf paused with the wheelbarrow and looked behind him. "Is that them boys' bull?" he asked in an incredulous tone.

She did not say a word. She merely looked away with her mouth taut.

"They told me their bull was out but I never known that was him," he said.

"I want that bull put up now," she said, "and I'm going to drive over to

O.T. and E.T.'s and tell them they'll have to come get him today. I ought to charge for the time he's been here—then it wouldn't happen again."

"They didn't pay but seventy-five dollars for him," Mr. Greenleaf offered.

"I wouldn't have had him as a gift," she said.

"They was just going to beef him," Mr. Greenleaf went on, "but he got loose and run his head into their pickup truck. He don't like cars and trucks. They had a time getting his horn out the fender and when they finally got him loose, he took off and they was too tired to run after him—but I never known that was him there."

"It wouldn't have paid you to know, Mr. Greenleaf," she said. "But you know now. Get a horse and get him."

In a half hour, from her front window she saw the bull, squirrel-colored, with jutting hips and long light horns, ambling down the dirt road that ran in front of the house. Mr. Greenleaf was behind him on the horse. "That's a Greenleaf bull if I ever saw one," she muttered. She went out on the porch and called, "Put him where he can't get out."

"He likes to bust loose," Mr. Greenleaf said, looking with approval at the bull's rump. "This gentleman is a sport."

"If those boys don't come for him, he's going to be a dead sport," she said. "I'm just warning you."

He heard her but he didn't answer.

"That's the awfullest looking bull I ever saw," she called but he was too far down the road to hear.

It was mid-morning when she turned into O.T. and E.T.'s driveway. The house, a new red-brick, low-to-the-ground building that looked like a warehouse with windows, was on top of a treeless hill. The sun was beating down directly on the white roof of it. It was the kind of house that everybody built now and nothing marked it as belonging to Greenleafs except three dogs, part hound and part spitz, that rushed out from behind it as soon as she stopped her car. She reminded herself that you could always tell the class of people by the class of dog, and honked her horn. While she sat waiting for someone to come, she continued to study the house. All the windows were down and she wondered if the government could have air-conditioned the thing. No one came and she honked again. Presently a door opened and several children appeared in it and stood looking at her, making no move to come forward. She recognized this as a true Greenleaf trait—they could hang in a door, looking at you for hours.

"Can't one of you children come here?" she called.

After a minute they all began to move forward, slowly. They had on overalls and were barefooted but they were not as dirty as she might have expected. There were two or three that looked distinctly like Greenleafs; the

others not so much so. The smallest child was a girl with untidy black hair. They stopped about six feet from the automobile and stood looking at her.

"You're mighty pretty," Mrs. May said, addressing herself to the smallest girl.

There was no answer. They appeared to share one dispassionate expression between them.

"Where's your Mamma?" she asked.

There was no answer to this for some time. Then one of them said something in French. Mrs. May did not speak French.

"Where's your daddy?" she asked.

After a while, one of the boys said, "He ain't hyar neither."

"Ahhhh," Mrs. May said as if something had been proven. "Where's the colored man?"

She waited and decided no one was going to answer. "The cat has six little tongues," she said. "How would you like to come home with me and let me teach you how to talk?" She laughed and her laugh died on the silent air. She felt as if she were on trial for her life, facing a jury of Greenleafs. "I'll go down and see if I can find the colored man," she said.

"You can go if you want to," one of the boys said.

"Well, thank you," she murmured and drove off.

The barn was down the lane from the house. She had not seen it before but Mr. Greenleaf had described it in detail for it had been built according to the latest specifications. It was a milking parlor arrangement where the cows are milked from below. The milk ran in pipes from the machines to the milk house and was never carried in no bucket, Mr. Greenleaf said, by no human hand. "When you gonter get you one?" he had asked.

"Mr. Greenleaf," she had said, "I have to do for myself. I am not assisted hand and foot by the government. It would cost me $20,000 to install a milking parlor. I barely make ends meet as it is."

"My boys done it," Mr. Greenleaf had murmured, and then—"but all boys ain't alike."

"No indeed!" she had said. "I thank God for that!"

"I thank Gawd for ever-thang," Mr. Greenleaf had drawled.

You might as well, she had thought in the fierce silence that followed; you've never done anything for yourself.

She stopped by the side of the barn and honked but no one appeared. For several minutes she sat in the car, observing the various machines parked around, wondering how many of them were paid for. They had a forage harvester and a rotary hay baler. She had those too. She decided that since no one was here, she would get out and have a look at the milking parlor and see if they kept it clean.

She opened the milking room door and stuck her head in and for the first

second she felt as if she were going to lose her breath. The spotless white concrete room was filled with sunlight that came from a row of windows head-high along both walls. The metal stanchions gleamed ferociously and she had to squint to be able to look at all. She drew her head out the room quickly and closed the door and leaned against it, frowning. The light outside was not so bright but she was conscious that the sun was directly on top of her head, like a silver bullet ready to drop into her brain.

A negro carrying a yellow calf-feed bucket appeared from around the corner of the machine shed and came toward her. He was a light yellow boy dressed in the cast-off army clothes of the Greenleaf twins. He stopped at a respectable distance and set the bucket on the ground.

"Where's Mr. O. T. and Mr. E. T.?" she asked.

"Mist O. T. he in town, Mist E. T. he off yonder in the field," the negro said, pointing first to the left and then to the right as if he were naming the position of two planets.

"Can you remember a message?" she asked, looking as if she thought this doubtful.

"I'll remember it if I don't forget it," he said with a touch of sullenness.

"Well, I'll write it down then," she said. She got in her car and took a stub of pencil from her pocket book and began to write on the back of an empty envelope. The negro came and stood at the window. "I'm Mrs. May," she said as she wrote. "Their bull is on my place and I want him off *today*. You can tell them I'm furious about it."

"That bull lef here Sareday," the negro said, "and none of us ain't seen him since. We ain't knowed where he was."

"Well, you know now," she said, "and you can tell Mr. O. T. and Mr. E. T. that if they don't come get him today, I'm going to have their daddy shoot him the first thing in the morning. I can't have that bull ruining my herd." She handed him the note.

"If I knows Mist O. T. and Mist E. T.," he said, taking it, "they goin to say you go ahead on and shoot him. He done busted up one of our trucks already and we be glad to see the last of him."

She pulled her head back and gave him a look from slightly blared eyes. "Do they expect me to take my time and my worker to shoot their bull?" she asked. "They don't want him so they just let him loose and expect somebody else to kill him? He's eating my oats and ruining my herd and I'm expected to shoot him too?"

"I speck you is," he said softly. "He done busted up. . . ."

She gave him a very sharp look and said, "Well, I'm not surprised. That's just the way some people are," and after a second she asked, "Which is boss, Mr. O. T. or Mr. E. T.?" She had always suspected that they fought between themselves secretly.

"They never quarls," the boy said. "They like one man in two skins."

"Hmp. I expect you just never heard them quarrel."

"Nor nobody else heard them neither," he said, looking away as if this insolence were addressed to some one else.

"Well," she said, "I haven't put up with their father for fifteen years not to know a few things about Greenleafs."

The negro looked at her suddenly with a gleam of recognition. "Is you my policy man's mother?" he asked.

"I don't know who your policy man is," she said sharply. "You give them that note and tell them if they don't come for that bull today, they'll be making their father shoot it tomorrow," and she drove off.

She stayed at home all afternoon waiting for the Greenleaf twins to come for the bull. They did not come. I might as well be working for them, she thought furiously. They are simply going to use me to the limit. At the supper table, she went over it again for the boys' benefit because she wanted them to see exactly what O.T. and E.T. would do. "They don't want that bull," she said, "—pass the butter—so they simply turn him loose and let somebody else worry about getting rid of him for them. How do you like that? I'm the victim. I've always been the victim."

"Pass the butter to the victim," Wesley said. He was in a worse humor than usual because he had had a flat tire on the way home from the university.

Scofield handed her the butter and said, "Why Mamma, ain't you ashamed to shoot an old bull that ain't done nothing but give you a little scrub strain in your herd? I declare," he said, "with the Mamma I got it's a wonder I turned out to be such a nice boy!"

"You ain't her boy, Son," Wesley said.

She eased back in her chair, her fingertips on the edge of the table.

"All I know is," Scofield said, "I done mighty well to be as nice as I am seeing what I come from."

When they teased her they spoke Greenleaf English but Wesley made his own particular tone come through it like a knife edge. "Well lemme tell you one thang, Brother," he said, leaning over the table, "that if you had half a mind you would already know."

"What's that, Brother?" Scofield asked, his broad face grinning into the thin constricted one across from him.

"That is," Wesley said, "that neither you nor me is her boy . . . ," but he stopped abruptly as she gave a kind of hoarse wheeze like an old horse lashed unexpectedly. She reared up and ran from the room.

"Oh, for God's sake," Wesley growled, "what did you start her off for?"

"I never started her off," Scofield said. "You started her off."

"Hah."

"She's not as young as she used to be and she can't take it."

"She can only give it out," Wesley said. "I'm the one that takes it."

His brother's pleasant face had changed so that an ugly family resemblance showed between them. "Nobody feels sorry for a lousy bastard like you," he said and grabbed across the table for the other's shirtfront.

From her room she heard a crash of dishes and she rushed back through the kitchen into the dining room. The hall door was open and Scofield was going out of it. Wesley was lying like a large bug on his back with the edge of the over-turned table cutting him across the middle and broken dishes scattered on top of him. She pulled the table off him and caught his arm to help him rise but he scrambled up and pushed her off with a furious charge of energy and flung himself out the door after his brother.

She would have collapsed but a knock on the back door stiffened her and she swung around. Across the kitchen and back porch, she could see Mr. Greenleaf peering eagerly through the screenwire. All her resources returned in full strength as if she had only needed to be challenged by the devil himself to regain them. "I heard a thump," he called, "and I thought the plastering might have fell on you."

If he had been wanted someone would have had to go on a horse to find him. She crossed the kitchen and the porch and stood inside the screen and said, "No, nothing happened but the table turned over. One of the legs was weak," and without pausing, "the boys didn't come for the bull so tomorrow you'll have to shoot him."

The sky was crossed with thin red and purple bars and behind them the sun was moving down slowly as if it were descending a ladder. Mr. Greenleaf squatted down on the step, his back to her, the top of his hat on a level with her feet. "Tomorrow I'll drive him home for you," he said.

"Oh no, Mr. Greenleaf," she said in a mocking voice, "you drive him home tomorrow and next week he'll be back here. I know better than that." Then in a mournful tone, she said, "I'm surprised at O.T. and E.T. to treat me this way. I thought they'd have more gratitude. Those boys spent some mighty happy days on this place, didn't they, Mr. Greenleaf?"

Mr. Greenleaf didn't say anything.

"I think they did," she said. "I think they did. But they've forgotten all the nice little things I did for them now. If I recall, they wore my boys' old clothes and played with my boys' old toys and hunted with my boys' old guns. They swam in my pond and shot my birds and fished in my stream and I never forgot their birthday and Christmas seemed to roll around very often if I remember it right. And do they think of any of those things now?" she asked. "NOOOOO," she said.

For a few seconds, she looked at the disappearing sun and Mr. Greenleaf examined the palms of his hands. Presently as if it had just occurred to her, she asked, "Do you know the real reason they didn't come for that bull?"

"Naw I don't," Mr. Greenleaf said in a surly voice.

"They didn't come because I'm a woman," she said. "You can get away with anything when you're dealing with a woman. If there were a man running this place. . . ."

Quick as a snake striking Mr. Greenleaf said, "You got two boys. They know you got two men on the place."

The sun had disappeared behind the tree line. She looked down at the dark crafty face, upturned now, and at the wary eyes, bright under the shadow of the hatbrim. She waited long enough for him to see that she was hurt and then she said, "Some people learn gratitude too late, Mr. Greenleaf, and some never learn it at all," and she turned and left him sitting on the steps.

Half the night in her sleep she heard a sound as if some large stone were grinding a hole on the outside wall of her brain. She was walking on the inside, over a succession of beautiful rolling hills, planting her stick in front of each step. She became aware after a time that the noise was the sun trying to burn through the tree line and she stopped to watch, safe in the knowledge that it couldn't, that it had to sink the way it always did outside of her property. When she first stopped it was a swollen red ball, but as she stood watching it began to narrow and pale until it looked like a bullet. Then suddenly it burst through the tree line and raced down the hill toward her. She woke up with her hand over her mouth and the same noise, diminished but distinct, in her ear. It was the bull munching under her window. Mr. Greenleaf had let him out.

She got up and made her way to the window in the dark and looked out through the slit blind, but the bull had moved away from the hedge and at first she didn't see him. Then she saw a heavy form some distance away, paused as if observing her. This is the last night I am going to put up with this, she said, and watched until the iron shadow moved away in the darkness.

The next morning she waited until exactly eleven o'clock. Then she got in her car and drove to the barn. Mr. Greenleaf was cleaning milk cans. He had seven of them standing up outside the milk room to get the sun. She had been telling him to do this for two weeks. "All right, Mr. Greenleaf," she said, "go get your gun. We're going to shoot that bull."

"I thought you wanted theseyer cans. . . ."

"Go get your gun, Mr. Greenleaf," she said. Her voice and face were expressionless.

"That gentleman torn out of there last night," he murmured in a tone of regret and bent again to the can he had his arm in.

"Go get your gun, Mr. Greenleaf," she said in the same triumphant toneless voice. "The bull is in the pasture with the dry cows. I saw him from my

upstairs window. I'm going to drive you up to the field and you can run him into the empty pasture and shoot him there."

He detached himself from the can slowly. "Ain't nobody ever ast me to shoot my boys' own bull!" he said in a high rasping voice. He removed a rag from his back pocket and began to wipe his hands violently, then his nose.

She turned as if she had not heard this and said, "I'll wait for you in the car. Go get your gun."

She sat in the car and watched him stalk off toward the harness room where he kept a gun. After he had entered the room, there was a crash as if he had kicked something out of his way. Presently he emerged again with the gun, circled behind the car, opened the door violently and threw himself onto the seat beside her. He held the gun between his knees and looked straight ahead. He'd like to shoot me instead of the bull, she thought, and turned her face away so that he could not see her smile.

The morning was dry and clear. She drove through the woods for a quarter of a mile and then out into the open where there were fields on either side of the narrow road. The exhilaration of carrying her point had sharpened her senses. Birds were screaming everywhere, the grass was almost too bright to look at, the sky was an even piercing blue. "Spring is here!" she said gaily. Mr. Greenleaf lifted one muscle somewhere near his mouth as if he found this the most asinine remark ever made. When she stopped at the second pasture gate, he flung himself out of the car door and slammed it behind him. Then he opened the gate and she drove through. He closed it and flung himself back in, silently, and she drove around the rim of the pasture until she spotted the bull, almost in the center of it, grazing peacefully among the cows.

"The gentleman is waiting on you," she said and gave Mr. Greenleaf's furious profile a sly look. "Run him into that next pasture and when you get him in, I'll drive in behind you and shut the gate myself."

He flung himself out again, this time deliberately leaving the car door open so that she had to lean across the seat and close it. She sat smiling as she watched him make his way across the pasture toward the opposite gate. He seemed to throw himself forward at each step and then pull back as if he were calling on some power to witness that he was being forced. "Well," she said aloud as if he were still in the car, "it's your own boys who are making you do this, Mr. Greenleaf." O.T. and E.T. were probably splitting their sides laughing at him now. She could hear their identical nasal voices saying, "Made Daddy shoot our bull for us. Daddy don't know no better than to think that's a fine bull he's shooting. Gonna kill Daddy to shoot that bull!"

"If those boys cared a thing about you, Mr. Greenleaf," she said, "they would have come for that bull. I'm surprised at them."

He was circling around to open the gate first. The bull, dark among the spotted cows, had not moved. He kept his head down, eating constantly. Mr. Greenleaf opened the gate and then began circling back to approach him from the rear. When he was about ten feet behind him, he flapped his arms at his sides. The bull lifted his head indolently and then lowered it again and continued to eat. Mr. Greenleaf stooped again and picked up something and threw it at him with a vicious swing. She decided it was a sharp rock for the bull leapt and then began to gallop until he disappeared over the rim of the hill. Mr. Greenleaf followed at his leisure.

"You needn't think you're going to lose him!" she cried and started the car straight across the pasture. She had to drive slowly over the terraces and when she reached the gate, Mr. Greenleaf and the bull were nowhere in sight. This pasture was smaller than the last, a green arena, encircled almost entirely by woods. She got out and closed the gate and stood looking for some sign of Mr. Greenleaf but he had disappeared completely. She knew at once that his plan was to lose the bull in the woods. Eventually, she would see him emerge somewhere from the circle of trees and come limping toward her and when he finally reached her, he would say, "If you can find that gentleman in them woods, you're better than me."

She was going to say, "Mr. Greenleaf, if I have to walk into those woods with you and stay all afternoon, we are going to find that bull and shoot him. You are going to shoot him if I have to pull the trigger for you." When he saw she meant business, he would return and shoot the bull quickly himself.

She got back into the car and drove to the center of the pasture where he would not have so far to walk to reach her when he came out of the woods. At this moment she could picture him sitting on a stump, marking lines in the ground with a stick. She decided she would wait exactly ten minutes by her watch. Then she would begin to honk. She got out of the car and walked around a little and then sat down on the front bumper to wait and rest. She was very tired and she lay her head back against the hood and closed her eyes. She did not understand why she should be so tired when it was only mid-morning. Through her closed eyes, she could feel the sun, red-hot overhead. She opened her eyes slightly but the white light forced her to close them again.

For some time she lay back against the hood, wondering drowsily why she was so tired. With her eyes closed, she didn't think of time as divided into days and nights but into past and future. She decided she was tired because she had been working continuously for fifteen years. She decided she had every right to be tired, and to rest for a few minutes before she began working again. Before any kind of judgment seat, she would be able to say: I've worked, I have not wallowed. At this very instant while she was recalling a life time of work, Mr. Greenleaf was loitering in the woods and Mrs. Green-

leaf was probably flat on the ground, asleep over her holeful of clippings. The woman had got worse over the years and Mrs. May believed that now she was actually demented. "I'm afraid your wife has let religion warp her," she said once tactfully to Mr. Greenleaf. "Everything in moderation, you know."

"She cured a man oncet that half his gut was eat out with worms," Mr. Greenleaf said, and she had turned away, half-sickened. Poor souls, she thought now, so simple. For a few seconds she dozed.

When she sat up and looked at her watch, more than ten minutes had passed. She had not heard any shot. A new thought occurred to her: suppose Mr. Greenleaf had aroused the bull chunking stones at him and the animal had turned on him and run him up against a tree and gored him? The irony of it deepened: O.T. and E.T. would then get a shyster lawyer and sue her. It would be the fitting end to her fifteen years with the Greenleafs. She thought of it almost with pleasure as if she had hit on the perfect ending for a story she was telling her friends. Then she dropped it, for Mr. Greenleaf had a gun with him and she had insurance.

She decided to honk. She got up and reached inside the car window and gave three sustained honks and two or three shorter ones to let him know she was getting impatient. Then she went back and sat down on the bumper again.

In a few minutes something emerged from the tree line, a black heavy shadow that tossed its head several times and then bounded forward. After a second she saw it was the bull. He was crossing the pasture toward her at a slow gallop, a gay almost rocking gait as if he were overjoyed to find her again. She looked beyond him to see if Mr. Greenleaf was coming out of the woods too but he was not. "Here he is, Mr. Greenleaf!" she called and looked on the other side of the pasture to see if he could be coming out there but he was not in sight. She looked back and saw that the bull, his head lowered, was racing toward her. She remained perfectly still, not in fright, but in a freezing unbelief. She stared at the violent black streak bounding toward her as if she had no sense of distance, as if she could not decide at once what his intention was, and the bull had buried his head in her lap, like a wild tormented lover, before her expression changed. One of his horns sank until it pierced her heart and the other curved around her side and held her in an unbreakable grip. She continued to stare straight ahead but the entire scene in front of her had changed—the tree line was a dark wound in a world that was nothing but sky—and she had the look of a person whose sight has been suddenly restored but who finds the light unbearable.

Mr. Greenleaf was running toward her from the side with his gun raised and she saw him coming though she was not looking in his direction. She saw him approaching on the outside of some invisible circle, the tree line

gaping behind him and nothing under his feet. He shot the bull four times through the eye. She did not hear the shots but she felt the quake in the huge body as it sank, pulling her forward on its head, so that she seemed, when Mr. Greenleaf reached her, to be bent over whispering some last discovery into the animal's ear.

1958: *from Atlantic Monthly*

IN SICKNESS AS IN HEALTH

by Martha Gellhorn, who was born in St. Louis and educated at Bryn Mawr College. For many years she was foreign and war correspondent for Collier's *magazine. Author of books, articles, and short stories, Miss Gellhorn now lives in London with her husband, T. S. Matthews. "In Sickness as in Health" is one section of a four-part novel,* Two by Two; The Face of War *was published in 1959, and* His Own Man *in 1961.*

She had been waiting for him. The door opened gently. There were no sudden movements, no unexpected noise in the house. She held out her arms and he came across the room and kissed her hand and her forehead. He pulled the chair closer to her chaise longue and took her hand in his. She watched him, with happy eyes and slightly parted lips. Her asthma is better, he thought. He smiled, hoping there was nothing mechanical or weary about what he felt as a grimace of the mouth.

"I've brought you a present," he said. It was more of a present than he could afford. He took a small velvet box from his pocket and gave it to her.

"Oh," she said. "Oh, James."

It was a pin: three stalks of lily of the valley, with leaves, bound together by a gold band. The leaves were palest green enamel, the flowers white, small pearls imitated dew. He was, himself, sick to death of lilies of the valley, her favorite flower. She tried to fasten the pin to her pretty dotted swiss negligee, but her hands trembled. A bad sign, he thought. He took

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the jewel from her and got it more or less properly placed and she moved her head to see it, and then touched it carefully.

"Our sixteenth," she said in her low hesitant voice, the voice that had to be rationed, using the breath that was so costly and difficult to keep in her body. "I can't believe it. I remember the day we were married as if it were now. Where *have* the years gone? Oh darling, your beautiful present."

He knew very well where the years had gone. Doubtless she remembered their wedding day better than he did, since she had so little to remember. He could think of nothing at all to say, so he kissed her hand again, and as he bowed his head, she stroked his hair. Then she talked; she saved everything to tell him.

At last she believed she really knew and understood the Bach Concerto in D Minor. She had been playing it over and over and listening with all her attention. And she had read the Chekhov stories he sent her, weren't they sad, weren't they perfect, motionless stories which said everything. The squirrels were now settled down to married life, and Mrs. S. was a bustling mother, a competent Hausfrau, and Mr. S. as anyone could see was feeling his responsibilities. Three days ago he scampered in through the open French window and studied her room. Soon they would all come. But the robins had left, it was a great loss, probably the squirrels irritated them, being such active noisy little beasts. Had he ever seen the garden lovelier; Aunt Lucy and Sarine were beside themselves with pleasure over it. Aunt Lucy had given a little bridge party last week, three other ladies, what a twit she had been in, worrying Sarine about the sandwiches and the cake and the cookies, but it was a great success and Aunt Lucy talked of nothing else, she had enough village news to last for half a year. Ted was so good, so constant, so generous of his time, and also encouraging, he was sure she was getting better.

At the name Ted, he listened hoping to hear something beyond her words. Ted was always good, constant, encouraging, and had been for years. How many? Nine years, now. Ted was the ideal doctor, and as much of a fixture as Aunt Lucy, Sarine, and more of a fixture than the squirrels. He saw that she was tiring herself, she had talked enough. It was his turn. Since she never asked about his life, he did not speak of it. Had she simply lost interest; did she fear to know; did she feel she would not understand, as if his life was something lived among foreigners, in a country she had never seen? Besides, what report could he give? I go to the store at nine and leave at five. I sit at my desk and plan layouts, correct copy, write copy. They tell me to push a new line in airplane luggage. They say they want to get rid of last year's fur coats. The china department informs me they have bargain stuff from Copenhagen. Sometimes I smoke and look at the sky. Sometimes I think of a fast-selling idea and rush into Black's office, full of hopped-up,

necessary enthusiasm, and pour it out with trimmings, and that way I prove I am a man keen on his work. At five I often walk in the park, walking off the taste of the day, before I go home. What was there to tell? He would speak, as usual, of a play he had seen, a movie, pictures, a record he had bought. It was no use to talk of people; she knew none of them, he saw very few anyhow, they were without meaning to him also. He could not speak of Maggie, who was all, absolutely all, that concerned him.

2: He heard his voice as a monotone, heavy with boredom. He tried to force color and warmth into the sounds he was making. She listened, fascinated. His voice droned on and on: Arthur Miller, Brando, the gifted young American painter Perlin whose pictures of Italy, the Boston Symphony recording of Bartok's . . . The insect murmur from the garden matched his words and accompanied them. She lay now in the beginning of shadow, the afternoon was ending. The house was silent around them, although Sarine would be busy in the kitchen and Aunt Lucy was supposedly alive upstairs and not glued to her chair. This room would make a perfect picture, cool, Degas without ballet girls perhaps. He spoiled it, of course; it was not a room that a man could fit into.

Strange how she never tired of anything; she had kept this soft green wallpaper, printed with delicate clusters of lilies of the valley, for thirteen years. Yet it was so fresh that she must have had her room done several times, always in the same design. Her bed in the corner, disguised as a large divan, was covered with the same rosy damask, the windows were curtained in the same faded rose material. Her writing table, which was an ornament since she could not sit at it, the tables by her chaise longue, by her bed, the long table against the far wall were tobacco-brown, lovingly polished pieces of wood made in the eighteenth century by Englishmen who knew their craft; but they were never moved, the order of the room remained the same. And everywhere, for as long as he could remember, there was this luxury of flowers, in bowls, in small porcelain vases, in great glass jars, and always the air held the same light sweet scent of lilies of the valley. Since nothing else changed, why should she alter the colors and the pattern of her becoming room?

He began to talk of plays he had not seen, discussing the rival reviews, and he studied his wife, thinking that facts were facts and this was indeed their sixteenth wedding anniversary and therefore she was thirty-seven years old and would be thirty-eight in two months, but facts did not obey any known laws in this house, time was nothing but a theoretical idea here, for she looked as she always had. In a terrible, sinister way, he felt that she grew younger on her chaise longue, year after year. Whereas he grew

much older, faster than time, far ahead of time, on the fifteenth floor of Berkeley's, crouched there in his neat white cell high above Fifth Avenue.

She was beautiful and new and fragile as the spring. Yet she had suffocated and fought for air, felt the muscles clamp around her heart; she had gone through this often, she could expect such agony at any time, without warning. And she lived with fear. She lived in horror of death, and the horror grew the longer she waited. Her face should have been drawn and her eyes wild. Instead, her face was smooth and of the clear color of a shell. The curve of her cheek was as touching as it had been when she was a girl. Her eyes had the same look of innocence. Her hair still played that amazing trick of seeming to blow in shadows of curls around her temples and ears. She had always worn her hair long. It was loosely tied back, with a narrow satin bow, the color of her eyes. Should there not be gray in that bright, brown mane? She was unmarked and unused; her hands, her arms, her lovely breast, her impossibly small waist, her beautiful legs, her knees, a perfection of the mechanics of bone, all as before, as remembered. Everyone spread and sagged, faded, bloated. His own body repelled him with its new creases, and patches of flabbiness. Time scarred the whole human race, except Annette.

He knew, as a wickedness in himself, that he could have cared more, somehow joined in her pain and her terror, if only she showed how her life had hurt her. On the other hand, perhaps it was pure bravery to show nothing. He tried to make himself see that and honor her for it. But he could not quite believe it; he did not know, there was no way of knowing; she would not speak of her illness. He suspected that she had shut her mind, refusing death by refusing to think; he suspected that she stayed young because she would not grow. She lay forever on her chaise longue, or on the worst days in her bed, and denied this helpless immobility, denied that anything was different, denied even that he and she were anything but man and wife, as other men, other wives.

He could not imagine what he had found to say; now the words ground to a stop. He was tormented by the need for a cigarette, but naturally he could not smoke here. He felt hot. He would have liked to sleep for twelve hours or play two hard sets of tennis and go swimming. Annette reached for her handkerchief and he looked furtively at his watch. It was still the fourteenth of April, still the garden crackled and hummed in the failing sunlight, and he had delivered his lecture on contemporary art, crawled over that mountain pass of time, in less than a quarter of an hour. He was shaken and sick with something he knew too well, hopelessness, and an anger that had no focus, and pity for them both, and the sense of waste. He could also remember how he had loved her, which was his own pain, altogether different from hers. He remembered the joy and the power and the immense

hope of his loving her. It was as if he remembered a happy man and that man was now long dead.

Sarine opened the door, without knocking. There would be no intimate scene to disturb and Mrs. Whiteley could not, in any case, raise her voice to call "Come in." Sarine brought a tray and laid it on the table by the chaise longue.

"Evening, Mr. James," she said, as if she had seen him since early afternoon.

"How are you, Sarine?"

"Not too bad, Mr. James. We're all doing fine, aren't we now, Miss Annette?"

She was a tall, ugly, bony, strong, colored woman in her fifties, who smiled for no one except his wife, her Miss Annette. He had thought about Sarine's life often, and with shame. If he could not save himself, he could at least save Sarine. Once, years ago, he offered to finance Sarine's escape; she could find work anywhere, she could live in her own house, he held out Harlem with the greatest doubt, still it seemed better, closer to life, than the virginal dolled-up attic of the white frame house in Grangeville. Sarine was not too old to marry; perhaps too old for children, by then, but not too old for a man. She was healthy, she had a right to live. Sarine apparently was a slave who had nothing to love but her chains. Leave Miss Annette, her little saint, Miss Annette who couldn't do a thing for herself, and was like Sarine's baby? Sarine had never trusted him, after that, probably no longer liked him, if ever she had liked him.

"I brought you a cocktail too, Miss Annette." Sarine poured lemonade from a small glass pitcher into a cocktail glass and gave the glass to Annette, who smiled her thanks, that wonderful smile, the smile of a pleased and grateful child. He took bottles from the tray and mixed a martini. Sarine looked at him, saying silently all she meant to say: now you be careful, don't you tire our baby, don't you stay more than an hour, don't you say anything to upset her. Then she left them to their ritual.

Usually, he raised his glass and said, "To you."

She smiled at him, exactly as she smiled at Sarine, and said, "To you, darling."

Tonight he said, "To our sixteenth."

"Yes. Oh James, James, darling. I have so much to thank you for. Sixteen years. And you've never made me unhappy, never hurt me, never a quarrel. Nothing but your love and your kindness, all that time. I can only thank God for sending you to me."

He could not answer or look at her. She was used to silence. To drink without smoking was not the same thing, but it helped. He poured another martini. He asked if he might hear the Bach concerto and she told him

where the record was. He listened to the racing intricate music, stopped listening, and drank more martinis. The sky was greenish blue, with the light going quickly. His allotted hour was finished. He would see her again for a few moments after breakfast, and then he would take his train back to New York, and this visit, like countless others, would be behind him, and he would organize his mind to forget it.

He kissed her again on the forehead, pressed her hand gently, smiled from the door, called Sarine, and turned and hurried out of the house. He would cross Necher's fields and get into the woods and walk fast along the darkening path until he came to the top of the hill. Then he would sit down and smoke one cigarette and try to think of nothing. Then he would come back and face the evening meal with Aunt Lucy. He might even run in the woods, although running was only a gesture, only the compulsion of his body, for he never ran as he wanted to, away.

3: The table was round, so Aunt Lucy could not, properly, sit at the head of it but she did anyhow. He sat at her right, the guest of honor. He always felt a guest in this house, and not a very certain one: any wrong move and Aunt Lucy and Sarine would chuck him out. This was a peculiar way to feel since it was not only his house but he had been born in it, in the bedroom next door, formerly his father's and mother's, now Aunt Lucy's. Of course, when the house became a hospital and shrine, it had changed so much that it no longer resembled the place where he had grown up. His mother ran a feeding station for the Grangeville boys; she had felt guilty because she could not give him brothers and sisters to keep him company, and she was always afraid that James would be lonely, the only child of middle-aged parents. His mother had not cared how her house looked or what happened to it, as long as it was filled, positively roaring, with life.

From the beginning, Aunt Lucy, consulting Annette's wishes, sensibly and ruthlessly arranged this old remembered house to fit Annette. They enlarged the real living room, downstairs, to make Annette's bedroom because they could move her into the garden from there, and the squirrels could come to call, and she could watch the flowers growing, close at hand. They changed the dining room into a dressing room and bathroom for Annette. They did wonders to the kitchen so that now it had become a noiseless odorless operating theater. It had to be odorless, because of Annette's asthma. Aunt Lucy made his room, where now they ate at the round table, into a snug, chintzy Victorian parlor. Here she could receive her soft-spoken lady friends; the room was not directly above Annette, and their footsteps would not disturb her. Here, he had once hung his pennants, his cases of butterflies, his stuffed fish; he had done his homework, thrown his clothes on the floor, slept well and dreamed triumphantly. They kept the tiny guest room,

only changing it into a bower of rosebuds and blue lover's knots, and it was known politely as James's room. The bathroom was unrecognizably pretty; it had been a bare splashed-up box in his time. In the attic, Sarine was content with her white-painted iron bedstead, her cushioned rocking chair, and her shower bath from Sears Roebuck. Well, why not, he thought. They live here, I don't. It was a little jewel of a house, and had cost quite a lot: luckily, his mother carried a heavy life insurance.

Because they believed these to be his favorite dishes, they always gave him the same dinner, and always, as now, Aunt Lucy said how too bad it was that he had to eat that unhealthy restaurant food in New York when what he needed was this nice home cooking.

Stuffing fried chicken and corn soufflé into his mouth, he began a wordless conversation. "Oh no, Aunt Lucy, you've got it wrong. I eat dinner at home every night. My beloved is interested in cookery as a game, a sport. She has never heard of a balanced diet and probably never will. Last night, for instance, we had a brownish slippery mess which was a mixture of bamboo shoots and almonds and strips of meat said to be duck. You might not believe me, but it was delicious."

Suddenly he noticed the silence. Aunt Lucy, unlike Annette, was not used to silence. He said, "Well, I have to work, you know."

"Of course you do, dear boy. And how is everything at the store?"

"About the same."

She would not ask anything more. The only work she understood was her father's work, he had been the Methodist minister in Petersfield, South Carolina. She thought that was good work. She also had a dim idea of what Judge Mallin, her little Bea's husband, Annette's father, had been up to. On the whole, she did not think men's work was any of her business; they worked, as they should, to earn the money to keep their wives. In return, their wives were loving, ornamental, served them excellent food, and kept pretty homes for them, as Annette did. Heaven knew it was the least men could do, considering. James was very sweet and aware of his duties, but there must have been times. What had he done to use Annette up, in less than four years? She had given Annette to him in perfect health, and when she came back, to bring Annette to this house and nurse her, Annette was a pitiful little white thing, dying before her eyes. Lucy Blair knew exactly what James had done, but she would not put it into words in her mind. God had been especially kind to her, granting her Annette to mother, after her dear parents died in the Accident. She had this joy without paying any harsh and terrible price. They were all happy women here, and perhaps James, who was in a sense guilty, had been God's instrument, and in any case she had long since decided she was not to judge him.

Smoothly round, serene-faced, white-haired, Aunt Lucy sat in her rightful place and ate her way daintily through piles of food.

4: Helping himself to another popover, he said, "Annette looks fine."

Aunt Lucy's eyes lighted; now, at last, they were launched on her subject. It is her life's work, he thought, it is reasonable for her to want to talk of nothing else.

"She *is* looking well, isn't she? I'm so glad you said so. I can never be sure if I'm really seeing her, you know, looking at her so hard all the time. Well, we haven't had a bad attack, really not an attack at all since, let me see, it would be March tenth, yes, it was well after you left us the last time." (Reproach, he thought, and followed his usual technique of continuing to chew.) "I can't think what happened. There may have been some dust from the garden or maybe she overtired herself." (How in God's name? he thought.) "She just had enough strength to ring the bell by her bed, and Sarine and I flew downstairs and while Sarine helped her up and gave her the drops, I telephoned Ted and he got here in no time at all, he must have put his coat over his pajamas, I don't know what. Well, it was terrible for a while; oh that poor angel, that lamb of light, I can never tell you, James, what that child is. There she was choking, fighting, you could see the pain she was in, and somehow she managed to smile at us. Ted gave her an injection and massaged her; I don't know what he does, it's just a miracle; and he saved her again. What would we do without Ted?"

"You didn't write me."

"No, Annette forbade me. She said it was useless to worry you. She thinks of you all the time, James. Ted said to me once that he believes what keeps Annette alive is the thought of you and the hope of seeing you again."

"Did he?"

"Yes, he did. And I said to him, no man ever had a more devoted living wife than Annette."

He ate some more; it was wonderful how, if you kept your mouth full, you were excused from speech.

Presently he said, "Ted is very fond of Annette, isn't he?" It was a daydream he made for himself, in the cell on the fifteenth floor of Berkeley's store. Ted would come to him, man to man, noble with his sandy crew-cut, and say, "James, I am afraid this will break your heart, but Annette and I . . ."

"He loves her," Aunt Lucy said, "the way we all do. If he's told me once, he's told me a thousand times, that she's the bravest, sweetest patient he's ever had."

"And Annette is very fond of him?"

"Why, you know that, James. She's the most grateful person on earth.

She even thanks the flowers for growing, she thanks us all for every little thing we do for her. She can't thank Ted enough for his care of her."

There are also the bills, James thought, it is not entirely on this spiritual level of the healer, wrestling with death. There are the bills.

"I was wondering," he said. Now how could he possibly say it? He picked at the apple pie, and sloshed the thick cream around his plate. "Living so much alone, seeing no one, only you and Sarine and Ted, I was wondering if she wouldn't . . ."

"James," Aunt Lucy said, in a granite voice, "if you are going to start being jealous of that poor helpless dying angel, it is the ugliest and most unworthy thing I ever heard."

"Oh no," he said. "Oh no, you don't understand."

"I'm sure I don't."

He gave up; besides it was foolish and hopeless. Ted was thirty-five years old and not crazy and, though unmarried and officially blameless, he was not likely to be a eunuch. No man would start off with a woman in Annette's condition. Not start off, not marry. Probably Ted attended to vital needs in New York or Hartford or Boston. Probably, having seen so many married couples, he was steering clear of the whole business. What did he know about Ted? Nothing, except that he couldn't take him. It was Ted, old Dr. Bartlett's sparkling new assistant, who told him, when he came back from the war, about Annette's heart and her asthma, in medical terms which he did not understand, and finished by saying, "I am afraid she cannot stand anything, Whiteley, you know what I mean? I am afraid you will have to be a brother and sister, in some ways, from now on. Of course, medicine is not an exact science and there can always be a miraculous change." No change. Splendid Ted. The perfect doctor. He had learned, from Ted, the trick of kissing Annette's hand; this did not interfere with her precarious intake of breath.

"I think I'll go for a walk, Aunt Lucy. Delicious dinner. I'll thank Sarine downstairs."

"You'll be very quiet, coming in, won't you, dear?"

5: Ted was waiting for him in the hall. It was always arranged this way. Ted paid his first call at the Whiteley house whenever James came up from New York. This gave James plenty of time to catch the 9:40 for the city. Immediately after breakfast, having already thanked Aunt Lucy and Sarine for his visit, James went to say good-by to his wife. She looked as lovely in the morning; she looked as if she had slept better than any other adult on the American continent. He promised to write more. She could not write at all; he got his news from Aunt Lucy. He announced that he would send

any good books he read. He kissed her forehead or her cheek, told her to keep up the good work, and let himself quietly out of the room. For, at just that moment, as he left, there was another expression in her eyes, which he knew well. It was the look not of a pleased and grateful child, but of a hurt lost lonely child, unjustly punished. He never wanted to see that, and during the last four years he had consciously turned his head, to avoid seeing. He would not feel guilty about Maggie, who on earth had a right to suggest that he was guilty; but he did not wish to see that particular look in his wife's eyes.

When he had closed the door silently behind him, there was Ted. They would now walk down the road, away from the house, smoke, and have a frank chat about Annette's health. And then his train, his train, his train, which by now he was longing for with hunger, with passion.

"Well?" Ted said, as always.

"She looks fine, don't you think?"

"Yes, she's doing nicely just now. We had a bad one in March, Miss Blair tell you? It shook Annette a lot. She can't get used to them, poor girl. I don't mean the pain. No one ever gets used to pain. It's the idea she can't learn to accept."

"Dying?"

"Well, yes. And each attack brings it nearer, obviously. It's a wonder to me how her heart stands up. She knows that, too. But she can't . . ."

"I know."

"I wish there was some way to help her. Spiritually, I mean. It's not my field."

"Not mine. A minister, I should think. Have you ever talked to Aunt Lucy?"

"She doesn't want to think about it, any more than Annette."

"Annette said you thought she was getting better."

"Better than she was in March. Better than on her worst days. But not better. You know that."

"Yes."

"Of course, she's amazingly strong in her will. She may live a very long time. There's nothing new to tell you, James."

"No."

"Well, I suppose you want to be getting to your train?"

"Yes, I'll have to. Thanks for everything, Ted."

They were back at the front door. James picked up his suitcase and walked quickly down the road. Ted entered the house. Already, walking away, with the house at his back, with the train ahead of him, he could start forgetting. He would not have to come again until her birthday in June.

6: He kicked open the door, shouting, "Maggie, Maggie." She sprang from a welter of papers, her paint box dropped on the floor, as usual she seemed to have painted herself as well. Holding the bourbon bottles like dumbbells, he hugged her fiercely. She had her arms around his neck, she kissed him. They made sounds as if they had been running towards each other, over a great distance.

"Look what I brought you," he said, at last.

"Oh goody! Oh wonderful! Let's drink them both tonight. *Jim.* You've been gone so long I don't know how to treat you. What shall we do next?"

"Well, drink."

"What a good idea."

She busied herself in the kitchenette, a small hell-hole. There was only the big room and the bathroom and the kitchenette, they hardly ever lost sight of each other.

"What have you been doing?" he asked, collecting the fallen sheets of drawing papers.

"A bra ad. A beauty. It may be the best bra ad ever done. I think it ought to bring in five hundred dollars. Here," she said, showing him her work of art.

"Golly," he said.

"Why? No. Please. Say why. Is it indecent?"

"No, not indecent. But, golly."

"Good. Then we'll have five hundred dollars and we'll take a trip."

"Where?"

"I don't know. Africa. Chile."

"What are we having for dinner?"

"Chile. That's why I said it of course. It's a Chilean dish. It seems to be based on pancakes and fish."

"Where did you learn about it?" He was always enchanted by this, her monkey curiosity, every day she came home with something added to the glorious optimistic jumble in her mind.

"I have a friend who knows a Chilean. But don't let's eat until late. Your drink."

He raised his glass. "To you, Maggie. Maggie darling. And to being home."

"Yes." But she was still shy.

"What's been going on, during my long absence?"

"Bill and Jessie were having lunch at my drugstore and when I said I was alone they said they'd come and cheer me up and bring wine and then somehow Mark and Andy showed up too, so we ate an immense amount of spaghetti and gallons of ghastly red wine and *discussed.*"

"What?"

"Oh, you know. Discussed. The way they do."

The way they did, he corrected her silently. She used to have a constant salon, it seemed; her flat here on Thirty-ninth Street was convenient, she was hospitable and lively, people came, bringing contributions to the general welfare, and stayed and stayed and talked and talked. It took a while for them to drift away. She had been twenty-four when he moved in; her friends were her age. It would have been against their principles to remark on this open liaison. But James seemed terribly old to them, a man of forty then, he made them nervous, they didn't understand him, or they didn't understand his being so much older, they didn't call him "sir" because they weren't that kind, but they might have. And he really didn't know what they were talking about, he could not see what excited them so, he could not remember himself at twenty-four, or anyhow he had not been like this. He was a silent spectator; they took his silence for disapproval, whereas it was only uneasiness. Now they came if Maggie asked them, which was rarely; they always appeared, as if by magic, whenever he was away. I have taken her friends too, he thought. What haven't I taken? Four years of her life, half her flat, including her share of the expenses, there isn't any end to what I won't take from Maggie.

"Drink up," Maggie said, anxiously. "I don't like the look in your eye."

"I was thinking."

"Yes, I know. I don't like it a bit when you think. Did you order your new suit?"

"Not exactly. No."

"Oh why? Did you change your mind? I thought it was lovely, so handsome and practical too. I can't wait to see you in it."

It was not that he couldn't think of a lie, he had become a talented liar, but he did not wish to lie to Maggie, not ever if he could help it.

"I spent the money on something else."

"Oh."

She might well say "Oh" with that note of shocked disappointment. After all, it was her money too. If he had not saved it to buy a suit, he could have spent it here, on their life; he could have spent it on her. He had thought of himself going without a suit; he had not thought of Maggie, and it now occurred to him that he was down-at-heel, dingy, and that his shabbiness hurt Maggie's pride.

"I hadn't thought," he said.

"What is it, Jim?"

"I spent it on a pin, a present for Annette. I can't give her anything, except something like that. It was our sixteenth wedding anniversary, you know. I guess I did it out of guilt. Not nice, is it? And I hadn't thought about you."

"It doesn't matter," she said, loo
few months anyhow, we'll have the
bra ad. So it doesn't matter a bit."

"It does."

"Please," she said. "It's over. Do
silly thing to worry about."

But she did not ask what the pin
She had this in common with Annet
about.

The dishes were stacked and dir
from the chairs on to the floor. Ma
glasses settled in wet rings on the
had abandoned everything, suddenly
the reason for it still stood betwee
again, they could not afford or endu
way but this, this best and unbelieva
gentle, fierce and healing.

"Jim."

"My dearest?"

"How I love you. Just you. Nobo

He held her head against his chest
she slept easily. He was too tired to
stay awake with his happiness. He
the past. They were in Naples. It w
he, standing on the balcony, could
nolias, tuberoses, he was not sure,
and black and high and magical ac
had an ice bucket with champagne
matrimoniale. In the morning they

the Battle of the Bulge. Paris was perfect too, silver and perfect, and Maggie was the toast of the town. They met in London just once. They had a room in the Dorchester high above the park. It rained; they stayed in bed most of the time. The war was nothing, it happened in between his leaves with Maggie.

He moved Maggie, now, tenderly; rubbed his shoulder, stretched, rolled over on his side and closed his eyes. None of it true, he thought, can't get away with it, can't fool with the past. It's there, you can't change it. It's just there, all the time.

None of it true. On his infrequent leaves, he slept. He slept like the dead and sick. And then got silently, unlaughingly, stonily drunk: and then went back to the regiment. He never had Maggie, he never had any woman. How could he, with his beautiful, beloved young wife dying at home? He had a superstitious terror that if he took a woman, even the ugliest bargain-rate whore, it would kill Annette like lightning. And all he wanted was for Annette to live, only that; let Annette live until he could come home and make her well. He worked, that was what he did in the war. It wasn't so bad; it kept him from thinking. Company commander, battalion commander, second in command of the regiment, never wounded, always there, dependable Jim, not much fun, serious guy, took the war seriously, had some trouble of his own, got the work done. No Maggie, only the joyless years.

7: Maggie worked steadily at her drawing board for two days. She worked hard, because she did everything hard, and she did not mind this job at all, she thought it was a joke, money for jam, drawing these never-never-land women in various ludicrous positions—just now with breasts stuck out, as if they were offering peanuts to elephants—and getting paid for it. She did not worry, she drew; she got paid, maybe not for all of the silly women but for enough of them. She didn't want money except to live, and had no exalted idea of how to live. This time, she wanted money badly.

Her agent had said the Nu-Way people were pleased with her work on the E. Z. Two-Twist Girdle: the Tip-Cup, said her agent, is a big chance for you, you might get a contract. Five hundred dollars now, Maggie thought, the hell with contracts. She left the wash drawing with her agent's secretary. Then she waited at home for the agent's report. She smoked and roamed about the room and brooded on money.

Couldn't that miserable Dame aux Camélias in the country see for herself how Jim looked? Couldn't she and that household of female hogs cut down a little: what did they live on anyhow, caviar and shredded orchids with cream? Didn't she give a damn, so lost in her successful career of dying, that her legal husband, that self-sacrificing crazy-generous angel and darling, looked like a rug peddler or a bum from under the bridges? Did

they ever think about that? How did Jim feel, in those baggy worn-out clothes; what did they think at the office? They probably thought he drank or gambled his money away, maybe they were having conferences about him and saying he looked too awful, it was a disgrace to the store, they'd have to get a sharper-looking fellow for the job. Oh not that, who cared about that? Him. Him. *Him.* He was beautiful and he was hers and she wanted him to look beautiful and sleek and young, the way he ought to. In dark gray flannel. She knew exactly how he would look, with his black hair and his black eyebrows and his thin stylish nose and his long bitter mouth, and then his shape, made for that suit, good shoulders and good legs and not loose and hangy around the waist, the way city men were. *They have to buy it,* Maggie thought, *I want that suit.*

They did buy it too. Her agent telephoned to congratulate her and said that Wallenstein at Nu-Way wanted to talk to her himself, he suggested a conference in his office day after tomorrow at three, Wallenstein thought she had something, very sexy her stuff was, they planned to work her in on the fall line.

Maggie ordered the suit herself, taking no chances. Jim's birthday was not until February, it would have to be a Spring Present. She felt nervous, now that she had given the order, Jim was very touchy, but he couldn't refuse, not when it mattered so much to her. Damn that woman, what did she wear, Balenciaga bedjackets probably. A man who earned thousands a year ought to be able to buy himself as many suits as would hang in a closet, and so he could if he didn't have to support those bloodsuckers in Connecticut.

Jim explained it to her, before he moved in; he wanted her to listen and she did, though she hated it. What it came to, obviously, was that with keeping them all in crepe de Chine sheets and larks' tongues and the most expensive medicine they could possibly find, and after paying taxes, which needless to say they never considered, he had about three thousand dollars left for himself. Just enough, Maggie thought, to go on eating so he can go on working, very liberal of them. "It isn't only that I can't give you anything, Maggie," he'd said, "I can't even keep you. Not even food and rent. Do you see? I'm sixteen years older than you and a pauper. Now what?" She'd told him, with dignity, that if he thought she wanted to be a kept woman, and then she couldn't go on like that, and hurled herself into his arms, crying, and saying she loved him and didn't he love her and they could get a bigger bed on the installment plan and if he didn't want to live with her she'd just as soon be dead.

"I do not care, for myself," Maggie said, looking at their room, which was not a very nice room, chewed up, not awfully fresh, mustard-colored on the whole, but theirs and they were happy in it. That woman, what was she thinking, what was she doing, what did she know, how dared she call

that love? He won't take the suit he'll be so beautiful in. James, returning, found her in tears on the bed, immediately thought she was ill and felt a cold shaking emptiness in his stomach, held her in his arms, begged her to tell him what had happened, and was so wildly relieved when he heard that he said he was delighted, he would love to have the suit, she was marvelous, he was going to give her a Spring Present too, only never frighten me like that again. Never.

James's Spring Present was to be a weekend trip. Long Island somewhere, he thought. Maggie took the matter in hand. Couldn't they go to the shack Bill and Jessie rented in the Adirondacks? Jessie had flu so they weren't using it, so much nicer than a hotel.

"We could catch trout and tie a rope around each other and be mountaineers."

They went. Maggie caught a fish, not a trout whatever it was. It lay flapping on the bank by the stream and she was seized with remorse and threw it back into the water, saying she would never eat fish again. They climbed a mountain—Maggie insisted it was a mountain—and made love in a nest of rhododendron bushes at the top. That was all James remembered of the mountain.

8: Little things, James told himself, little things, not worth noticing. How could he not notice them? Hank Martin arrived from Chicago, without warning. He had been James's roommate, hundreds of years ago, at Yale. Yale was what his mother saved for, longer and harder than he ever saved for a suit or anything else. Hank called him at the office, very hearty, Hank was a successful lawyer, one of the friendly, reassuring type who could not talk to you without laying a hand on your shoulder, arm, or knee. The squeeze and pat system of communication. Hank had been a successful campus politician before. They were oddly assorted roommates.

"I know it's short notice, Jim, but how about having dinner tonight with Ruth and me?"

Leave Maggie? Say what, to Maggie?

"I'm terribly sorry, Hank, if only I'd known you were coming. I'm tied up. It's damn bad luck for me."

"No, for us. Well, lunch tomorrow?"

"This is awful. I've got a business thing and I can't put it off. How about next week? I seem to have a terrible week right now. Lunch conferences, you know."

"We're only here three days. I'll try to wire in advance next time. Sudden trip, I didn't know I had to come, myself."

"What a deal," James said, with too much sincerity. "Give my love to Ruth, will you?"

That would be one of the last, he thought, not that there had ever been many, and fewer still after the war. He didn't eat lunch any more, better for his figure, foolish waste of money. He could not see Hank. Not talking about Maggie was like hiding her.

Or was Maggie his excuse? How did I come to this place where I am, James wondered. I'm all right, only I want to be left alone. It had something to do with being a failure, of course. He did not mind that either, what he could not stand was acting, dressing it up, keeping the ball in the air. That hopeless talk—how're you boy; fine fine fine, how're you; dandy, never better—followed by the determined, optimistic brag, the plans, the deals, the triumph, the money. No wonder none of his friends could talk to each other and themselves about everything being wonderful, more than they could have hoped. I am not who I wanted to be, James thought, and my work is nothing except a pay check; this is a perfectly usual condition; I have Maggie and I am not obliged to pretend out of office hours. Everyone cannot be Tolstoy or President, James told himself, success is the great American error. Maggie is all I have or need or want.

Maggie's sister, the married one from Minneapolis, came to New York with her husband for some reason or other. Maggie's family was not clear to James, she had a father and mother, they owned a drugstore, they lived in a small town in Missouri, and she had a brother in San Francisco and the sister in Minneapolis. She never wrote to them or thought about them, as far as James knew. She didn't have anything against them, she just wasn't interested. She was an orphan gypsy, in fact. But there was no way to get out of seeing the sister. Maggie explained that to James apologetically; she'd meet them at their hotel and have dinner and be home early. She did not say, I'll bring them here for a drink first, so you can all meet. It did not occur to James that Maggie was ashamed of her sister in mutation mink and a fancy hat, and ashamed of her brother-in-law and his brassy sales talk. They were not James's kind, they would revolt him. She was not ashamed of herself because James had chosen her and she was his pupil. She had learned everything she knew from James; you could hardly expect to get an education at Buxton High in Missouri.

9: It had been a specially worthless day at the store. There was nothing to get angry about, there was simply nothing. The day went on and on, by three o'clock he was promising himself Maggie as if he had not seen her for months. He left his office on the dot of five and walked directly home. He made plans for her evening's pleasure. The weather was lovely, couldn't they take a boat somewhere, up the river, or to Staten Island, after all New York was surrounded by water, not that they benefited from it. Full of these modest hopes, he opened the door and saw at once that something was

wrong, Maggie sat still, and unoccupied, looking out of the window. What you saw from the window was the flat brick front of a dingy hotel, across the street; there was no reason ever to look out the window.

"Maggie?"

"Darling?"

"What is it?"

"Well . . ."

But she could not, or would not, tell him. She launched into an aggrieved recital about her agent and what did he expect and those Nu-Way fiends and their ghastly trusses for the female form. He believed none of it. They took the boat to Staten Island and it might as well have been winter or they might as well have stayed at home. As they walked back to the flat from the subway, he began to think that he didn't want to know what was on her mind, he felt menaced.

In bed, in the dark, she curled against him.

"Maggie, tell me now."

"Kiss me."

"Now. Tell me."

She had been feeling odd, she consulted Jessie, Jessie arranged an appointment with her doctor four days ago, today she went back; now she knew.

His heart made heavy sick thudding sounds.

"But how? But why?" he said. After all this time.

She reminded him of the nest of rhododendron on the mountain, it was the only possible explanation.

In a faraway, brittle voice, Maggie said, "You don't want it, of course?"

Want it? He couldn't think, he had to catch hold of something first, so he could think at all. Suddenly she rolled away from him, gasping with sobs.

"Can't you say something? You can say something. Anything. I didn't do it on purpose. What do you think? Do you think I planned it so I could trap you? I couldn't help it!"

He caught hold of that, of her, he held her so close that it hurt, saying over and over, "I love you, I love you, don't cry, something will happen, Maggie, I love you."

The darkness was a hole to crawl into. Time, he thought, give us time. He felt stupid with tiredness and on the edge of sleep. She was quiet now in his arms. He reminded himself that he must think, and could not. There was no place to begin. From the darkness, he heard his voice, but surely he was thinking, not talking?

"It could kill you," he said. She moved at his side. "Aunt Lucy thinks that's what finished Annette. It was in Georgia at boot camp. Annette had a room in a boardinghouse in town, awful, squalid, she couldn't do anything

about it, she wasn't a girl who could fix anything. I knew she was delicate, my God yes, I knew about her asthma all right. I imagined asthma was like hay fever or something, a damned nuisance, I didn't know really. When she told me about the baby, it seemed the most wonderful thing that ever happened. A son, I thought, and she'll have him to look after and keep her happy while I'm away and I'll have them both to come back to. That was what I thought. Divine Providence, everything arranged in the best way you could hope for. She miscarried in the sixth month and nearly died, that's what they wrote me. Her heart, her asthma complicating it, I don't know what. They never bothered to tell me before, the whole bunch of prize fools, that she'd had rheumatic fever when she was eleven and they always knew she had a whacky heart. What do they live by anyhow; I bet her poor doting parents were the worst of the lot. Aunt Lucy treated her like glass, but they never talk about anything they don't like. If I'd known about her heart then."

In the dark, very gently, Maggie kissed his shoulder.

"And what have you been thinking all this time?" he said. "I never told you anything. I wanted to keep it away from us so we could live here alone. That's as hopeless as everything else."

"No, no," Maggie said vaguely.

"I can't tell the truth about Annette anyhow, because I don't remember. It doesn't seem true, whatever I say. But I was in love with her, I know that, even if I can't believe it now. I thought she was the most beautiful girl in the world, and much more, not like all the rest of us ordinary mortals. I couldn't get over her marrying me; who was I; how did I deserve anything so lovely? Then after we were married I moved right into a splendid role, the Tower of Strength. I admired myself very much, I thought I was a Tower of Strength to beat hell. Every day I'd hurry home from work to that apartment we had in the village and find my beautiful wife sitting in chaos, and then I'd soothe her and comfort her and take over. I was a great one for taking over. But it didn't worry me, it was going to be just a phase. Because very soon now I would be the famous rich great writer, translated into forty languages, and then I'd put my wife on a satin cushion where she could be my inspiration. Naturally great writers took a while to get recognized, look at their early lives, they all had to work at stupid little jobs, for a start. I was in the tradition, I thought it was perfect, including Annette's helplessness. It makes me sick to think about it."

"Don't, Jim," Maggie said.

"I've started, you might as well hear it all. Not that there's much, I haven't had a very varied life. There was joining-up and Georgia, and all that. Then my division went to Africa. I got Aunt Lucy's letter there, in 1942. Annette would never have another child and probably never recover from

this one. On and on. I didn't believe her. I thought that she and Sarine were hysterical old women, and doctors are all the same. I thought Annette needed me, just me, once I got back I'd cure her. So I did get back, and even after Ted warned me, I couldn't help myself. I'd been gone for three and a half years. I walked into her room and saw her and picked her up and kissed her, the way a man kisses his wife. She had an attack at once. It was probably excitement but also moving her, kissing her hard. I watched it. She was strangling, she couldn't get enough air to breathe, and then there was the pain in her heart and what it did to her eyes and face. I never saw anything worse and I knew it was true then, they were right, I couldn't cure her, nothing could. I left that night, when everything was under control again, and I went to Hartford to a cheesy hotel. I had a fine orgy of drunkenness and despair, for about two weeks, and then I went back to work, same old job, waiting for me the way they promised. That was ten years ago. Maybe you never get used to dying yourself but you certainly get used to someone else dying. I haven't any idea what Annette thinks because she hasn't talked to me. She's always the same, sweet and calm and beautiful and delighted to see me and full of little chat about things she chats about. Of course I've got no reason to worry, I have a good secure job and when I'm too old for it, the store has its own pension scheme. How do people manage," he said. "My God, that's what I want to know. How do people manage?"

Maggie took him in her arms and held his head against her breast, making little sounds without words, smoothing his hair, his cheek, rocking him gently against her. She had never imagined that she could help him; he was all her help, her certainty, wiser than she, older, strong, he was the one who would keep her from being a silly cheap woman with nothing much to do in the world. And she thought he was used to the stale story of Annette, and such a good man that of course he would not abandon his invalid wife, but that was all: a duty he fulfilled and did not think about, a habit that cost him more than he could afford but he was too generous to care. Fool, she told herself, wicked fool; holding him and loving him. She knew better now. She had to save his life, she had to, and she would.

Maggie had not foreseen that he would be ashamed of every word he had said, shrugging his shoulders in his office, as if shrinking away from his disgust. Whining, he thought, so sorry for himself, poor little fellow, scrounging sympathy. He could taste it in his mouth. He could not remember when he had loathed himself more. At the end of the day he telephoned Maggie and announced in a flat voice that he had to dine with Blick, and ate at an automat and went to a movie, hoping she would be asleep by the time he got home.

Maggie settled herself with a new patience, to say nothing and wait. After days of this, each more leaden and disappointing than the last, she believed

she understood him. It was not too bad, the only thing she did not want to lose was Jim.

They stood, wedged in the kitchenette, she washing plates, he drying them, and Maggie said, with extreme casualness, "Jessie knows a sort of doctor, seems she had a little trouble herself once. I've got the money, from the Nu-Way garter belt. So we don't have to worry about it any more."

"No. No. *No.*"

"Well what?" she said, close to tears, her hands limp in the dishpan. "What then?"

"Oh Maggie. Leave these damned dishes. Come here."

He pulled her on to his lap, in their one creaking comfortable chair, and said, "Maggie, what do you want to do? You, yourself."

"I'm like you. I can't get used to it. I don't know. But if it was just me, Jim, I want to have the baby. We could get an orange crate and fix it a bed here in our room and then there'd be you and me and our little brown baby."

He laughed. Heaven, she thought, what a long time it's been. He laughed and hugged her and said, "Naturally. Of course. Of course there's nothing else at all. You and me and our little brown baby in an orange crate."

They had a Practical Talk. This was Maggie's unfavorite kind of talk but she listened and nodded her head wisely. They would be just poor, the one thing he could not do was cut off any of the Grangeville supplies. Of course, in time he would get a raise, it was automatic, and in more time, about six or seven years, he would get Blick's job, and the Grangeville needs were stationary so they could expect to live fairly decently. Yes, yes, Maggie murmured, nodding her head. It would be cruel to break this to Annette on her birthday, so he would have to stay over an extra day, or at least the whole morning, if it was possible to talk to Annette then. On the other hand, what with time and money, it was better not to make a special trip to see her. Yes, yes, Maggie agreed. The only snag was divorce laws, he didn't know about them, and certainly couldn't afford the six weeks and the trip to Reno but probably they could get a divorce in Connecticut, on the grounds of so many years of actual separation. Maggie nodded. She was to be very careful while he was gone, it was these early days that were tricky. Oh yes, Maggie said, yes indeed.

Now, on the train, he could not plan the sentences he knew he would have to say. There was no picture in his mind of him, standing, sitting, in Annette's room and saying, "After thirteen years of no marriage, I want my freedom." He found he had a cracking headache and preferred to think of Maggie's little brown baby, who was as clear to him as if already born, already burbling and waving his legs in the orange crate.

10: There was a small cake, with white icing and pink sugar roses and one candle, to grow on. For him there was a half bottle of champagne, a drink he detested, but it was routine for birthday parties. There was the collection of Emily Dickinson's poems, his present for Annette: no absurd extravagance, this time; he had other obligations. Annette looked at least ten years younger than her age, and especially lovely in a soft blue, ruffled, tucked, gathered robe which Aunt Lucy had made, as her birthday gift. Then there was dinner with Aunt Lucy, and a never-ending night, then the usual brisk after-breakfast talk with Ted, who had sent a lavish box of chocolates the day before. With Ted's permission ("She's really much better, give her a kick too, make her realize how well she is") he opened Annette's door, thinking that this was perhaps the last time he would see her and feeling an unsteady light-headed sense of relief.

"I've come to talk to you, Annette," he said; oh fool, he obviously wasn't coming to beat her, and he must find some reasonable voice, not this croak.

"How lovely, how wonderful. It's the best birthday present of all. I didn't *know* you could stay over. No one told me. A birthday surprise?"

"Well."

"Pull your chair out of the sun, darling. It's getting so hot. Is it terribly hot in the city?"

"Quite hot."

"My darling. I think it's wicked that they won't give you a vacation. It would be so lovely and restful if only you could come here for two weeks."

Ah. Forget it, he thought, such an old lie that he'd forgotten it. He spent his annual two weeks with Maggie, mostly at Jones Beach.

None of the beginnings work, he thought. And said, in a perfectly indecipherable voice, indecipherable even to himself, "Do you ever think about us, Annette?"

"James. I think about us all the time." She smiled, lighted up, shone like the sun. "I think of us as a miracle. There isn't anything miraculous about me loving you, I knew I would all my life, from the first day I met you. Do you remember, at the Partridges'? I still write, I mean I dictate a letter to Aunt Lucy every year, to Sarah Partridge because she introduced me to you, or you to me, which was it? The miracle is you, James, you're the miracle."

He said nothing, and looked at his nails, which seemed very far-off and peculiar, hardly the sort of nails you would expect to see.

"We haven't had the life we meant to have," she said gently. "But think of the people, the poor people, who lose their love, and see it all as a failure, and have to go through a horrible divorce, and then try to start again, worn-out and secondhand. My health," she said, having difficulty with the word,

"has been a terrible trial, but it hasn't killed anything. That's what makes it all right, you see, what makes living beautiful for me."

And how about me, he shouted in his mind, me, James, the miracle man, what is supposed to make life beautiful for me? I am in fine health, rude health, I haven't got the appetites of a flower or a bird, I am not safely slowed down on a chaise longue. He hated her. He plainly hated her. The word "love" made him sick, made him retch. He must remember to tell Maggie. I am not going to say I love you, Maggie, because love is a dirty word, it's blackmail, it's the word people use when they mean absolute cannibal possessiveness. And throughout all eternity, I will eat you, you will eat me. Christ. He wanted to shake her, hit her, sitting there like a beautiful fresh clean hen on that goddamned egg, her love.

"I get lonely," he said, flat like a weather report.

"Dearest. I know, I know. You've never said anything, I knew you always wanted to spare me. I know about loneliness. It's worst at night. I always hope you are asleep, not feeling that."

Her hand was stretched out to him; he ignored it.

"Do you think about the child, ever?" Now it was like a policeman, impersonal third-degree. I didn't give you rheumatic fever, I didn't make your misshapen heart, if you'd had the sense to mention a simple fact like that I'd have damn well seen to it you never got pregnant, you wouldn't have to lie on a chaise longue at least not all the time, you would long since have been handed over to the care of a better, gentler, richer man, and it wouldn't matter, honey, it wouldn't matter, baby, you'd be surprised, you just need a caretaker-man to love, it doesn't have to be me.

Since she did not answer, he let his nails alone, and looked at her. And was horrified to see her eyes, the unjustly punished child, but more, much more and worse: anguish. "I don't, I swear I don't," she whispered. "I did for years, I tried always to hide it. How can they live with me if I am like that, mourning for what I've lost and can never have. I never saw his grave, did he have a grave, I couldn't ask. I cannot put that on to you and to them, as well, not that too. I don't think of the child any more, I promise you I don't."

He turned his head, and looked at the garden. He would not see her, nor respond to that pain. He would not. Dead. Long dead. There is life to fight for, he thought, not always death, not always what is past, failed, gone. Now, he told himself, now is what matters. *Now.*

"I would like to have a child." What a quaint way of saying it. Will you dance the minuet with me? I would like. I must. I will. I am going to. A little brown boy with Maggie's hair and eyes, in an orange crate in our room, next to our bed.

She took in her breath, with a hard grating sound. He rose, ready to get

the drops, first emergency treatment, suddenly realizing that he could talk her to death. His hands were sweating.

"Annette!"

But now she turned on him eyes that were alight with wonder, something almost insane, an insanity of hope.

"Adopt a baby?" she said. "James! Could we? Could we? Would it be fair, I could do so little for it. But Aunt Lucy and Sarine. Here? Here in the garden, playing and laughing in the garden? A very little baby? I could help to bathe it. Would you? It would be ours, it *would* be ours, we'd make it ours. I can still sew, I could sew clothes for it, and later I could teach it to read, I think I could."

"No," he said, heavily. He got up from the chair and walked through the open French windows and stood in the garden: the squirrel's tree, the roses growing along the fence, the bird's fountain. Nothing, he thought, she understands nothing; we might be shouting at each other from different planets. Help to bathe it. She isn't guilty, he thought with terrible weariness, she has committed no crime, she doesn't prefer death to life. She is blind and completely unreal from these years of nothingness, but she isn't guilty. Why can't she die? Fighting to live on a chaise longue, fighting off the terrors at night, fighting off the need of a child. Why can't she die? Die. God, *make her die.*

He had to go back. He had to finish this, although who knew how it would end. The rocketing hope was gone from her eyes, clouded over with a milky strange fixed look, ready to be fear. If he tormented her long enough, if he confused her so that she did not know what was happening to her and to her tiny world, if he made the walls shake and the garden slant and the sunlight turn gray, she could also take leave of her anchorage, that slight whatever-it-was that kept her bound to this time and this place. Thirteen years was a very long time to wait for death; aside from her heart, there was no telling what state her mind was in; if you hurt it enough, it might give too. All right, now, now was the time for the axe and the final blow. However it would end.

"I love," he began, and saw it happening. Saw the fear, saw her push back against the pillows, recoiling as if he had come towards her with murderous hands, saw the fear slipping too and behind it nothing, her eyes already going dull and empty.

"*I love you,*" he said. "It is all right, Annette. *I love you.*"

Then he rang for Sarine and pulled open the door, and ran from the house, like an old man, running down the road. They could look after her, it was their job now. They could hardly expect him to give her anything more.

11: Blick had told him not to come back to the office today. Compassionate leave. Blick was a perfectly decent fellow. They all were. Maybe they hated the job as much as he did, but put on a better show. Maybe they didn't hate the job but that was no reason to despise them. He was not exactly a man who had the right to despise anyone. He would just walk around a bit first, it might be easier later on.

He went up the stairs slowly, wishing there were more of them. Then he opened the door slowly, wishing he had forgotten his key, wishing that Maggie would be out. Maggie was there, and turned to him, her face warm with love and concern and hope, and saw what she saw. He did not have to tell her. He knelt by her chair, smelling paint, and hid his face in her lap.

Grief, he thought, that is what this is: I never knew. No one can live with it. It's beyond caring, beyond hope. A big gray emptiness. We can't, we can't.

Maggie's hand was on his shoulder. He moved, raised his head, and took her hand, which was cold. She was looking out the window. Her face showed nothing.

"Maggie," he said. "Maggie, please."

She turned her head and looked at him.

"Maggie, don't. Maggie, wait. Wait. She'll die. She has to die. It can't go on. Maggie, *wait*."

She did not answer. After a while he got up, his knees hurting and creaking, and sat in the comfortable chair. It grew dark.

In the darkness across a great distance, he talked to her. His voice seemed to echo, as if he were calling to her on the other side of a canyon.

"Maggie, listen. Turn your face. I beg you to listen."

She stirred, moved, he saw a pale blur.

"If you think I couldn't because I love Annette, you are wrong. I wished her dead. I prayed for her to die." He did not know what he expected, perhaps that Maggie would cry out against this crime. He felt it as a crime, and now something terrible he would always keep with him, a knowledge of himself that he could not escape. Maggie was silent. Did she not believe him; was she too repelled to speak?

"I could have done it, I think, I'm not sure but I think so, said it all, if it had killed her quickly, at once." Is it true, he asked himself, it may be true. Who am I? "But not what I saw. What it was going to be. That she'd go on lying there, forever in that room, and mad. Crazy. With those eyes."

Maggie was doing something. What? Putting her hands over her ears, not to listen, not to hear this horrible stuff? Shaking herself, to shake him off, to writhe away from this whole vile story, from all he had to say and was? He was afraid of everything now. He could hardly understand what he was say-

ing, or his voice. "You're young, I'm not really old. We'll be free some day, maybe not too long off, but we will be. We can have the baby; we'll be free later. We can count on that, we can, Maggie."

My God, he thought, *my God.*

"*No,*" Maggie said, shouting the word across the now enormous room

No. God in heaven, no. Waiting for a funeral, every day, hoping for it with all their strength so they could marry. Dancing on a coffin. I must be mad myself. And besides, it was all very well to live together, you could get away with that, fashion had gone so far, provided you were discreet, but illegitimate children; no one had them, he'd never known anyone; he'd lose his job as soon as they heard, the child would starve; there might even be laws; they'd take the child to an institution; what has happened, James thought, I don't even know what I'm thinking.

"I don't care about the rules," Maggie said harshly. "Or if it got too tough, we could go to another city and say we were married. If it was only you and me, I wouldn't care. But I'm not going to have a father for my child, on loan. Do you hear? Half there, on loan from a damned ghost who won't die!"

She must have been crying, she made ugly sounds, as if the breath in her throat was metal, and she got up and bumped against the card table and the book case and he could hear her heavy on the stairs as she went down to the street.

Later he turned on the lights and went into the kitchenette and opened a can and heated the brownish stuff in a saucepan and sat at the table before the uneaten food, not knowing what he was waiting for.

Blick said to his secretary, "I think Mr. Whiteley's wife must be worse."

"Poor man."

Every evening he came home with fear, and found Maggie there, gentle, quiet; they seemed to him like two shadows, performing underwater rites of eating, sleeping, washing, as if they were real people. The fear was so heavy that it ended by numbing him. When he came home now he counted the stairs to their flat, thinking of nothing. The note was on the bed. He walked across the room and picked it up steadily. It was there because it had to be, he had known he would come back one of these days and find it.

"Dear Jim; I have gone to that doctor of Jessie's who fixes things. Afterward, I am going with Jessie to the Adirondacks for a week or two. It will be nice to lie in the sun. Then I'll come back. I suppose our life will be kind of sad and dull here but maybe that's the way life is, when you get older. Take care of yourself. Maggie."

He folded the note and put it back on the bed. He took off his hat and sat in Maggie's chair, by the drawing board. Wait, wait, he said to himself.

No. Wait for what? He thought of Maggie where she was now, and suddenly he was bent over, holding his head, breathing through his mouth, fighting off panic and nausea. After a while he went into the dark little bathroom and drank a glass of water and wiped his face with a towel. Then he came back and stood in the center of the room.

Sad and dull. No. No, my darling, it doesn't have to be. There is no law. It depends on the company you keep. It doesn't have to be, it won't be for you, there's plenty of time for you. Annette feeding on him, he feeding on Maggie. Well, no. He could prevent that, anyhow. You just have to be careful of the company you keep, my little one.

He looked at the room: the bed, the drawing board, the scarred old office desk where Maggie hid her disorderly tools and her underclothes, the card table where they ate, the homemade book case, the hideous lamp, the radio and record player, bought on the installment plan too. He looked at the floor where the nonexistent orange crate would not stand. He pulled two big suitcases from under the bed, and began to pack.

1959: *from The Kenyon Review*

VENUS, CUPID, FOLLY AND TIME

by Peter Taylor, who was born and raised in Tennessee. He graduated from Kenyon College in 1941 and has taught at North Carolina College for Women, Indiana University, Kenyon College, and Ohio State University. His stories have appeared in The Kenyon Review, The New Yorker, *and other magazines; and he is the author of a novel,* A Woman of Means; *a book of short stories,* The Widows of Thornton; *and a play,* Tennessee Day in St. Louis.

Their house alone would not have made you think there was anything so awfully wrong with Mr. Dorset or his old maid sister. But certain things about the way both of them dressed had, for a long time, annoyed and disturbed everyone. We used to see them together at the grocery store, for

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instance, or even in one of the big department stores downtown, wearing their bedroom slippers. Looking more closely we would sometimes see the cuff of a pajama top or the hem of a hitched up nightgown showing from underneath their ordinary daytime clothes. Such slovenliness in one's neighbors is so unpleasant that even husbands and wives in West Vesey Place, which was the street where the Dorsets lived, had got so they didn't like to joke about it with each other. Were the Dorsets, poor old things, losing their minds? If so, what was to be done about it? Some neighbors got so they would not even admit to themselves what they saw. And a child coming home with an ugly report on the Dorsets was apt to be told that it was time he learned to curb his imagination.

Mr. Dorset wore tweed caps and sleeveless sweaters. Usually he had his sweater stuffed down inside his trousers with his shirt tails. To the women and young girls in West Vesey Place this was extremely distasteful. It made them feel as though Mr. Dorset had just come from the bathroom and had got his sweater inside his trousers by mistake. There was, in fact, nothing about Mr. Dorset that was not offensive to the women. Even the old touring car he drove was regarded by most of them as a disgrace to the neighborhood. Parked out in front of his house, as it usually was, it seemed a worse violation of West Vesey's zoning than the house itself. And worst of all was seeing Mr. Dorset wash the car.

Mr. Dorset washed his own car! He washed it not back in the alley or in his driveway but out there in the street of West Vesey Place. This would usually be on the day of one of the parties which he and his sister liked to give for young people or on a day when they were going to make deliveries of the paper flowers or the home grown figs which they sold to their friends. Mr. Dorset would appear in the street carrying two buckets of warm water and wearing a pair of skin-tight coveralls. The skin-tight coveralls, of khaki material but faded almost to flesh color, were still more offensive to the women and young girls than his way of wearing his sweaters. With sponges and chamois cloths and a large scrub brush (for use on the canvas top) the old fellow would fall to and scrub away, gently at first on the canvas top and more vigorously as he progressed to the hood and body, just as though the car were something alive. Neighbor children felt that he went after the headlights exactly as if he were scrubbing the poor car's ears. There was an element of brutality in the way he did it and yet an element of tenderness too. An old lady visiting in the neighborhood once said that it was like the cleansing of a sacrificial animal. I suppose it was some such feeling as this that made all women want to turn away their eyes whenever the spectacle of Mr. Dorset washing his car presented itself.

As for Mr. Dorset's sister, her behavior was in its way just as offensive as his. To the men and boys in the neighborhood it was she who seemed quite

beyond the pale. She would come out on her front terrace at mid-day clad in a faded flannel bathrobe and with her dyed black hair all undone and hanging down her back like the hair of an Indian squaw. To us whose wives and mothers did not even come downstairs in their negligees, this was very unsettling. It was hard to excuse it even on the grounds that the Dorsets were too old and lonely and hard-pressed to care about appearances any more.

Moreover, there was a boy who had gone to Miss Dorset's house one morning in the early fall to collect for his paper route and saw this very Miss Louisa Dorset pushing a carpet sweeper about one of the downstairs rooms without a stitch of clothes on. He saw her through one of the little lancet windows that opened on the front loggia of the house, and he watched her for quite a long while. She was cleaning the house in preparation for a party they were giving for young people that night, and the boy said that when she finally got hot and tired she dropped down in an easy chair and crossed her spindly, blue veined, old legs and sat there completely naked, with her legs crossed and shaking one scrawny little foot, just as unconcerned as if she didn't care that somebody was likely to walk in on her at any moment. After a little bit the boy saw her get up again and go and lean across a table to arrange some paper flowers in a vase. Fortunately he was a nice boy, though he lived only on the edge of the West Vesey Place neighborhood, and he went away without ringing the doorbell or collecting for his paper that week. But he could not resist telling his friends about what he had seen. He said it was a sight he would never forget! And she an old lady more than sixty years old who, had she not been so foolish and self-willed, might have had a house full of servants to push the carpet sweeper for her!

This foolish pair of old people had given up almost everything in life for each other's sake. And it was not at all necessary. When they were young they could have come into a decent inheritance, or now that they were old they might have been provided for by a host of rich relatives. It was only a matter of their being a little tolerant—or even civil—toward their kinspeople. But this was something that old Mr. Dorset and his sister could never consent to do. Almost all their lives they had spoken of their father's kin as "Mama's in-laws" and of their mother's kin as "Papa's in-laws." Their family name was Dorset, not on one side but on both sides. Their parents had been distant cousins. As a matter of fact, the Dorset family in the city of Mero had once been so large and was so long established there that it would have been hard to estimate how distant the kinship might be. But still it was something that the old couple never liked to have mentioned. Most of their mother's close kin had, by the time I am speaking of, moved off to California, and most of their father's people lived somewhere up east. But Miss Dorset and her old bachelor brother found any contact, correspondence, even an exchange of Christmas cards with these in-laws intolerable. It was a case, so

they said, of the in-laws respecting the value of the dollar above all else, whereas they, Miss Louisa and Mr. Alfred Dorset, placed importance on other things.

They lived in a dilapidated and curiously mutilated house on a street which, except for their own house, was the most splendid street in the entire city. Their house was one that you or I would have been ashamed to live in —even in the lean years of the early thirties. In order to reduce taxes the Dorsets had had the third story of the house torn away, leaving an ugly, flat-topped effect without any trim or ornamentation. Also they had had the south wing pulled down and had sealed the scars not with matching brick but with a speckled stucco that looked raw and naked. All this the old couple did in violation of the strict zoning laws of West Vesey Place, and for doing so they would most certainly have been prosecuted except that they were the Dorsets and except that this was during the depression when zoning laws weren't easy to enforce in a city like Mero.

To the young people whom she and her brother entertained at their house once each year Miss Louisa Dorset liked to say: "We have given up everything for each other. Our only income is from our paper flowers and our figs." The old lady, though without showing any great skill or talent for it, made paper flowers. During the winter months her brother took her in that fifteen-year-old touring car of theirs, with its steering wheel on the wrong side and with isinglass side curtains that were never taken down, to deliver these flowers to her customers. The flowers looked more like sprays of tinted potato chips than like any real flowers. Nobody could possibly have wanted to buy them except that she charged next to nothing for them and except that to people with children it seemed important to be on the Dorsets' list of worthwhile people. Nobody could really have wanted Mr. Dorset's figs either. He cultivated a dozen little bushes along the back wall of their house, covering them in the wintertime with some odd looking boxes which he had had constructed for the purpose. The bushes were very productive, but the figs they produced were dried up little things without much taste. During the summer months he and his sister went about in their car, with the side curtains still up, delivering the figs to the same customers who bought the paper flowers. The money they made could hardly have paid for the gas it took to run the car. It was a great waste and it was very foolish of them.

And yet, despite everything, this foolish pair of old people, this same Miss Louisa and Mr. Alfred Dorset, had become social arbiters of a kind in our city. They had attained this position entirely through their fondness for giving an annual dancing party for young people. To *young* people—to *very* young people—the Dorsets' hearts went out. I don't mean to suggest that

their hearts went out to orphans or to the children of the poor, for they were not foolish in that way. The guests at their little dancing parties were the thirteen- and fourteen-year-olds from families like the one they had long ago set themselves against, young people from the very houses to which, in season, they delivered their figs and their paper flowers. And when the night of one of their parties came round, it was in fact the custom for Mr. Alfred to go in the same old car and fetch all the invited guests to his house. His sister might explain to reluctant parents that this saved the children the embarrassment of being taken to their first dance by mommy and daddy. But the parents knew well enough that for twenty years the Dorsets had permitted no adult person, besides themselves, to put foot inside their house.

At those little dancing parties which the Dorsets gave, peculiar things went on—unsettling things to the boys and girls who had been fetched round in the old car. Sensible parents wished to keep their children away. Yet what could they do? For a Mero girl to have to explain, a few years later, why she never went to a party at the Dorsets' was like having to explain why she had never been a debutante. For a boy it was like having to explain why he had not gone up East to school or even why his father hadn't belonged to the Mero Racquet Club. If when you were thirteen or fourteen you got invited to the Dorsets' house, you went; it was the way of letting people know from the outset who you were. In a busy, modern city like Mero you cannot afford to let people forget who you are—not for a moment, not at any age. Even the Dorsets knew that.

Many a little girl, after one of those evenings at the Dorsets', was heard to cry out in her sleep. When waked, or half waked, her only explanation might be: "It was just the fragrance from the paper flowers." Or: "I dreamed I could really smell the paper flowers." Many a boy was observed by his parents to seem "different" afterward. He became "secretive." The parents of the generation that had to attend those parties never pretended to understand what went on at the Dorsets' house. And even to those of us who were in that unlucky generation it seemed we were half a lifetime learning what really took place during our one evening under the Dorsets' roof. Before our turn to go ever came round we had for years been hearing about what it was like from older boys and girls. Afterward, we continued to hear about it from those who followed us. And, looking back on it, nothing about the one evening when you were actually there ever seemed quite so real as the glimpses and snatches which you got from those people before and after you—the second-hand impressions of the Dorsets' behavior, of things they said, of looks that passed between them.

Since Miss Dorset kept no servants she always opened her own door. I suspect that for the guests at her parties the sight of her opening her door,

in her astonishing attire, came as the most violent shock of the whole evening. On these occasions she and her brother got themselves up as we had never seen them before and never would again. The old lady invariably wore a modish white evening gown, a garment perfectly fitted to her spare and scrawny figure and cut in such high fashion that it must necessarily have been new that year. And never to be worn but that one night! Her hair, long and thick and newly dyed for the occasion, would be swept upward and forward in a billowy mass which was topped by a corsage of yellow and coral paper flowers. Her cheeks and lips would be darkly rouged. On her long bony arms and her bare shoulders she would have applied some kind of sun-tan powder. Whatever else you had been led to expect of the evening, no one had warned you sufficiently about the radical change to be noted in her appearance—or in that of her brother, either. By the end of the party Miss Louisa might look as dowdy as ever, and Mr. Alfred a little worse than usual. But at the outset, when the party was assembling in their drawing room, even Mr. Alfred appeared resplendent in a nattily tailored tuxedo, with exactly the shirt, the collar, and the tie which fashion prescribed that year. His gray hair was nicely trimmed, his puffy old face freshly shaven. He was powdered with the same dark powder that his sister used. One felt even that his cheeks had been lightly touched with rouge.

A strange perfume pervaded the atmosphere of the house. The moment you set foot inside, this awful fragrance engulfed you. It was like a mixture of spicy incense and sweet attar of roses. And always, too, there was the profusion of paper flowers. The flowers were everywhere—on every cabinet and console, every inlaid table and carved chest, on every high, marble mantelpiece, on the book-shelves. In the entrance hall special tiers must have been set up to hold the flowers, because they were there in overpowering masses. They were in such abundance that it seemed hardly possible that Miss Dorset could have made them all. She must have spent weeks and weeks preparing them, even months, perhaps even the whole year between parties. When she went about delivering them to her customers, in the months following, they were apt to be somewhat faded and dusty; but on the night of the party the colors of the flowers seemed even more impressive and more unlikely than their number. They were fuchsia, they were chartreuse, they were coral, aquamarine, brown, they were even black.

Everywhere in the Dorsets' house too were certain curious illuminations and lighting effects. The source of the light was usually hidden and its purpose was never obvious at once. The lighting was a subtler element than either the perfume or the paper flowers, and ultimately it was more disconcerting. A shaft of lavender light would catch a young visitor's eye and lead it, seemingly without purpose, in among the flowers. Then just beyond the point where the strength of the light would begin to diminish, the eye

would discover something. In a small aperture in the mass of flowers, or sometimes in a larger grotto-like opening, there would be a piece of sculpture—in the hall a plaster replica of Rodin's *The Kiss*, in the library an antique plaque of Leda and the Swan. Or just above the flowers would be hung a picture, usually a black and white print but sometimes a reproduction in color. On the landing of the stairway leading down to the basement ballroom was the only picture that one was likely to learn the title of at the time. It was a tiny color print of Bronzino's *Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time.* This picture was not even framed. It was simply tacked on the wall, and it had obviously been torn—rather carelessly, perhaps hurriedly—from a book or magazine. The title and the name of the painter were printed in the white margin underneath.

About these works of art most of us had been warned by older boys and girls; and we stood in painful dread of that moment when Miss Dorset or her brother might catch us staring at any one of their pictures or sculptures. We had been warned, time and again, that during the course of the evening moments would come when she or he would reach out and touch the other's elbow and indicate, with a nod or just the trace of a smile, some guest whose glance had strayed among the flowers.

To some extent the dread which all of us felt of that evening at the Dorsets' cast a shadow over the whole of our childhood. Yet for nearly twenty years the Dorsets continued to give their annual party. And even the most sensible of parents were not willing to keep their children away.

But a thing happened finally which could almost have been predicted. Young people, even in West Vesey Place, will not submit forever to the prudent counsel of their parents. Or some of them won't. There was a boy named Ned Meriwether and his sister Emily Meriwether, who lived with their parents in West Vesey Place just one block away from the Dorsets' house. In November Ned and Emily were invited to the Dorsets' party, and because they dreaded it they decided to play a trick on everyone concerned —even on themselves, as it turned out. . . . They got up a plan for smuggling an uninvited guest into the Dorsets' party.

The parents of this Emily and Ned sensed that their children were concealing something from them and suspected that the two were up to mischief of some kind. But they managed to deceive themselves with the thought that it was only natural for young people—"mere children"—to be nervous about going to the Dorsets' house. And so instead of questioning them during the last hour before they left for the party, these sensible parents tried to do everything in their power to calm their two children. The boy and the girl, seeing that this was the case, took advantage of it.

"You must not go down to the front door with us when we leave," the

daughter insisted to her mother. And she persuaded both Mr. and Mrs. Meriwether that after she and her brother were dressed for the party they should all wait together in the upstairs sitting room until Mr. Dorset came to fetch the two young people in his car.

When, at eight o'clock, the lights of the automobile appeared in the street below, the brother and sister were still upstairs—watching from the bay window of the family sitting room. They kissed Mother and Daddy good-by and then they flew down the stairs and across the wide, carpeted entrance hall to a certain dark recess where a boy named Tom Bascomb was hidden. This boy was the uninvited guest whom Ned and Emily were going to smuggle into the party. They had left the front door unlatched for Tom, and from the upstairs window just a few minutes ago they had watched him come across their front lawn. Now in the little recess of the hall there was a quick exchange of overcoats and hats between Ned Meriwether and Tom Bascomb; for it was a feature of the plan that Tom should attend the party as Ned and that Ned should go as the uninvited guest.

In the darkness of the recess Ned fidgeted and dropped Tom Bascomb's coat on the floor. But the boy, Tom Bascomb, did not fidget. He stepped out into the light of the hall and began methodically getting into the overcoat which he would wear tonight. He was not a boy who lived in the West Vesey Place neighborhood (he was in fact the very boy who had once watched Miss Dorset cleaning house without any clothes on), and he did not share Emily's and Ned's nervous excitement about the evening. The sound of Mr. Dorset's footsteps outside did not disturb him. When both Ned and Emily stood frozen by that sound, he continued buttoning the unfamiliar coat and even amused himself by stretching forth one arm to observe how high the sleeve came on his wrist.

The doorbell rang, and from his dark corner Ned Meriwether whispered to his sister and to Tom: "Don't worry. I'll be at the Dorsets' in plenty of time."

Tom Bascomb only shrugged his shoulders at this reassurance. Presently when he looked at Emily's flushed face and saw her batting her eyes like a nervous monkey, a crooked smile played upon his lips. Then, at a sign from Emily, Tom followed her to the entrance door and permitted her to introduce him to old Mr. Dorset as her brother.

From the window of the upstairs sitting room the Meriwether parents watched Mr. Dorset and this boy and this girl walking across the lawn toward Mr. Dorset's peculiar looking car. A light shone bravely and protectively from above the entrance of the house, and in its rays the parents were able to detect the strange angle at which Brother was carrying his head tonight and how his new fedora already seemed too small for him. They even noticed that he seemed a bit taller tonight.

"I hope it's all right," said the mother.

"What do you mean 'all right'?" the father asked petulantly.

"I mean—" the mother began, and then she hesitated. She did not want to mention that the boy out there did not look like their own Ned. It would have seemed to give away her feelings too much. "I mean that I wonder if I should have put Sister in that long dress at this age and let her wear my cape. I'm afraid the cape is really inappropriate. She's still young for that sort of thing."

"Oh," said the father, "I thought you meant something else."

"Whatever else did you think I meant, Edwin?" the mother said, suddenly breathless.

"I thought you meant the business we've discussed before," he said although this was of course not what he had thought she meant. He had thought she meant that the boy out there did not look like their Ned. To him it had seemed even that the boy's step was different from Ned's. "The Dorsets' parties," he said, "are not very nice affairs to be sending your children off to, Muriel. That's all I thought you meant."

"But we *can't* keep them away," the mother said defensively.

"Oh, it's just that they are growing up faster than we realize," said the father, glancing at his wife out of the corner of his eye.

By this time Mr. Dorset's car had pulled out of sight, and from downstairs Muriel Meriwether thought she heard another door closing. "What was that?" she said, putting one hand on her husband's.

"Don't be so jumpy," her husband said irritably, snatching away his hand. "It's the servants closing up in the kitchen."

Both of them knew that the servants had closed up in the kitchen long before this. Both of them had heard quite distinctly the sound of the side door closing as Ned went out. But they went on talking and deceiving themselves in this fashion during most of that evening.

Even before she opened the door to Mr. Dorset, little Emily Meriwether had known that there would be no difficulty about passing Tom Bascomb off as her brother. In the first place, she knew that without his spectacles Mr. Dorset could hardly see his hand before his face and knew that due to some silly pride he had he never put on his spectacles except when he was behind the wheel of his automobile. This much was common knowledge. In the second place, Emily knew from experience that neither he nor his sister ever made any real pretense of knowing one child in their general acquaintance from another. And so, standing in the doorway and speaking almost in a whisper, Emily had merely to introduce first herself and then her pretended brother to Mr. Dorset. After that the three of them walked in silence from her father's house to the waiting car.

by Peter Taylor

Emily was wearing her mother's second best evening wrap, a white lapin cape which, on Emily, swept the ground. As she walked between the boy and the man, the touch of the cape's soft silk lining on her bare arms and on her shoulders spoke to her silently of a strange girl she had seen in her looking glass upstairs tonight. And with her every step toward the car the skirt of her long taffeta gown whispered her own name to her: *Emily . . . Emily.* She heard it distinctly, and yet the name sounded unfamiliar. Once during this unreal walk from house to car she glanced at the mysterious boy, Tom Bascomb, longing to ask him—if only with her eyes—for some reassurance that she was really she. But Tom Bascomb was absorbed in his own irrelevant observations. With his head tilted back he was gazing upward at the nondescript winter sky where, among drifting clouds, a few pale stars were shedding their dull light alike on West Vesey Place and on the rest of the world. Emily drew her wrap tightly about her, and when presently Mr. Dorset held open the door to the back seat of his car she shut her eyes and plunged into the pitch-blackness of the car's interior.

Tom Bascomb was a year older than Ned Meriwether and he was nearly two years older than Emily. He had been Ned's friend first. He and Ned had played baseball together on Saturdays before Emily ever set eyes on him. Yet according to Tom Bascomb himself, with whom several of us older boys talked just a few weeks after the night he went to the Dorsets, Emily always insisted that it was she who had known him first. On what she based this false claim Tom could not say. And on the two or three other occasions when we got Tom to talk about that night, he kept saying that he didn't understand what it was that had made Emily and Ned quarrel over which of them knew him first and knew him better.

We could have told him what it was, I think. But we didn't. It would have been too hard to say to him that at one time or another all of us in West Vesey had had our Tom Bascombs. Tom lived with his parents in an apartment house on a wide thoroughfare known as Division Boulevard, and his only real connection with West Vesey Place was that that street was included in his paper route. During the early morning hours he rode his bicycle along West Vesey and along other quiet streets like it, carefully aiming a neatly rolled paper at the dark loggia, at the colonnaded porch, or at the ornamented doorway of each of the palazzi and châteaux and manor houses that glowered at him in the dawn. He was well thought of as a paper boy. If by mistake one of his papers went astray and lit on an upstairs balcony or on the roof of a porch, Tom would always take more careful aim and throw another. Even if the paper only went into the shrubbery, Tom got off his bicycle and fished it out. He wasn't the kind of boy to whom it would have occurred that the old fogies and the rich kids in West Vesey could very well get out and scramble for their own papers.

Actually a party at the Dorsets' house was more a grand tour of the house than a real party. There was a half hour spent over very light refreshments (fruit Jell-o, English tea biscuits, lime punch). There was another half hour ostensibly given to general dancing in the basement ballroom (to the accompaniment of victrola music). But mainly there was the tour. As the party passed through the house, stopping sometimes to sit down in the principal rooms, the host and hostess provided entertainment in the form of an almost continuous dialogue between themselves. This dialogue was famous and was full of interest, being all about how much the Dorsets had given up for each other's sake and about how much higher the tone of Mero society used to be than it was nowadays. They would invariably speak of their parents, who had died within a year of each other when Miss Louisa and Mr. Alfred were still in their teens; they even spoke of their wicked in-laws. When their parents died, the wicked in-laws had first tried to make them sell the house, then had tried to separate them and send them away to boarding schools, and had ended by trying to marry them off to "just anyone." Their two grandfathers had still been alive in those days and each had had a hand in the machinations, after the failure of which each grandfather had disinherited them. Mr. Alfred and Miss Louisa spoke also of how, a few years later, a procession of "young nobodies" had come of their own accord trying to steal the two of them away from each other. Both he and she would scowl at the very recollection of those "just anybodies" and those "nobodies," those "would-be suitors" who always turned out to be misguided fortune-hunters and had to be driven away.

The Dorsets' dialogue usually began in the living room the moment Mr. Dorset returned with his last collection of guests. (He sometimes had to make five or six trips in the car.) There, as in other rooms afterward, they were likely to begin with a reference to the room itself or perhaps to some piece of furniture in the room. For instance, the extraordinary length of the drawing room—or reception room, as the Dorsets called it—would lead them to speak of an even longer room which they had had torn away from the house. "It grieved us, we wept," Miss Dorset would say, "to have Mama's French drawing room torn away from us."

"But we tore it away from ourselves," he brother would add, "as we tore away our in-laws—because we could not afford them." Both of them spoke in a fine declamatory style, but they frequently interrupted themselves with a sad little laugh which expressed something quite different from what they were saying and which seemed to serve them as an aside not meant for our ears.

"That was one of our greatest sacrifices," Miss Dorset would say, referring still to her mother's French drawing room.

And her brother would say: "But we knew the day had passed in Mero for entertainments worthy of that room."

"It was the room which Mama and Papa loved best, but we gave it up because we knew, from our upbringing, which things to give up."

From this they might go on to anecdotes about their childhood. Sometimes their parents had left them for months or even a whole year at a time with only the housekeeper or with trusted servants to see after them. "You could trust servants then," they explained. And: "In those days parents could do that sort of thing, because in those days there was a responsible body of people within which your young people could always find proper companionship."

In the library, to which the party always moved from the drawing room, Mr. Dorset was fond of exhibiting snapshots of the house taken before the south wing was pulled down. As the pictures were passed around, the dialogue continued. It was often there that they told the story of how the in-laws had tried to force them to sell the house. "For the sake of economy!" Mr. Dorset would exclaim, adding an ironic "Ha ha!"

His sister would repeat the exclamation, "For the sake of economy!" and also the ironic "Ha ha!"

"As though money——" he would begin.

"As though money ever took the place," his sister would come in, "of living with your own kind."

"Or of being well born," said Mr. Dorset.

After the billiard room, where everyone who wanted it was permitted one turn with the only cue that there seemed to be in the house, and after the dining room, where it was promised refreshments would be served later, the guests would be taken down to the ballroom—purportedly for dancing. Instead of everyone's being urged to dance, however, once they were assembled in the ballroom, Miss Dorset would announce that she and her brother understood the timidity which young people felt about dancing and that all that she and he intended to do was to set the party a good example. . . . It was only Miss Louisa and Mr. Alfred who danced. For perhaps thirty minutes, in a room without light excepting that from a few weak bulbs concealed among the flowers, the old couple danced; and they danced with such grace and there was such perfect harmony in all their movements that the guests stood about in stunned silence, as if hypnotized. The Dorsets waltzed, they two-stepped, they even fox-trotted, stopping only long enough between dances for Mr. Dorset, amid general applause, to change the victrola record.

But it was when their dance was ended that all the effects of the Dorsets' careful grooming that night would have vanished. And, alas, they made no effort to restore themselves. During the remainder of the evening Mr. Dorset

went about with his bow tie hanging limply on his damp shirt front, a gold collar button shining above it. A strand of gray hair, which normally covered his bald spot on top, now would have fallen on the wrong side of his part and hung like fringe about his ear. On his face and neck the thick layer of powder was streaked with perspiration. Miss Dorset was usually in an even more disheveled state, depending somewhat upon the fashion of her dress that year. But always her powder was streaked, her lipstick entirely gone, her hair falling down on all sides, and her corsage danging somewhere about the nape of her neck. In this condition they led the party upstairs again, not stopping until they had reached the second floor of the house.

On the second floor we—the guests—were shown the rooms which the Dorsets' parents had once occupied (the Dorsets' own rooms were never shown). We saw, in glass museum cases along the hallway, the dresses and suits and hats and even the shoes which Miss Louisa and Mr. Alfred had worn to parties when they were very young. And now the dialogue, which had been left off while the Dorsets danced, was resumed. "Ah, the happy time," one of them would say, "was when we were *your* age!" And then, exhorting us to be happy and gay while we were still safe in the bosom of our own kind and before the world came crowding in on us with its ugly demands, the Dorsets would recall the happiness they had known when they were very young. This was their *pièce de résistance*. With many a wink and blush and giggle and shake of the forefinger—and of course standing before the whole party—they each would remind the other of his or her naughty behavior in some old-fashioned parlor game or of certain silly little flirtations which they had long ago caught each other in.

They were on their way downstairs again now, and by the time they had finished with this favorite subject they would be downstairs. They would be in the dark, flower bedecked downstairs hall and just before entering the dining room for the promised refreshments: the fruit Jell-o, the English tea biscuits, the lime punch.

And now for a moment Mr. Dorset bars the way to the dining room and prevents his sister from opening the closed door. "Now, my good friends," he says, "let us eat, drink and be merry!"

"For the night is yet young," says his sister.

"Tonight you must be gay and carefree," Mr. Dorset enjoins.

"Because in this house we are all friends," Miss Dorset says. "We are all young, we all love one another."

"And love can make us all young forever," her brother says.

"Remember!"

"Remember this evening always, sweet young people!"

"Remember!"

"Remember what our life is like here!"

And now Miss Dorset, with one hand on the knob of the great door which she is about to throw open, leans a little toward the guests and whispers hoarsely: "This is what it is like to be young forever!"

Ned Meriwether was waiting behind a big japonica shrub near the sidewalk when, about twenty minutes after he had last seen Emily, the queer old touring car drew up in front of the Dorsets' house. During the interval, the car had gone from the Meriwether house to gather a number of other guests, and so it was not only Emily and Tom who alighted on the sidewalk before the Dorsets' house. The group was just large enough to make it easy for Ned to slip out from his dark hiding place and join them without being noticed by Mr. Dorset. And now the group was escorted rather unceremoniously up to the door of the house, and Mr. Dorset departed to fetch more guests.

They were received at the door by Miss Dorset. Her eyesight was no doubt better than her brother's, but still there was really no danger of her detecting an uninvited guest. Those of us who had gone to that house in the years just before Ned and Emily came along, could remember that during a whole evening, when their house was full of young people, the Dorsets made no introductions and made no effort to distinguish which of their guests was which. They did not even make a count of heads. Perhaps they did vaguely recognize some of the faces, because sometimes when they had come delivering figs or paper flowers to a house they had of necessity encountered a young child there, and always they smiled sweetly at it, asked its age, and calculated on their old fingers how many years must pass before the child would be eligible for an invitation. Yet at those moments something in the way they had held up their fingers and in the way they had gazed *at* the little face instead of into it had revealed their lack of interest in the individual child. And later when the child was finally old enough to receive their invitation he found it was still no different with the Dorsets. Even in their own house it was evidently to the young people as a group that the Dorsets' hearts went out; while they had the boys and girls under their roof they herded them about like so many little thoroughbred calves. Even when Miss Dorset opened the front door she did so exactly as though she were opening a gate. She pulled it open very slowly, standing half behind it to keep out of harm's way. And the children, all huddled together, surged in.

How meticulously this Ned and Emily Meriwether must have laid their plans for that evening! And the whole business might have come out all right if only they could have foreseen the effect which one part of their plan—rather a last minute embellishment of it—would produce upon Ned himself. Barely ten minutes after they entered the house Ned was watching

Tom as he took his seat on the piano bench beside Emily. Ned probably watched Tom closely, because certainly he knew what the next move was going to be. The moment Miss Louisa Dorset's back was turned Tom Bascomb slipped his arm gently about Emily's little waist and commenced kissing her all over her pretty face. It was almost as if he were kissing away tears.

This spectacle on the piano bench, and others like it which followed, had been an inspiration of the last day or so before the party. Or so Ned and Emily maintained afterward when defending themselves to their parents. But no matter when it was conceived, a part of their plan it was, and Ned must have believed himself fully prepared for it. Probably he expected to join in the round of giggling which it produced from the other guests. But now that the time had come—it is easy to imagine—the boy Ned Meriwether found himself not quite able to join in the fun. He watched with the others, but he was not quite infected by their laughter. He stood a little apart, and possibly he was hoping that Emily and Tom would not notice his failure to appreciate the success of their comedy. He was no doubt baffled by his own feelings, by the failure of his own enthusiasm, and by a growing desire to withdraw himself from the plot and from the party itself.

It is easy to imagine Ned's uneasiness and confusion that night. And I believe the account which I have given of Emily's impressions and her delicate little sensations while on the way to the party has the ring of truth about it, though actually the account was supplied by girls who knew her only slightly, who were not at the party, who could not possibly have seen her afterward. It may, after all, represent only what other girls imagined she would have felt. As for the account of how Mr. and Mrs. Meriwether spent the evening, it is their very own. And they did not hesitate to give it to anyone who would listen.

It was a long time, though, before many of us had a clear picture of the main events of the evening. We heard very soon that the parties for young people were to be no more, that there had been a wild scramble and chase through the Dorsets' house, and that it had ended by the Dorsets locking some boy—whether Ned or Tom was not easy to determine at first—in a queer sort of bathroom in which the plumbing had been disconnected, and even the fixtures removed, I believe. (Later I learned that there was nothing literally sinister about the bathroom itself. By having the pipes disconnected to this, and perhaps other bathrooms, the Dorsets had obtained further reductions in their taxes.) But a clear picture of the whole evening wasn't to be had—not without considerable searching. For one thing, the Meriwether parents immediately, within a week after the party, packed their son and daughter off to boarding schools. Accounts from the other children were contradictory and vague—perversely so, it seemed. Par-

ents reported to each other that the little girls had nightmares which were worse even than those which their older sisters had had. And the boys were secretive and elusive, even with us older boys when we questioned them about what had gone on.

One sketchy account of events leading up to the chase, however, did go the rounds almost at once. Ned must have written it back to some older boy in a letter, because it contained information which no one but Ned could have had. The account went like this: When Mr. Dorset returned from his last round up of guests, he came hurrying into the drawing room where the others were waiting and said in a voice trembling with excitement: "Now, let us all be seated, my young friends, and let us warm ourselves with some good talk."

At that moment everyone who was not already seated made a dash for a place on one of the divans or love seats or even in one of the broad window seats. (There were no individual chairs in the room.) Everyone made a dash, that is, except Ned. Ned did not move. He remained standing beside a little table rubbing his fingers over its polished surface. And from this moment he was clearly an object of suspicion in the eyes of his host and hostess. Soon the party moved from the drawing room to the library, but in whatever room they stopped Ned managed to isolate himself from the rest. He would sit or stand looking down at his hands until once again an explosion of giggles filled the room. Then he would look up just in time to see Tom Bascomb's cheek against Emily's or his arm about her waist.

For nearly two hours Ned didn't speak a word to anyone. He endured the Dorsets' dialogue, the paper flowers, the perfumed air, the works of art. Whenever a burst of giggling forced him to raise his eyes he would look up at Tom and Emily and then turn his eyes away. Before looking down at his hands again he would let his eyes travel slowly about the room until they came to rest on the figures of the two Dorsets. That, it seems was how he happened to discover that the Dorsets understood, or thought they understood, what the giggles meant. In the great mirror mounted over the library mantel he saw them exchanging half-suppressed smiles. Their smiles lasted precisely as long as the giggling continued, and then, in the mirror, Ned saw their faces change and grow solemn when their eyes—their identical, tiny, dull, amber-colored eyes—focussed upon himself.

From the library the party continued on the regular tour of the house. At last when they had been to the ballroom and watched the Dorsets dance, had been upstairs to gaze upon the faded party clothes in the museum cases, they descended into the downstairs hall and were just before being turned into the dining room. The guests had already heard the Dorsets teasing each other about the silly little flirtations and about their naughtiness in parlor games when they were young and had listened to their exhortations to be

gay and happy and carefree. Then just when Miss Dorset leaned toward them and whispered, "This is what it is like to be young forever," there rose a chorus of laughter, breathless and shrill, yet loud and intensely penetrating.

Ned Meriwether, standing on the bottom step of the stairway, lifted his eyes and looked over the heads of the party to see Tom and Emily half hidden in a bower of paper flowers and caught directly in a ray of mauve light. The two had squeezed themselves into a little niche there and stood squarely in front of the Rodin statuary. Tom had one arm placed about Emily's shoulders and he was kissing her lightly first on the lobe of one ear and then on the tip of her nose. Emily stood as rigid and pale as the plaster sculpture behind her and with just the faintest smile on her lips. Ned looked at the two of them and then turned his glance at once on the Dorsets.

He found Miss Louisa and Mr. Alfred gazing quite openly at Tom and Emily and frankly grinning at the spectacle. It was more than Ned could endure. "Don't you *know?*" he fairly wailed, as if in great physical pain. "Can't you *tell?* Can't you see who they *are?* They're *brother* and *sister!*"

From the other guests came one concerted gasp. And then an instant later, mistaking Ned's outcry to be something he had planned all along and probably intended—as they imagined—for the very cream of the jest, the whole company burst once again into laughter—not a chorus of laughter this time but a volley of loud guffaws from the boys, and from the girls a cacophony of separately articulated shrieks and trills.

None of the guests present that night could—or would—give a satisfactory account of what happened next. Everyone insisted that he had not even looked at the Dorsets, that he, or she, didn't know how Miss Louisa and Mr. Alfred reacted at first. Yet this was precisely what those of us who had gone there in the past *had* to know. And when finally we did manage to get an account of it, we knew that it was a very truthful and accurate one. Because we got it, of course, from Tom Bascomb.

Since Ned's outburst came after the dancing exhibition, the Dorsets were in their most dishevelled state. Miss Louisa's hair was fallen half over her face, and that long, limp strand of Mr. Alfred's was dangling about his left ear. Like that, they stood at the doorway to the dining room grinning at Tom Bascomb's antics. And when Tom Bascomb, hearing Ned's wail, whirled about, the grins were still on the Dorsets' faces even though the guffaws and the shrieks of laughter were now silenced. Tom said that for several moments they continued to wear their grins like masks and that you couldn't really tell how they were taking it at all until presently Miss Louisa's face, still wearing the grin, began turning all the queer colors of her paper flowers. Then the grin vanished from her lips and her mouth fell open and every

bit of color went out of her face. She took a step backward and leaned against the doorjamb with her mouth still open and her eyes closed. If she hadn't been on her feet, Tom said he would have thought she was dead. Her brother didn't look at her, but his own grin had vanished just as hers did, and his face, all drawn and wrinkled, momentarily turned a dull copperish green.

Presently, though, he too went white, not white in faintness but in anger. His little brown eyes now shone like rosin. And he took several steps toward Ned Meriwether. "What we know is that you are not one of us," he croaked. "We have perceived that from the beginning! We don't know how you got here or who you are. But the important question is, What are you doing here among these nice children?"

The question seemed to restore life to Miss Louisa. Her amber eyes popped wide open. She stepped away from the door and began pinning up her hair which had fallen down on her shoulders, and at the same time addressing the guests who were huddled together in the center of the hall. "Who is he, children? He is an intruder, that we know. If you know who he is, you must tell us."

"Who *am* I? Why, I am Tom Bascomb!" shouted Ned, still from the bottom step of the stairway. "I am Tom Bascomb, your paper boy!"

Then he turned and fled up the stairs toward the second floor. In a moment Mr. Dorset was after him.

To the real Tom Bascomb it had seemed that Ned honestly believed what he had been saying; and his own first impulse was to shout a denial. But being a levelheaded boy and seeing how bad things were, Tom went instead to Miss Dorset and whispered to her that Tom Bascomb was a pretty tough guy and that she had better let *him* call the police for her. She told him where the telephone was in the side hall, and he started away.

But Miss Dorset changed her mind. She ran after Tom telling him not to call. Some of the guests mistook this for the beginning of another chase. Before the old lady could overtake Tom, however, Ned himself had appeared in the doorway toward which she and Tom were moving. He had come down the back stairway and he was calling out to Emily, "We're going *home*, Sis!"

A cheer went up from the whole party. Maybe it was this that caused Ned to lose his head, or maybe it was simply the sight of Miss Dorset rushing at him that did it. At any rate, the next moment he was running up the front stairs again, this time with Miss Dorset in pursuit.

When Tom returned from the telephone, all was quiet in the hall. The guests—everybody except Emily—had moved to the foot of the stairs and they were looking up and listening. From upstairs Tom could hear Ned saying, "All right. All right. All right." The old couple had cornered him.

Emily was still standing in the little niche among the flowers. And it is the image of Emily Meriwether standing among the paper flowers that tantalizes me whenever I think or hear someone speak of that evening. That, more than anything else, can make me wish that I had been there. I shall never cease to wonder what kind of thoughts were in her head to make her seem so oblivious to all that was going on while she stood there, and, for that matter, what had been in her mind all evening while she endured Tom Bascomb's caresses. When, in years since, I have had reason to wonder what some girl or woman is thinking—some Emily grown older—my mind nearly always returns to the image of that girl among the paper flowers. Tom said that when he returned from the telephone she looked very solemn and pale still but that her mind didn't seem to be on any of the present excitement. Immediately he went to her and said, "Your dad is on his way over, Emily." For it was the Meriwether parents he had telephoned, of course, and not the police.

It seemed to Tom that so far as he was concerned the party was now over. There was nothing more he could do. Mr. Dorset was upstairs guarding the door to the strange little room in which Ned was locked up. Miss Dorset was serving lime punch to the other guests in the dining room, all the while listening with one ear for the arrival of the police whom Tom pretended he had called. When the doorbell finally rang and Miss Dorset hurried to answer it, Tom slipped quietly out through the pantry and through the kitchen and left the house by the back door as the Meriwether parents entered by the front.

There was no difficulty in getting Edwin and Muriel Meriwether, the children's parents, to talk about what happened after they arrived that night. Both of them were sensible and clearheaded people, and they were not so conservative as some of our other neighbors in West Vesey. Being fond of gossip of any kind and fond of reasonably funny stories on themselves, they told how their children had deceived them earlier in the evening and how they had deceived themselves later. They tended to blame themselves more than the children for what had happened. They tried to protect the children from any harm or embarrassment that might result from it by sending them off to boarding school. In their talk they never referred directly to Tom's reprehensible conduct or to the possible motives that the children might have had for getting up their plan. They tried to spare their children and they tried to spare Tom, but fortunately it didn't occur to them to try to spare the poor old Dorsets.

When Miss Louisa opened the door, Mr. Meriwether said, "I'm Edwin Meriwether, Miss Dorset. I've come for my son, Ned."

"And for your daughter Emily, I hope," his wife whispered to him.

"And for my daughter Emily."

Before Miss Dorset could answer him Edwin Meriwether spied Mr. Dorset descending the stairs. With his wife, Muriel, sticking close to his side Edwin now strode over to the foot of the stairs. "Mr. Dorset," he began, "my son Ned——"

From behind them, Edwin and Muriel now heard Miss Dorset saying, "All the invited guests are gathered in the dining room." From where they were standing the two parents could see into the dining room. Suddenly they turned and hurried in there. Mr. Dorset and his sister of course followed them.

Muriel Meriwether went directly to Emily, who was standing in a group of girls. "Emily, where is your brother?"

Emily said nothing, but one of the boys answered: "I think they've got him locked up upstairs somewhere."

"Oh, no!" said Miss Louisa, a hairpin in her mouth—for she was still rather absent-mindedly working at her hair. "It is an intruder that my brother has upstairs."

Mr. Dorset began speaking in a confidential tone to Edwin. "My dear neighbor," he said, "our paper boy saw fit to intrude himself upon our company tonight. But we recognized him as an outsider from the start."

Muriel Meriwether asked: "Where *is* the paper boy? Where is the paper boy, Emily?"

Again one of the boys volunteered: "He went out through the back door, Mrs. Meriwether."

The eyes of Mr. Alfred and Miss Louisa searched the room for Tom. Finally their eyes met and they smiled coyly. "*All* the children are being mischievous tonight," said Miss Louisa, and it was quite as though she had said, "all *we* children." Then, still smiling, she said, "Your tie has come undone, Brother. Mr. and Mrs. Meriwether will hardly know what to think."

Mr. Alfred fumbled for a moment with his tie but soon gave it up. Now with a bashful glance at the Meriwether parents, and giving a nod in the direction of the children, he actually said, "I'm afraid we've all decided to play a trick on Mr. and Mrs. Meriwether."

Miss Louisa said to Emily: "We've hidden our brother somewhere, haven't we?"

Emily's mother said firmly: "Emily, tell me where Ned is."

"He's upstairs, Mother," said Emily in a whisper.

Emily's father said: "I wish you to take me to the boy upstairs, Mr. Dorset."

The coy, bashful expressions vanished from the two Dorsets' faces. Their eyes were little dark pools of incredulity, growing narrower by the second. And both of them were now trying to put their hair in order. "Why, *we*

know nice children when we see them," Miss Louisa said peevishly. There was a pleading quality in her voice, too. "We knew from the beginning that that boy upstairs didn't belong amongst us," she said. "Dear neighbors, it isn't just the money, you know." All at once she sounded like a little girl about to burst into tears.

"It isn't just the money?" Edwin Meriwether repeated.

"Miss Dorsett," said Muriel with new gentleness in her tone, as though she had just sensed that she was talking to a little girl, "there has been some kind of mistake—a misunderstanding."

Mr. Alfred Dorset said: "Oh, we wouldn't make a mistake of that kind! People *are* different. It isn't something you can put your finger on, but it isn't the money."

"I don't know what you're talking about," Edwin said, exasperated. "But I'm going upstairs to find that boy." He left the room with Mr. Dorset following him with quick little steps—steps like those of a small boy trying to keep up with a man.

Miss Louisa now sat down in one of the high-backed dining chairs which were lined up along the oak wainscot. She was trembling, and Muriel came and stood beside her. Neither of them spoke, and in almost no time Edwin Meriwether came downstairs again with Ned. Miss Louisa looked at Ned, and tears came into her eyes. "Where is my brother?" she asked accusingly, as though she thought possibly Ned and his father had locked Mr. Dorset in the bathroom.

"I believe he has retired," said Edwin. "He left us and disappeared into one of the rooms upstairs."

"Then I must go up to him," said Miss Louisa. For a moment she seemed unable to rise. At last she pushed herself up from the chair and walked from the room with the slow, steady gait of a somnambulist. Muriel Meriwether followed her into the hall and as she watched the old woman ascending the steps, leaning heavily on the rail, her impulse was to go and offer to assist her. But something made her turn back into the dining room. Perhaps she imagined that her daughter, Emily, might need her now.

The Dorsets did not reappear that night. After Miss Louisa went upstairs, Muriel promptly got on the telephone and called the parents of some of the other boys and girls. Within a quarter of an hour a dozen parents had arrived. It was the first time in many years that any adult had set foot inside the Dorset house. It was the first time that any parent had ever inhaled the perfumed air or seen the masses of paper flowers and the illuminations and the statuary. In the guise of holding consultations over whether or not they should put out the lights and lock up the house the parents lingered much longer than was necessary before taking the young people home. Some of them even tasted the lime punch. But in the presence of their children they

made no comment on what had happened and gave no indication of what their own impressions were—not even their impressions of the punch. At last it was decided that two of the men should see to putting out the lights everywhere on the first floor and down in the ballroom. They were a long time in finding the switches for the indirect lighting. In most cases they simply resorted to unscrewing the bulbs. Meanwhile the children went to the large cloak closet behind the stairway and got their wraps. When Ned and Emily Meriwether rejoined their parents at the front door to leave the house, Ned was wearing his own overcoat and held his own fedora in his hand.

Miss Louisa and Mr. Alfred Dorset lived on for nearly ten years after that night, but they gave up selling their figs and paper flowers and of course they never entertained young people again. I often wonder if growing up in Mero can ever have seemed quite the same since. Some of the terror must have gone out of it. Half the dread of coming of age must have vanished with the dread of the Dorsets' parties.

After that night, their old car would sometimes be observed creeping about town, but it was never parked in front of their house any more. It stood usually at the side entrance where the Dorsets could climb in and out of it without being seen. They began keeping a servant too—mainly to run their errands for them, I imagine. Sometimes it would be a man, sometimes a woman, never the same one for more than a few months at a time. Both of the Dorsets died during the Second World War while many of us who had gone to their parties were away from Mero. But the story went round—and I am inclined to believe it—that after they were dead and the house was sold, Tom Bascomb's coat and hat were found still hanging in the cloak closet behind the stairs.

Tom himself was a pilot in the war and was a considerable hero. He was such a success and made such a name for himself that he never came back to Mero to live. He found bigger opportunities elsewhere I suppose, and I don't suppose he ever felt the ties to Mero that people with Ned's kind of upbringing do. Ned was in the war too, of course. He was in the Navy and after the war he did return to Mero to live, though actually it was not until then that he had spent much time here since his parents bundled him off to boarding school. Emily came home and made her debut just two or three years before the war, but she was already engaged to some boy in the East; she never comes back any more except to bring her children to see their grandparents for a few days during Christmas or at Easter.

I understand that Emily and Ned are pretty indifferent to each other's existence nowadays. I have been told this by Ned Meriwether's own wife. Ned's wife maintains that the night Ned and Emily went to the Dorsets'

party marked the beginning of this indifference, that it marked the end of their childhood intimacy and the beginning of a shyness, a reserve, even an animosity between them that was destined to be a sorrow forever to the two sensible parents who had sat in the upstairs sitting room that night waiting until the telephone call came from Tom Bascomb.

Ned's wife is a girl he met while he was in the Navy. She was a Wave, and her background isn't the same as his. Apparently she isn't too happy with life in what she refers to as "Mero proper." She and Ned have recently moved out into a suburban development, which she doesn't like either and which she refers to as "greater Mero." She asked me at a party one night how Mero ever got its absurd name, and when I told her that it was named for the last Spanish governor of Louisiana she burst out laughing. I don't know why exactly. But what interests me most about her is that after a few drinks she likes to talk about Ned and Emily and Tom Bascomb and the Dorsets. Tom Bascomb has become a kind of hero—and I don't mean a wartime hero—in her eyes, though of course not having grown up in Mero she has never seen him in her life. But she is a clever girl, and there are times when she will say to me, "Tell me about Mero. Tell me about the Dorsets." And I try to tell her. I tell her to remember that Mero looks upon itself as a rather old city. I tell her to remember that it was one of the first English-speaking settlements west of the Alleghenies and that by the end of the American Revolution, when veterans began pouring westward over the Wilderness Road or down the Ohio River, Mero was often referred to as a thriving village. Then she tells me that I am being dull, because it is hard for her to concentrate on any aspect of the story that doesn't center around Tom Bascomb and that night at the Dorsets'.

But I make her listen. Or at least one time I did. The Dorset family, I insisted on saying, was in Mero even in those earliest times right after the Revolution, but they had come here under somewhat different circumstances from those of the other early settlers. How could that really matter, Ned's wife asked, after a hundred and fifty years? How could distinctions between the first settlers matter after the Irish had come to Mero, after the Germans, after the Italians? Well, in West Vesey Place it could matter. It had to. If the distinction was false, it mattered all the more and it was all the more necessary to make it.

But let me inject here that Mero is located in a state about whose history most Mero citizens—not newcomers like Ned's wife, but old timers—have little interest and less knowledge. Most of us, for instance, are never even quite sure whether during the 1860s our state did secede or didn't secede. As for the city itself, some of us hold that it is geographically Northern and culturally Southern. Others say the reverse is true. We are all apt to want to feel misplaced in Mero, and so we are not content merely to say that it is

a border city. How you stand on this important question is apt to depend entirely on whether your family is one of those with a good Southern name or one that had its origin in New England, because those are the two main categories of old society families in Mero.

But truly—I told Ned's wife—the Dorset family was never in either of those categories. The first Dorset had come, with his family and his possessions and even a little capital, direct from a city in the English Midlands to Mero. The Dorsets came not as pioneers but paying their way all the way. They had not bothered to stop for a generation or two to put down roots in Pennsylvania or Virginia or Massachusetts. And this was the distinction which some people wished always to make. Apparently those early Dorsets had cared no more for putting down roots in the soil of the New World than they had cared for whatever they had left behind in the Old. They were an obscure mercantile family who came to invest in a new Western city. Within two generations the business—no, the industry!—which they established made them rich beyond any dreams they could have had in the beginning. For half a century they were looked upon, if any family ever was, as our first family.

And then the Dorsets left Mero—practically all of them except the one old bachelor and the one old maid—left it just as they had come, not caring much about what they were leaving or where they were going. They were city people, and they were Americans. They knew that what they had in Mero they could buy more of in other places. For them Mero was an investment that had paid off. They went to live in Santa Barbara and Laguna Beach, in Newport and on Long Island. And the truth which it was so hard for the rest of us to admit was that, despite our family memories of Massachusetts and Virginia, we were all more like the Dorsets—those Dorsets who left Mero—than we were *un*like them. Their spirit was just a little closer to being the very essence of Mero than ours was. The obvious difference was that we had to stay on here and pretend that our life had a meaning which it did not. And if it was only by a sort of chance that Miss Louisa and Mr. Alfred played the role of social arbiters among the young people for a number of years, still no one could honestly question their divine right to do so.

"It may have been their right," Ned's wife said at this point, "but just think what might have happened."

"It's not a matter of what might have happened," I said. "It is a matter of what did happen. Otherwise, what have you and I been talking about?"

"Otherwise," she said with an irrepressible shudder, "I would not be forever getting you off in a corner at these parties to talk about my husband and my husband's sister and how it is they care so little for each other's company nowadays."

And I could think of nothing to say to that except that probably we had now pretty well exhausted our subject.

1960: *from The Hudson Review*

THE LEDGE

by Lawrence Sargent Hall, who was born in Haverhill, Massachusetts, in 1915. After receiving his B.A. from Bowdoin College and his Ph.D. from Yale, Mr. Hall served in the Navy. In addition to being professor of English at Bowdoin, he is the owner and operator of a boatyard at Orr's Island, Maine. Mr. Hall is the author of Hawthorne: Critic of Society *and the novel,* Stowaway.

On Christmas morning before sunup the fisherman embraced his warm wife and left his close bed. She did not want him to go. It was Christmas morning. He was a big, raw man, with too much strength, whose delight in winter was to hunt the sea ducks that flew in to feed by the outer ledges, bare at low tide.

As his bare feet touched the cold floor and the frosty air struck his nude flesh, he might have changed his mind in the dark of this special day. It was a home day, which made it seem natural to think of the outer ledges merely as some place he had shot ducks in the past. But he had promised his son, thirteen, and his nephew, fifteen, who came from inland. That was why he had given them his present of an automatic shotgun each the night before, on Christmas Eve. Rough man though he was known to be, and no spoiler of boys, he kept his promises when he understood what they meant. And to the boys, as to him, home meant where you came for rest after you had your Christmas fill of action and excitement.

His legs astride, his arms raised, the fisherman stretched as high as he could in the dim privacy of his bedroom. Above the snug murmur of his wife's protest he heard the wind in the pines and knew it was easterly as the boys had hoped and he had surmised the night before. Conditions would be ideal, and when they were, anybody ought to take advantage of them. The birds would be flying. The boys would get a man's sport their first time outside on the ledges.

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by Lawrence Sargent Hall

His son at thirteen, small but steady and experienced, was fierce to grow up in hunting, to graduate from sheltered waters and the blinds along the shores of the inner bay. His nephew at fifteen, an overgrown farm boy, had a farm boy's love of the sea, though he could not swim a stroke and was often sick in choppy weather. That was the reason his father, the fisherman's brother, was a farmer and chose to sleep in on the holiday morning at his brother's house. Many of the ones the farmer had grown up with were regularly seasick and could not swim, but they were unafraid of the water. They could not have dreamed of being anything but fishermen. The fisherman himself could swim like a seal and was never sick, and he would sooner die than be anything else.

He dressed in the cold and dark, and woke the boys gruffly. They tumbled out of bed, their instincts instantly awake while their thoughts still fumbled slumbrously. The fisherman's wife in the adjacent bedroom heard them apparently trying to find their clothes, mumbling sleepily and happily to each other, while her husband went down to the hot kitchen to fry eggs—sunny-side up, she knew, because that was how they all liked them.

Always in winter she hated to have them go outside, the weather was so treacherous and there were so few others out in case of trouble. To the fisherman these were no more than woman's fears, to be taken for granted and laughed off. When they were first married they fought miserably every fall because she was after him constantly to put his boat up until spring. The fishing was all outside in winter, and though prices were high the storms made the rate of attrition high on gear. Nevertheless he did well. So she could do nothing with him.

People thought him a hard man, and gave him the reputation of being all out for himself because he was inclined to brag and be disdainful. If it was true, and his own brother was one of those who strongly felt it was, they lived better than others, and his brother had small right to criticize. There had been times when in her loneliness she had yearned to leave him for another man. But it would have been dangerous. So over the years she had learned to shut her mind to his hard-driving, and take what comfort she might from his unsympathetic competence. Only once or twice, perhaps, had she gone so far as to dwell guiltily on what it would be like to be a widow.

The thought that her boy, possibly because he was small, would not be insensitive like his father, and the rattle of dishes and small of frying bacon downstairs in the kitchen shut off from the rest of the chilly house, restored the cozy feeling she had had before she was alone in bed. She heard them after a long while go out and shut the back door.

Under her window she heard the snow grind drily beneath their boots, and her husband's sharp, exasperated commands to the boys. She shivered slightly

in the envelope of her own warmth. She listened to the noise of her son and nephew talking elatedly. Twice she caught the glimmer of their lights on the white ceiling above the window as they went down the path to the shore. There would be frost on the skiff and freezing suds at the water's edge. She herself used to go gunning when she was younger; now, it seemed to her, anyone going out like that on Christmas morning had to be incurably male. They would none of them think about her until they returned and piled the birds they had shot on top of the sink for her to dress.

Ripping into the quiet pre-dawn cold she heard the hot snarl of the outboard taking them out to the boat. It died as abruptly as it had burst into life. Two or three or four or five minutes later the big engine broke into a warm reassuring roar. He had the best of equipment, and he kept it in the best of condition. She closed her eyes. It would not be too long before the others would be up for Christmas. The summer drone of the exhaust deepened. Then gradually it faded in the wind until it was lost at sea, or she slept.

The engine had started immediately in spite of the temperature. This put the fisherman in a good mood. He was proud of his boat. Together he and the two boys heaved the skiff and outboard onto the stern and secured it athwartships. His son went forward along the deck, iridescent in the ray of the light the nephew shone through the windshield, and cast the mooring pennant loose into darkness. The fisherman swung to starboard, glanced at his compass, and headed seaward down the obscure bay.

There would be just enough visibility by the time they reached the headland to navigate the crooked channel between the islands. It was the only nasty stretch of water. The fisherman had done it often in fog or at night—he always swore he could go anywhere in the bay blindfolded—but there was no sense in taking chances if you didn't have to. From the mouth of the channel he could lay a straight course for Brown Cow Island, anchor the boat out of sight behind it, and from the skiff set their tollers off Devil's Hump three hundred yards to seaward. By then the tide would be clearing the ledge and they could land and be ready to shoot around half-tide.

It was early, it was Christmas, and it was farther out than most hunters cared to go in this season of the closing year, so that he felt sure no one would be taking possession ahead of them. He had shot thousands of ducks there in his day. The Hump was by far the best hunting. Only thing was you had to plan for the right conditions because you didn't have too much time. About four hours was all, and you had to get it before three in the afternoon when the birds left and went out to sea ahead of nightfall.

They had it figured exactly right for today. The ledge would not be going until until after the gunning was over, and they would be home for supper in good season. With a little luck the boys would have a skiff-load of birds to

show for their first time outside. Well beyond the legal limit, which was no matter. You took what you could get in this life, or the next man made out and you didn't.

The fisherman had never failed to make out gunning from Devil's Hump. And this trip, he had a hunch, would be above ordinary. The easterly wind would come up just stiff enough, the tide was right, and it was going to storm by tomorrow morning so the birds would be moving. Things were perfect.

The old fierceness was in his bones. Keeping a weather eye to the murk out front and a hand on the wheel, he reached over and cuffed both boys playfully as they stood together close to the heat of the exhaust pipe running up through the center of the house. They poked back at him and shouted above the drumming engine, making bets as they always did on who would shoot the most birds. This trip they had the thrill of new guns, the best money could buy, and a man's hunting ground. The black retriever wagged at them and barked. He was too old and arthritic to be allowed in December water, but he was jaunty anyway at being brought along.

Groping in his pocket for his pipe the fisherman suddenly had his high spirits rocked by the discovery that he had left his tobacco at home. He swore. Anticipation of a day out with nothing to smoke made him incredulous. He searched his clothes, and then he searched them again, unable to believe the tobacco was not somewhere. When the boys inquired what was wrong he spoke angrily to them, blaming them for being in some devious way at fault. They were instantly crestfallen and willing to put back after the tobacco, though they could appreciate what it meant only through his irritation. But he bitterly refused. That would throw everything out of phase. He was a man who did things the way he set out to do.

He clamped his pipe between his teeth, and twice more during the next few minutes he ransacked his clothes in disbelief. He was no stoic. For one relaxed moment he considered putting about and gunning somewhere nearer home. Instead he held his course and sucked the empty pipe, consoling himself with the reflection that at least he had whiskey enough if it got too uncomfortable on the ledge. Peremptorily he made the boys check to make certain the bottle was really in the knapsack with the lunches where he thought he had taken care to put it. When they reassured him he despised his fate a little less.

The fisherman's judgment was as usual accurate. By the time they were abreast of the headland there was sufficient light so that he could wind his way among the reefs without slackening speed. At last he turned his bows toward open ocean, and as the winter dawn filtered upward through long layers of smoky cloud on the eastern rim his spirits rose again with it.

He opened the throttle; steadied on his course, and settled down to the two hour run. The wind was stronger but seemed less cold coming from

the sea. The boys had withdrawn from the fisherman and were talking together while they watched the sky through the windows. The boat churned solidly through a light chop, flinging spray off her flaring bows. Astern the headland thinned rapidly till it lay like a blackened sill on the grey water. No other boats were abroad.

The boys fondled their new guns, sighted along the barrels, worked the mechanisms, compared notes, boasted, and gave each other contradictory advice. The fisherman got their attention once and pointed at the horizon. They peered through the windows and saw what looked like a black scum floating on top of gently agitated water. It wheeled and tilted, rippled, curled, then rose, strung itself out and became a huge raft of ducks escaping over the sea. A good sign.

The boys rushed out and leaned over the washboards in the wind and spray to see the flock curl below the horizon. Then they went and hovered around the hot engine, bewailing their lot. If only they had been already set out and waiting. Maybe these ducks would be crazy enough to return later and be slaughtered. Ducks were known to be foolish.

In due course and right on schedule they anchored at mid-morning in the lee of Brown Cow Island. They put the skiff overboard and loaded it with guns, knapsacks, and tollers. The boys showed their eagerness by being clumsy. The fisherman showed his in bad temper and abuse which they silently accepted in the absorbed tolerance of being boys. No doubt they laid it to lack of tobacco.

By outboard they rounded the island and pointed due east in the direction of a ridge of foam which could be seen whitening the surface three hundred yards away. They set the decoys in a broad, straddling vee opening wide into the ocean. The fisherman warned them not to get their hands wet, and when they did he made them carry on with red and painful fingers, in order to teach them. Once the last toller was bobbing among his fellows, brisk and alluring, they got their numbed fingers inside their oilskins and hugged their warm crotches. In the meantime the fisherman had turned the skiff toward the patch of foam where as if by magic, like a black glossy rib of earth, the ledge had broken through the belly of the sea.

Carefully they inhabited their slippery nub of the North American continent, while the unresting Atlantic swelled and swirled as it had for eons round the indomitable edges. They hauled the skiff after them, established themselves as comfortably as they could in a shallow sump on top, lay on their sides a foot or so above the water, and waited, guns in hand.

In time the fisherman took a thermos bottle from the knapsack and they drank steaming coffee, and waited for the nodding decoys to lure in the first flight to the rock. Eventually the boys got hungry and restless. The fisherman let them open the picnic lunch and eat one sandwich apiece, which they

both shared with the dog. Having no tobacco the fisherman himself would not eat.

Actually the day was relatively mild, and they were warm enough at present in their woollen clothes and socks underneath oilskins and hip boots. After a while, however, the boys began to feel cramped. Their nerves were agonized by inactivity. The nephew complained and was severely told by the fisherman—who pointed to the dog, crouched unmoving except for his white-rimmed eyes—that part of doing a man's hunting was learning how to wait. But he was beginning to have misgivings of his own. This could be one of those days where all the right conditions masked an incalculable flaw.

If the fisherman had been alone, as he often was, stopping off when the necessary coincidence of tide and time occurred on his way home from hauling trawls, and had plenty of tobacco, he would not have fidgeted. The boys' being nervous made him nervous. He growled at them again. When it came it was likely to come all at once, and then in a few moments be over. He warned them not to slack off, never to slack off, to be always ready. Under his rebuke they kept their tortured peace, though they could not help shifting and twisting until he lost what patience he had left and bullied them into lying still. A duck could see an eyelid twitch. If the dog could go without moving so could they.

"Here it comes!" the fisherman said tersely at last.

The boys quivered with quick relief. The flock came in downwind, quartering slightly, myriad, black, and swift.

"Beautiful—" breathed the fisherman's son.

"All right," said the fisherman, intense and precise. "Aim at singles in the thickest part of the flock. Wait for me to fire and then don't stop shooting till your gun's empty." He rolled up onto his left elbow and spread his legs to brace himself. The flock bore down, arrowy and vibrant, then a hundred yards beyond the decoys it veered off.

"They're going away!" the boys cried, sighting in.

"Not yet!" snapped the fisherman. "They're coming round."

The flock changed shape, folded over itself, and drove into the wind in a tight arc. "Thousands—" the boys hissed through their teeth. All at once a whistling storm of black and white broke over the decoys.

"Now!" the fisherman shouted. "Perfect!" And he opened fire at the flock just as it hung suspended in momentary chaos above the tollers. The three pulled at their triggers and the birds splashed into the water, until the last report went off unheard, the last smoking shell flew unheeded over their shoulders, and the last of the routed flock scattered diminishing, diminishing, diminishing in every direction.

Exultantly the boys dropped their guns, jumped up and scrambled for the skiff.

"I'll handle that skiff!" the fisherman shouted at them. They stopped. Gripping the painter and balancing himself he eased the skiff into the water stern first and held the bow hard against the side of the rock shelf the skiff had rested on. "You stay here," he said to his nephew. "No sense in all three of us going into the boat."

The boy on the reef gazed at the grey water rising and falling hypnotically along the glistening edge. It had dropped about a foot since their arrival. "I want to go with you," he said in a sullen tone, his eyes on the streaming eddies.

"You want to do what I tell you if you want to gun with me," answered the fisherman harshly. The boy couldn't swim, and he wasn't going to have him climbing in and out of the skiff any more than necessary. Besides he was too big.

The fisherman took his son in the skiff and cruised round and round among the decoys picking up dead birds. Meanwhile the other boy stared unmoving after them from the highest part of the ledge. Before they had quite finished gathering the dead birds, the fisherman cut the outboard and dropped to his knees in the skiff. "Down!" he yelled. "Get down!" About a dozen birds came tolling in. "Shoot—shoot!" his son hollered from the bottom of the boat to the boy on the ledge.

The dog, who had been running back and forth whining, sank to his belly, his muzzle on his forepaws. But the boy on the ledge never stirred. The ducks took late alarm at the skiff, swerved aside and into the air, passing with a whirr no more than fifty feet over the head of the boy, who remained on the ledge like a statue, without his gun, watching the two crouching in the boat.

The fisherman's son climbed onto the ledge and held the painter. The bottom of the skiff was covered with feathery black and white bodies with feet upturned and necks lolling. He was jubilant. "We got twenty-seven!" he told his cousin. "How's that? Nine apiece. Boy—" he added, "what a cool Christmas!"

The fisherman pulled the skiff onto its shelf and all three went and lay down again in anticipation of the next flight. The son, reloading, patted his shotgun affectionately. "I'm going to get me ten next time," he said. Then he asked his cousin, "Whatsamatter—didn't you see the strays?"

"Yeah," the boy said.

"How come you didn't shoot at 'em?"

"Didn't feel like it," replied the boy, still with a trace of sullenness.

"You stupid or something?" The fisherman's son was astounded. "What a highlander!" But the fisherman, though he said nothing, knew that the older boy had had an attack of ledge fever.

"Cripes!" his son kept at it. "I'd at least of tried."

"Shut up," the fisherman finally told him, "and leave him be."

At slack water three more flocks came in, one right after the other, and when it was over, the skiff was half full of clean, dead birds. During the subsequent lull they broke out the lunch and ate it all and finished the hot coffee. For a while the fisherman sucked away on his cold pipe. Then he had himself a swig of whiskey.

The boys passed the time contentedly jabbering about who shot the most —there were ninety-two all told—which of their friends they would show the biggest ones to, how many each could eat at a meal provided they didn't have to eat any vegetables. Now and then they heard sporadic distant gunfire on the mainland, at its nearest point about two miles to the north. Once far off they saw a fishing boat making in the direction of home.

At length the fisherman got a hand inside his oilskins and produced his watch.

"Do we have to go now?" asked his son.

"Not just yet," he replied. "Pretty soon." Everything had been perfect. As good as he had ever had it. Because he was getting tired of the boys' chatter he got up, heavily in his hip boots, and stretched. The tide had turned and was coming in, the sky was more ashen, and the wind had freshened enough so that whitecaps were beginning to blossom. It would be a good hour before they had to leave the ledge and pick up the tollers. However, he guessed they would leave a little early. On account of the rising wind he doubted there would be much more shooting. He stepped carefully along the back of the ledge, to work his kinks out. It was also getting a little colder.

The whiskey had begun to warm him, but he was unprepared for the sudden blaze that flashed upward inside him from belly to head. He was standing looking at the shelf where the skiff was. Only the foolish skiff was not there!

For a second time that day the fisherman felt the deep vacuity of disbelief. He gaped, seeing nothing but the flat shelf of rock. He whirled, started toward the boys, slipped, recovered himself, fetched a complete circle, and stared at the unimaginably empty shelf. Its emptiness made him feel as if everything he had done that day so far he had dreamed. What could have happened? The tide was still nearly a foot below. There had been no sea to speak of. The skiff could hardly have slid off by itself. For the life of him, consciously careful as he inveterately was, he could not now remember hauling it up the last time. Perhaps in the heat of hunting, he had left it to the boy. Perhaps he could not remember which was the last time.

"Christ—" he exclaimed loudly, without realizing it because he was so entranced by the invisible event.

"What's wrong, Dad?" asked his son, getting to his feet.

The fisherman went blind with uncontainable rage. "Get back down there where you belong!" he screamed. He scarcely noticed the boy sink back in amazement. In a frenzy he ran along the ledge thinking the skiff might have been drawn up at another place, though he knew better. There was no other place.

He stumbled, half falling, back to the boys who were gawking at him in consternation, as though he had gone insane. "God damn it!" he yelled savagely, grabbing both of them and yanking them to their knees. "Get on your feet!"

"What's wrong?" his son repeated in a stifled voice.

"Never mind what's wrong," he snarled. "Look for the skiff—it's adrift!" When they peered around he gripped their shoulders, brutally facing them about. "Down wind—" He slammed his fist against his thigh. "Jesus!" he cried, struck to madness at their stupidity.

At last he sighted the skiff himself, magically bobbing along the grim sea like a toller, a quarter of a mile to leeward on a direct course for home. The impulse to strip himself naked was succeeded instantly by a queer calm. He simply sat down on the ledge and forgot everything except the marvellous mystery.

As his awareness partially returned he glanced toward the boys. They were still observing the skiff speechlessly. Then he was gazing into the clear young eyes of his son.

"Dad," asked the boy steadily, "what do we do now?"

That brought the fisherman upright. "The first thing we have to do," he heard himself saying with infinite tenderness as if he were making love, "is think."

"Could you swim it?" asked his son.

He shook his head and smiled at them. They smiled quickly back, too quickly. "A hundred yards maybe, in this water. I wish I could," he added. It was the most intimate and pitiful thing he had ever said. He walked in circles round them, trying to break the stall his mind was left in.

He gauged the level of the water. To the eye it was quite stationary, six inches from the shelf at this second. The fisherman did not have to mark it on the side of the rock against the passing of time to prove to his reason that it was rising, always rising. Already it was over the brink of reason, beyond the margins of thought—a senseless measurement. No sense to it.

All his life the fisherman had tried to lick the element of time, by getting up earlier and going to bed later, owning a faster boat, planning more than the day would hold, and tackling just one other job before the deadline fell. If, as on rare occasions he had the grand illusion, he ever really had beaten the game, he would need to call on all his reserves of practice and cunning now.

by Lawrence Sargent Hall

He sized up the scant but unforgivable three hundred yards to Brown Cow Island. Another hundred yards behind it his boat rode at anchor, where, had he been aboard, he could have cut in a fathometer to plumb the profound and occult seas, or a ship-to-shore radio on which in an interminably short time he would have heard his wife's voice talking to him over the air about homecoming.

"Couldn't we wave something so somebody would see us?" his nephew suggested.

The fisherman spun round. "Load your guns!" he ordered. They loaded as if the air had suddenly gone frantic with birds. "I'll fire once and count to five. Then you fire. Count to five. That way they won't just think it's only somebody gunning ducks. We'll keep doing that."

"We've only got just two-and-a-half boxes left," said his son.

The fisherman nodded, understanding that from beginning to end their situation was purely mathematical, like the ticking of the alarm clock in his silent bedroom. Then he fired. The dog, who had been keeping watch over the decoys, leaped forward and yelped in confusion. They all counted off, fired the first five rounds by threes, and reloaded. The fisherman scanned first the horizon, then the contracting borders of the ledge, which was the sole place the water appeared to be climbing. Soon it would be over the shelf.

They counted off and fired the second five rounds. "We'll hold off a while on the last one," the fisherman told the boys. He sat down and pondered what a trivial thing was a skiff. This one he and the boy had knocked together in a day. Was a gun, manufactured for killing.

His son tallied up the remaining shells, grouping them symmetrically in threes on the rock when the wet box fell apart. "Two short," he announced. They reloaded and laid the guns on their knees.

Behind thickening clouds they could not see the sun going down. The water, coming up, was growing blacker. The fisherman thought he might have told his wife they would be home before dark since it was Christmas day. He realized he had forgotten about its being any particular day. The tide would not be high until two hours after sunset. When they did not get in by nightfall, and could not be raised by radio, she might send somebody to hunt for them right away. He rejected this arithmetic immediately, with a sickening shock, recollecting it was a two-and-a-half hour run at best. Then it occurred to him that she might send somebody on the mainland who was nearer. She would think he had engine trouble.

He rose and searched the shoreline, barely visible. Then his glance dropped to the toy shoreline at the edges of the reef. The shrinking ledge, so sinister from a boat, grew dearer minute by minute as though the whole wide world

he gazed on from horizon to horizon balanced on its contracting rim. He checked the water level and found the shelf awash.

Some of what went through his mind the fisherman told to the boys. They accepted it without comment. If he caught their eyes they looked away to spare him or because they were not yet old enough to face what they saw. Mostly they watched the rising water. The fisherman was unable to initiate a word of encouragement. He wanted one of them to ask him whether somebody would reach them ahead of the tide. He would have found it possible to say yes. But they did not inquire.

The fisherman was not sure how much, at their age, they were able to imagine. Both of them had seen from the docks drowned bodies put ashore out of boats. Sometimes they grasped things, and sometimes not. He supposed they might be longing for the comfort of their mothers, and was astonished, as much as he was capable of any astonishment except the supreme one, to discover himself wishing he had not left his wife's dark, close, naked bed that morning.

"Is it time to shoot now?" asked his nephew.

"Pretty soon," he said, as if he were putting off making good on a promise. "Not yet."

His own boy cried softly for a brief moment, like a man, his face averted in an effort neither to give or show pain.

"Before school starts," the fisherman said, wonderfully detached, "we'll go to town and I'll buy you boys anything you want."

With great difficulty, in a dull tone as though he did not in the least desire it, his son said after a pause, "I'd like one of those new thirty-horse outboards."

"All right," said the fisherman. And to his nephew, "How about you?"

The nephew shook his head desolately. "I don't want anything," he said.

After another pause the fisherman's son said, "Yes he does, Dad. He wants one too."

"All right—" the fisherman said again, and said no more.

The dog whined in uncertainty and licked the boys' faces where they sat together. Each threw an arm over his back and hugged him. Three strays flew in and sat companionably down among the stiff-necked decoys. The dog crouched, obedient to his training. The boys observed them listlessly. Presently, sensing something untoward, the ducks took off, splashing the wave tops with feet and wingtips, into the dusty waste.

The sea began to make up in the mounting wind, and the wind bore a new and deathly chill. The fisherman, scouring the somber, dwindling shadow of the mainland for a sign, hoped it would not snow. But it did. First a few flakes, then a flurry, then storming past horizontally. The fisherman took

one long, bewildered look at Brown Cow Island three hundred yards dead to leeward, and got to his feet.

Then it shut in, as if what was happening on the ledge was too private even for the last wan light of the expiring day.

"Last round," the fisherman said austerely.

The boys rose and shouldered their tacit guns. The fisherman fired into the flying snow. He counted methodically to five. His son fired and counted. His nephew. All three fired and counted. Four rounds.

"You've got one left, Dad," his son said.

The fisherman hesitated another second, then he fired the final shell. Its pathetic report, like the spat of a popgun, whipped away on the wind and was instantly blanketed in falling snow.

Night fell all in a moment to meet the ascending sea. They were now barely able to make one another out through driving snowflakes, dim as ghosts in their yellow oilskins. The fisherman heard a sea break and glanced down where his feet were. They seemed to be wound in a snowy sheet. Gently he took the boys by the shoulders and pushed them in front of him, feeling with his feet along the shallow sump to the place where it triangulated into a sharp crevice at the highest point of the ledge. "Face ahead," he told them. "Put the guns down."

"I'd like to hold mine, Dad," begged his son.

"Put it down," said the fisherman. "The tide won't hurt it. Now brace your feet against both sides and stay there."

They felt the dog, who was pitch black, running up and down in perplexity between their straddled legs. "Dad," said his son, "what about the pooch?"

If he had called the dog by name it would have been too personal. The fisherman would have wept. As it was he had all he could do to keep from laughing. He bent his knees, and when he touched the dog hoisted him under one arm. The dog's belly was soaking wet.

So they waited, marooned in their consciousness, surrounded by a monstrous tidal space which was slowly, slowly closing them out. In this space the periwinkle beneath the fisherman's boots was king. While hovering airborne in his mind he had an inward glimpse of his house as curiously separate, like a June mirage.

Snow, rocks, seas, wind the fisherman had lived by all his life. Now he thought he had never comprehended what they were, and he hated them. Though they had not changed. He was deadly chilled. He set out to ask the boys if they were cold. There was no sense. He thought of the whiskey, and sidled backward, still holding the awkward dog, till he located the bottle under water with his toe. He picked it up squeamishly as though afraid of getting his sleeve wet, worked his way forward and bent over his son. "Drink

it," he said, holding the bottle against the boy's ribs. The boy tipped his head back, drank, coughed hotly, then vomited.

"I can't," he told his father wretchedly.

"Try—try—" the fisherman pleaded, as if it meant the difference between life and death.

The boy obediently drank, and again he vomited hotly. He shook his head against his father's chest and passed the bottle forward to his cousin, who drank and vomited also. Passing the bottle back, the boys dropped it in the frigid water between them.

When the waves reached his knees the fisherman set the warm dog loose and said to his son, "Turn around and get up on my shoulders." The boy obeyed. The fisherman opened his oilskin jacket and twisted his hands behind him through his suspenders, clamping the boy's booted ankles with his elbows.

"What about the dog?" the boy asked.

"He'll make his own way all right," the fisherman said. "He can take the cold water." His knees were trembling. Every instinct shrieked for gymnastics. He ground his teeth and braced like a colossus against the sides of the submerged crevice.

The dog, having lived faithfully as though one of them for eleven years, swam a few minutes in and out around the fisherman's legs, not knowing what was happening, and left them without a whimper. He would swim and swim at random by himself, round and round in the blinding night, and when he had swum routinely through the paralyzing water all he could, he would simply, in one incomprehensible moment, drown. Almost the fisherman, waiting out infinity, envied him his pattern.

Freezing seas swept by, flooding inexorably up and up as the earth sank away imperceptibly beneath them. The boy called out once to his cousin. There was no answer. The fisherman, marvelling on a terror without voice, was dumbly glad when the boy did not call again. His own boots were long full of water. With no sensation left in his straddling legs he dared not move them. So long as the seas came sidewise against his hips, and then sidewise against his shoulders, he might balance—no telling how long. The upper half of him was what felt frozen. His legs, disengaged from his nerves and his will, he came to regard quite scientifically. They were the absurd, precarious axis around which reeled the surged universal tumult. The waves would come on and on; he could not visualize how many tossing reinforcements lurked in the night beyond—inexhaustible numbers, and he wept in supernatural fury at each because it was higher, till he transcended hate and took them, swaying like a convert, one by one as they lunged against him and away aimlessly into their own undisputed, wild realm.

From his hips upward the fisherman stretched to his utmost as a man

does whose spirit reaches out of dead sleep. The boy's head, none too high, must be at least seven feet above the ledge. Though growing larger every minute, it was a small light life. The fisherman meant to hold it there, if need be, through a thousand tides.

By and by the boy, slumped on the head of his father, asked, "Is it over your boots, Dad?"

"Not yet," the fisherman said. Then through his teeth he added, "If I fall—kick your boots off—swim for it—downwind—to the island. . . ."

"You . . . ?" the boy finally asked.

The fisherman nodded against the boy's belly. "—Won't see each other," he said.

The boy did for the fisherman the greatest thing that can be done. He may have been too young for perfect terror, but he was old enough to know there were things beyond the power of any man. All he could do he did, by trusting his father to do all he could, and asking nothing more.

The fisherman, rocked to his soul by a sea, held his eyes shut upon the interminable night.

"Is it time now?" the boy said.

The fisherman could hardly speak. "Not yet," he said. "Not just yet. . . ."

As the land mass pivoted toward sunlight the day after Christmas, a tiny fleet of small craft converged off shore like iron filings to a magnet. At daybreak they found the skiff floating unscathed off the headland, half full of ducks and snow. The shooting *had* been good, as someone hearing on the nearby mainland the previous afternoon had supposed. Two hours afterward they found the unharmed boat adrift five miles at sea. At high noon they found the fisherman at ebb tide, his right foot jammed cruelly into a glacial crevice of the ledge beside three shotguns, his hands tangled behind him in his suspenders, and under his right elbow a rubber boot with a sock and a live starfish in it. After dragging unlit depths all day for the boys, they towed the fisherman home in his own boat at sundown, and in the frost of evening, mute, laid him on his wharf for his wife to see.

She, somehow, standing on the dock as in her frequent dream, gazing at the fisherman pure as crystal on the icy boards, a small rubber boot still frozen under one clenched arm, saw him exaggerated beyond remorse or grief, absolved of his mortality.

1961: *from New World Writing*

TELL ME A RIDDLE

by Tillie Olsen, born and raised in Nebraska, and who now lives in San Francisco. She is married and has four children. She has won a Ford Foundation literary grant and a Stanford Writing Fellowship. Her work has appeared in Pacific Spectator, Best American Short Stories—1957, New Campus Writing, *and* Prairie Schooner.

For forty-seven years they had been married. How deep back the stubborn, gnarled roots of the quarrel reached, no one could say—but only now, when tending to the needs of others no longer shackled them together, the roots swelled up visible, split the earth between them, and the tearing shook even to the children, long since grown.

Why now, why now? wailed Hannah.

As if when we grew up weren't enough, said Paul.

Poor Ma. Poor Dad. It hurts so for both of them, said Vivi. They never had very much, at least in old age they should be happy.

Knock their heads together, insisted Sammy, tell 'em: you're too old for this kind of thing; no reason not to get along now.

Lenny wrote to Clara: They've lived over so much together; what could possibly tear them apart?

Something tangible enough.

Arthritic hands, and such work as he got, occasional. Poverty all his life, and there was little breath left for the running. He could not, could not turn away from this desire: to have the troubling of responsibility, the fretting with money, over and done with; to be free, to be *care*free where success was not measured by accumulation, and there was use for the vitality still in him.

There was a way. They could sell the house, and with the money join his lodge's Haven, cooperative for the aged. Happy communal life, and was he

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not already an official; had he not helped organize it, raise funds, served as a trustee?

But she—would not consider it.

"What do we need all this for?" he would ask loudly, for her hearing aid was turned down and the vacuum was shrilling. "Five rooms" (pushing the sofa so she could get into the corner) "furniture" (smoothing down the rug) "floors and surfaces to make work. Tell me, why do we need it?" And he was glad he could ask in a scream.

"Because I'm use't."

"Because you're use't. This is a reason, Mrs. Word Miser? Used to can get unused!"

"Enough unused I have to get used to already . . . Not enough words?" turning off the vacuum a moment to hear herself answer. "Because soon enough we'll need only a little closet, no windows, no furniture, no rooms, nothing to make work but for worms. Screech and blow like you're doing, you'll need that closet even sooner . . . Ha, again!" for the vacuum bag wailed, puffed half up, hung stubbornly limp. "This time fix it so it stays; quick before the phone rings and you get too important-busy."

But while he struggled with the motor, it seethed in him. Why fix it? Why have to bother? And if it can't be fixed, have to wring the mind with how to pay the repair? At the Haven they come in with their own machines to clean your room or your cottage; you fish, or play cards, or make jokes in the sun, not with knotty fingers fight to mend vacuums.

Over the dishes, coaxingly: "For once in your life, to be free, to have everything done for you, like a queen."

"I never liked queens."

"No dishes, no garbage, no towel to sop, no worry what to buy, what to eat."

"And what else would I do with my empty hands? Better to eat at my own table when I want, and to cook and eat how I want."

"In the cottages they buy what you ask, and cook it how you like. *You* are the one who always used to say: better mankind born without mouths and stomachs than always to worry for money to buy, to shop, to fix, to cook, to wash, to clean."

"How cleverly you hid that you heard. I said it then because eighteen hours a day I ran. And you never scraped a carrot or knew a dish towel sops. Now—for you and me—who cares? A herring out of a jar is enough. But when *I* want, and nobody to bother." And she turned off her ear button, so she would not have to hear.

But as *he* had no peace, juggling and re-juggling the money to figure: how will I pay for this now?; prying out the storm windows (there they take care of this); jolting in the streetcar on errands (there I would not have to

ride to take care of this or that); fending the patronizing of relatives just back from Florida (there it matters what one is, not what one can afford), he gave *her* no peace.

"Look! In their bulletin. A reading circle. Twice a week it meets."

"Haumm," her answer of not listening.

"A reading circle. Chekhov they read that you like, and Peretz. Cultured people at the Haven that you would enjoy."

"Enjoy!" She tasted the word. "Now, when it pleases you, you find a reading circle for me. And forty years ago when the children were morsels and there was a Circle, did you stay home with them once so I could go? Even once? You trained me well. I do not need others to enjoy. Others!" Her voice trembled. "Because *you* want to be there with others. Already it makes me sick to think of you always around others. Clown, grimacer, floormat, yes-man, entertainer, whatever they want of you." And now it was he who turned on the television loud so he need not hear.

Old scar tissue ruptured and the wounds festered anew. Chekhov indeed. She thought without softness of that young wife, who in the deep night hours while she nursed the current baby, and perhaps held another in her lap, would try to stay awake for the only time there was to read. She would feel again the weather of the outside on his cheek when, coming late from a meeting, he would find her so, and stimulated and ardent, sniffing her skin, coax: "I'll put the baby to bed, and you—put the book away, don't read, don't read."

That had been the most beguiling of all the "don't read, put your book away" her life had been. Chekhov indeed!

"Money?" She shrugged him off. "Could we get poorer than once we were? And in America, who starves?"

But as still he pressed:

"Let me alone about money. Was there ever enough? Seven little ones—for every penny I had to ask—and sometimes, remember, there was nothing. But always *I* had to manage. Now *you* manage. Rub your nose in it good."

But from those years she had had to manage, old humiliations and terrors rose up, lived again, and forced her to relive them. The children's needings; that grocer's face or this merchant's wife she had had to beg credit from when credit was a disgrace, the scenery of the long blocks she had walked around when she could not pay them; school coming, and the desperate going over the old to see what could yet be re-made; the soups of meat bones begged "for-the-dog" one winter . . .

Enough. Now they had no children. Let *him* wrack his head for how they would live. She would not exchange her solitude for anything. *Never again to be forced to move to the rhythms of others.*

For in this solitude she had won to a reconciled peace.

Tranquillity from having the empty house no longer an enemy, for it stayed clean—not as in the days when (by the perverse logic of exhausted housewifery) it was her family, the life in it, that had seemed the enemy: tracking, smudging, littering, dirtying, engaging her in endless defeating battle—and on whom her endless defeat had been spewed.

The few old books, memorized from re-reading; the pictures to ponder (the magnifying glass superimposed on her heavy eyeglasses). Or if she wishes, when he is gone, the phonograph, that if she turns up very loud and strains, she can hear: the ordered sounds, and the struggling.

Out in the garden, growing things to nurture. Birds to be kept out of the pear tree, and when the pears are heavy and ripe, the old fury of work, for all must be canned, nothing wasted.

And her one social duty (for she will not go to luncheons or meetings) the boxes of old clothes left with her, as with a life-practiced eye for finding what is still wearable within the worn (again the magnifying glass superimposed on the heavy glasses) she scans and sorts—this for rag or rummage, that for mending and cleaning, and this for sending abroad.

Being able at last to live within, and not move to the rhythms of others, as life had helped her to: denying; estranging; taking the children one by one; then deafening, half blinding—and at last, presenting her solitude.

And in it she had won to a reconciled peace.

Now he was violating it with his constant campaigning: *Sell the house and move to the Haven.* (You sit, you sit—there too you could sit like a stone.) He was making of her a battleground where old grievances tore. (Turn on your ear button—I am talking.) And stubbornly she resisted—so that from wheedling, reasoning, manipulation, it was bitterness he now started with.

And it came to where every happening lashed up a quarrel.

"I will sell the house anyway," he flung at her one night. "I am putting it up for sale. There'll be a way to make you sign."

The television blared, as always it did on the evenings he stayed home, and as always it reached her only as noise. She did not know if the tumult was in her or outside. Snap! she turned the sound off. "Shadows," she whispered to him, pointing to the screen, "look, it is only shadows." And in a scream: "Did you say you will sell the house? Look at me, not at that. I am no shadow. You cannot sell without me."

"Leave on the television. I am watching."

"Like Paulie, like Jenny, a four-year-old. Staring at shadows. *You cannot sell the house.*"

"I will. We are going to the Haven. There you would not have the television when you do not want it. I could sit in the social room and watch. You

could lock yourself up to smell your unpleasantness in a room by yourself —for who would want to come near you?"

"No, no selling." A whisper now.

"The television is shadows. Mrs. Enlightened! Mrs. Cultured! A world comes into your house—and it is shadows. People you would never meet in a thousand lifetimes. Wonders. When you were four years old, yes, like Paulie, like Jenny, did you know of Indian dances, alligators, how they used bamboo in Malaya? No, you scratched in your dirt with the chickens and thought Olshana was the world. Yes, Mrs. Unpleasant, I will sell the house, for there better can we be rid of each other than here."

She did not know if the tumult was outside, or in her. Always a ravening inside, a pull to the bed, to lie down, to succumb.

"Have you thought maybe Ma should let a doctor have a look at her?" asked their son Paul after Sunday dinner, regarding his mother crumpled on the couch, instead of, as was her custom, busying herself in Nancy's kitchen.

"Why not the President too?"

"Seriously, Dad. This is the third Sunday she's lain down like that after dinner. Is she that way at home?"

"A regular love affair with the bed. Every time I start to talk to her."

Good protective reaction, observed Nancy to herself. The workings of hos-ti-lity.

"Nancy could take her. I don't like how she looks. Let's have Nancy arrange an appointment."

"You think she'll go?" regarding his wife gloomily. "All right, we have to have doctor bills, we have to have doctor bills." Loudly: "Something hurts you?"

She startled, looked to his lips. He repeated: "Mrs. Take It Easy, something hurts?"

"Nothing . . . Only you."

"A woman of honey. That's why you're lying down?"

"Soon I'll get up to do the dishes, Nancy."

"Leave them, Mother, I like it better this way."

"Mrs. Take It Easy, Paul says you should start ballet. You should go see a doctor and ask: how soon can you start ballet?"

"A doctor?" she begged. "Ballet?"

"We were talking, Ma," explained Paul, "you don't seem any too well. It would be a good idea for you to see a doctor for a checkup."

"I get up now to do the kitchen. Doctors are bills and foolishness, my son. I need no doctors."

"At the Haven," he could not resist pointing out, "a doctor is *not* bills. He lives beside you. You start to sneeze, he is there before you open up a Kleenex. You can be sick there for free, all you want."

"Diarrhea of the mouth, is there a doctor to make you dumb?"

"Ma. Promise me you'll go. Nancy will arrange it."

"It's all of a piece when you think of it," said Nancy, "the way she attacks my kitchen, scrubbing under every cup hook, doing the inside of the oven so I can't enjoy Sunday dinner, knowing half blind or not, she's going to find every speck of dirt . . ."

"Don't, Nancy, I've told you—it's the only way she knows to be useful. What did the *doctor* say?"

"A real fatherly lecture. Sixty-nine is young these days. Go out, enjoy life, find interests. Get a new hearing aid, this one is antiquated. Old age is sickness only if one makes it so. Geriatrics, Inc."

"So there was nothing physical."

"Of course there was. How can you live to yourself the way she does without there being? Evidence of a kidney disorder, and her blood count is low. He gave her a diet, and she's to come back for follow-up and lab work . . . But he was clear enough: Number One prescription—start living like a human being. When I think of your dad who could really play the invalid with that arthritis of his, as active as a teen-ager, and twice as much fun . . ."

"You didn't tell me the doctor says your sickness is in you, how you live." He pushed his advantage. "Life and enjoyments you need better than medicine. And this diet, how can you keep it? To weigh each morsel and scrape away the bits of fat to make this soup, that pudding. There, at the Haven, they have a dietician, they would do it for you."

She is silent.

"You would feel better there, I know it," he says gently. "There there is life and enjoyments all around."

"What is the matter, Mr. Importantbusy, you have no card game or meeting you can go to?"—turning her face to the pillow.

For a while he cut his meetings and going out, fussed over her diet, trying to wheedle her into leaving the house, brought in visitors:

"I should come to a fashion tea. I should sit and look at pretty babies in clothes I cannot buy. This is pleasure?"

"Always you are better than everyone else. The doctor said you should go out. Mrs. Brem comes to you with goodness and you turn her away."

"Because *you* asked her to, she asked me."

"They won't come back. People you need, the doctor said. Your own cousins I asked; they were willing to come and make peace as if nothing had happened . . ."
"No more crushers of people, pushers, hypocrites, around me. No more in *my* house. You go to them if you like."

"Kind he is to visit. And you, like ice."
"A babbler. All my life around babblers. Enough!"

"She's even worse, Dad? Then let her stew awhile," advised Nancy. "You can't let it destroy you; it's a psychological thing, maybe too far gone for any of us to help."

So he let her stew. More and more she lay silent in bed, and sometimes did not even get up to make the meals. No longer was the tongue-lashing inevitable if he left the coffee cup where it did not belong, or forgot to take out the garbage or mislaid the broom. The birds grew bold that summer and for once, pocked the pears, undisturbed.

A bellyful of bitterness, and every day the same quarrel in a new way and a different old grievance the quarrel forced her to enter and re-live. And the new torment: I am not really sick, the doctor said it, then why do I feel so sick?

One night she asked him: "You have a meeting tonight? Do not go. Stay . . . with me."

He had planned to watch "This Is Your Life" anyway, but half sick himself from the heavy heat, and sickening therefore the more after the brooks and woods of the Haven, with satisfaction he grated:

"Hah, Mrs. Live Alone And Like It wants company all of a sudden. It doesn't seem so good the time of solitary when she was a girl exile in Siberia. 'Do not go. Stay with me.' A new song for Mrs. Free As A Bird. Yes, I am going out, and while I am gone chew this aloneness good, and think how you keep us both from where if you want people you do not need to be alone."

"Go, go. All your life you have gone without me."

After him she sobbed curses he had not heard in years, old country curses from their childhood: Grow, oh shall you grow like an onion, with your head in the ground. Like the hide of a drum shall you be, beaten in life, beaten in death. Oh shall you be like a chandelier, to hang, and to burn . . .

She was not in their bed when he came back. She lay on the cot on the sun porch. All week she did not speak or come near him; nor did he try to make peace or care for her.

He slept badly, so used to her next to him. After all the years, old harmonies and dependencies deep in their bodies; she curled to him, or he

coiled to her, each warmed, warming, turning as the other turned, the nights a long embrace.

It was not the empty bed or the storm that woke him, but a faint singing. *She* was singing. Shaking off the drops of rain, the lightning riving her lifted face, he saw her so; the cot covers on the floor.

"This is a private concert?" he asked. "Come in, you are wet."

"I can breathe now," she answered, "my lungs are rich." Though indeed the sound was hardly a breath.

"Come in, come in." Loosing the bamboo shades. "Look how wet you are." Half helping, half carrying her, still faint-breathing her song.

A Russian love song of fifty years ago.

He had found a buyer, but before he told her, he called together those children who were close enough to come. Paul, of course, Sammy from New Jersey, Hannah from Connecticut, Vivi from Ohio.

With a kindling of energy for her beloved visitors, she arrayed the house, cooked and baked. She was not prepared for the solemn after-dinner conclave, they too probing in and tearing. Her frightened eyes watched from mouth to mouth as each spoke.

His stories were eloquent and funny of her refusal to go back to the doctor; of the scorned invitations; of her stubborn silences or the bile "like a Niagara"; of her contrariness: "If I clean it's no good how I cleaned; if I don't clean, I'm still a master who thinks he has a slave."

("Vinegar, vinegar he poured on me all his life; I am well marinated; how can I be honey now?")

Deftly he marched in the rightness for moving to the Haven; their money from social security free for visiting the children, not sucked into daily needs and into the house; the activities in the Haven for him; but mostly the Haven for *her:* her health, her need of care, distraction, amusement, friends who shared her interests.

"This does offer an outlet for Dad," said Paul; "he's always been an active person. And economic peace of mind isn't to be sneezed at, either, I could use a little of that myself."

But when they asked: "And you, Ma, how do you feel about it?" she could only whisper:

"For him it is good. It is not for me. I can no longer live between people."

"You lived all your life *for* people," Vivi cried.

"Not with." Suffering doubly for the unhappiness on her children's faces.

"You have to find some compromise," Sammy insisted. "Maybe sell the house and buy a trailer. After forty-seven years there's surely some way you can find to live in peace."

"There is no help. Different things we need."

"Then live alone!" He could control himself no longer. "I have a buyer for the house. Half the money for you, half for me. Either alone or with me to the Haven. You think I can live any longer as we are doing now?"

"Ma doesn't have to make a decision this minute, however you feel, Dad," Paul said quickly, "and you wouldn't want her to. Let's let it lay a few months, and then talk some more."

"I think I can work it out to take Mother home with me for a while," Hannah said. "You both look terrible, but especially you, Mother. I'm going to ask Phil to have a look at you."

"Sure," cracked Sammy. "What's the use of a doctor husband if you can't get free service out of him once in a while for the family. And absence might make the heart . . . you know."

"There was something after all," Paul told Nancy in a colorless voice. "That was Hannah's Phil calling. Her gall bladder . . . Surgery."

"Her *gall* bladder. If that isn't classic. 'Bitter as gall'—talk of psychosom——"

He stepped closer, put his hand over her mouth and said in the same colorless, plodding voice. "We have to get Dad. They operated at once. The cancer was everywhere, surrounding the liver, everywhere. They did what they could . . . at best she has a year. Dad . . . we have to tell him."

II

Honest in his weakness when they told him, and that she was not to know. "I'm not an actor. She'll know right away by how I am. O that poor woman. I am old too, it will break me into pieces. O that poor woman. She will spit on me: 'So my sickness was how I live.' O Paulie, how she will be, that poor woman. Only she should not suffer . . . I can't stand sickness, Paulie, I can't go with you."

But went. And play-acted.

"A grand opening and you did not even wait for me . . . A good thing Hannah took you with her."

"Fashion teas I needed. They cut out what tore in me; just in my throat something hurts yet . . . Look! so many flowers, like a funeral. Vivi called, did Hannah tell you? And Lenny from San Francisco, and Clara; and Sammy is coming." Her gnome's face pressed happily into the flowers.

It is impossible to predict in these cases, but once over the immediate effects of the operation, she should have several months of comparative well-being.

The money, where will come the money?

Travel with her, Dad, the next few months.
Don't take her home to the old associations. The other children will want to see her.
The money, where will I wring the money?
Whatever happens, she is not to know. No, you can't ask her to sign papers to sell the house; nothing to upset her. Borrow instead, then after . . . *I had wanted to leave you each a few dollars to make life easier, as other fathers do. There will be nothing left now. (Failure! you and your "business is exploitation." Why didn't you make it when it could be made?—Is that what you're thinking Sammy?)*
Sure she's unreasonable, Dad—but you have to stay with her; if there's to be any happiness in what's left of her life, it depends on you.
Prop me up children, think of me, too. Shuffled, chained with her, bitter woman. No Haven, and the little money going . . . How happy she looks, poor creature.

The look of excitement. The straining to hear everything (the new hearing aid turned full). Why are you so happy, dying woman?

How the petals are, fold on fold, and the gladioli color. The autumn air.

Stranger grandsons, tall above the little gnome grandmother, the little spry grandfather. Paul in a frenzy of picture-taking before going.

She, wandering the great house. Feeling the books; laughing at the maple shoemaker's bench of a hundred years ago used as a table. The ear turned to music.

"Let us go home. See how good I walk now." "One step from the hospital," he answers, "and she wants to fly. Wait till Doctor Phil says."

"Look—the birds too are flying home. Very good Phil is and will not show it, but he is sick of sickness by the time he comes home." "Mrs. Telepathy, to read minds," he answers, "read mine what it says: when the trunks of medicines become a suitcase, then we will go."

The grandboys, they do not know what to say to us . . . Hannah, she runs around here, there, when is there time for herself?

Let us go home. Let us go home.

Musing; gentleness—*but for the incidents of the rabbi in the hospital, and of the candles of benediction.*

Of the rabbi in the hospital:

Now tell me what happened, Mother.

From the sleep I awoke, Hannah's Phil, and he stands there like a devil in a dream and calls me by name. I cannot hear. I think he prays. Go away please, I tell him, I am not a believer. Still he stands, while my heart knocks with fright.

You scared *him*, Mother. He thought you were delirious.
Who sent him? Why did he come to me?
It is a custom. The men of God come to visit those of their religion they might help. Jew, Protestant, Catholic, the hospital makes up the list for them, and you are on the Jewish list.
Not for rabbis. At once go and make them change. Tell them to write: Born, human; Religion, none.
And of the candles of benediction:
Look how you have upset yourself, Mrs. Excited Over Nothing.
Pleasant memories you should leave.
Go in, go back to Hannah and the lights. Two weeks I saw and said nothing. But she asked me.
So what was so terrible? She forgets you never did, she asks you to light the Friday candles and say the benediction like Phil's mother when she visits. If the candles give her pleasure, why shouldn't she have the pleasure?
Not for pleasure she does it. For emptiness. Because his family does. Because all around her do.
That is not a good reason to? But you did not hear her. For heritage, she told you. For the boys, from the past they should have tradition.
Superstition! From the savages, afraid of the dark, of themselves: mumbo words and magic lights to scare away ghosts.
She told you: how it started does not take away the goodness.
For centuries, peace in the house it means.
Swindler! does she look back on the centuries? Candles bought instead of bread and stuck into a potato for a candlestick?
Religion that said: in Paradise, woman, you will be the footstool of your husband, and in life—poor chosen Jew—ground under, despised, trembling in cellars. And cremated. And cremated.
This is religion's fault? You think you are still an orator of the 1905 revolution? Where are the pills for quieting? Which are they?
Heritage. How have we gone from the savages, how no longer to be savages, this to teach. To look back and learn what ennobled man, this to teach. Books in the house, will man live or die, and she gives to her boys —superstition.
Hannah that is so good to you. Take your pill, Mrs. Excited For Nothing, swallow.
Heritage! But when did I have time to teach? Of Hannah I asked only hands to help.
Swallow.
Otherwise—musing; gentleness.

Not to travel. To go home.

The children want to see you. We have to show them you are as thorny a flower as ever.

Not to travel.

Vivi wants you should see her new baby. She sent the tickets—airplane tickets—a Mrs. Roosevelt she wants to make of you. To Vivi's we have to go.

A new baby. How many warm, seductive babies. She holds him stiffly, *away* from her, so that he wails. And a long shudder begins, and the sweat beads on her forehead.

"Hush, shush," croons the grandfather, lifting him back. "You should forgive your grandmamma, little prince, she has never held a baby before, only seen them in glass cases. Hush, shush."

"You're tired, Ma," says Vivi. "The travel and the noisy dinner. I'll take you to lie down."

(*A long travel from, to, what the feel of a baby evokes.*)

In the airplane, cunningly designed to encase from motion (no wind, no feel of flight), she had sat severely and still, her face turned to the sky through which they cleaved and left no scar.

So this was how it looked, the determining, the crucial sky, and this was how man moved through it, remote above the dwindled earth, the concealed human life. Vulnerable life, that could scar.

A steerage ship in memory shook across a great, circular sea: clustered, ill human beings, and through the thick-stained air, tiny fretting waters in a window round like the airplane's—sun round, moon round. (The round thatched hut roofs of Olshana.) Eye round—like the smaller window that framed distance the solitary year of her exile when only her eyes could travel, and no voice spoke. And the polar winds hurled themselves across snow trackless and endless and white—like the clouds which had closed together below and hidden the earth.

Now they put a baby in her lap. Do not ask me, she would have liked to beg. Enough the worn face of Vivi, the remembered grandchildren. I cannot, cannot . . .

Cannot what? Unnatural grandmother, not able to make herself embrace a baby.

She lay there in the bed of the two little girls, her new hearing aid turned full, listening to the sound of the children going to sleep, the baby's fretful crying and hushing, the clatter of dishes being washed and put away. They thought she slept. Still she rode on.

It was not that she had not loved her babies, her children. The love—the passion of tending—had risen with the need like a torrent; and like a torrent

drowned and immolated all else. But when the need was done—o the power that was lost in the painful damming back and drying up of what still flooded, but had nowhere to go. Only the thin pulsing left that could not quiet, suffering over lives one felt, but could no longer hold nor help.

On that torrent she had borne them to their lives, and the riverbed was desert long years now. Not there would she dwell, a memoried wraith. Surely that was not all, surely there was more. Still the springs, the springs were in her seeking. Somewhere an older power that beat for life. Somewhere coherence, transport, meaning. If they would but leave her in the air now stilled of clamor, in the reconciled solitude, to journey to her life.

And they put a baby in her lap. Immediacy to embrace, and the breath of *that* past: warm flesh like this that had claims and nuzzled away all else and with lovely mouths devoured; hot living like an animal—intensely and now; the turning maze; the long drunkenness; the drowning into needing and being needed. Severely she looked back—and the shudder seized her again, and the sweat. Not that way. Not there, not now could she, not yet . . .

And all that visit, she could not touch the baby.

"Daddy, is it the . . . sickness she's like that?" asked Vivi. "I was so glad to be having the baby—for her. I told Tim, it'll give her more happiness than anything, being around a baby again. And she hasn't played with him once."

He was not listening. "Aahh little seed of life, little charmer," he crooned, "Hollywood should see you. A heart of ice you would melt. Kick, kick. The future you'll have for a ball. In 2050 still kick. Kick for your granddaddy then."

Attentive with the older children; sat through their performances (command performance; we command you to be the audience); helped Ann sort autumn leaves to find the best for a school program; listened gravely to Richard tell about his rock collection, while her lips mutely formed the words to remember: *igneous, sedimentary, metamorphic;* looked for missing socks, books and bus tickets; watched the children whoop after their grandfather who knew how to tickle, chuck, lift, toss, do tricks, tell secrets, make jokes, match riddle for riddle. (Tell me a riddle, Grammy. I know no riddles, child.) Scrubbed sills and woodwork and furniture in every room; folded the laundry; straightened drawers; emptied the heaped baskets waiting for ironing (while he or Vivi or Tim nagged: You're supposed to rest here, you've been sick) but to none tended or gave good—and could not touch the baby.

After a week she said: "Let us go home. Today call about the tickets."

"You have important business, Mrs. Inahurry? The President waits to

consult with you?" He shouted, for the fear of the future raced in him. "The clothes are still warm from the suitcase, your children cannot show enough how glad they are to see you, and you want home. There is plenty of time for home. We cannot be with the children at home."

"Blind to around you as always: the little ones sleep four in a room because we take their bed. We are two more people in a house with a new baby, and no help."

"Vivi is happy so. The children should have their grandparents a while, she told to me. I should have my mommy and daddy . . ."

"Babbler and blind. Do you look at her so tired? How she starts to talk and she cries? I am not strong enough yet to help. Let us go home."

(To reconciled solitude.)

For it seemed to her the crowded noisy house was listening to her, listening for *her. She could feel it like a great ear pressed under her heart. And everything knocked: quick constant raps: let me in, let me in.*

How was it that soft reaching tendrils also became blows that knocked?

Cmon Grandma, I want to show you . . .

Tell me a riddle, Grandma. (*I know no riddles*)

Look Grammy, he's so dumb he can't even find his hands. (Dody and the baby on a blanket over the fermenting autumn mound)

I made it—for you. (Flat paper dolls with aprons that lifted on scalloped skirts that lifted on flowered pants; hair of yarn and great ringed questioning eyes) (Ann)

Watch me, Grandma. Richard snaking up the tree, hanging exultant, free, with one hand at the top. Below Dody hunches over in pretend-cooking. (Climb too, Dody, climb and look) Be my nap bed, Grammy. (The "No!" too late.) Morty's abandoned heaviness, while his fingers ladder up and down her hearing-aid cord to his drowsy chant: eentsiebeentsiespider. (*Children trust*)

It's to start off your own rock collection. Grandma. That's a trilobite fossil, 200 million years old (millions of years on a boy's mouth) and that one's obsidian, black glass.

Knocked and knocked.

Mother, I *told* you the teacher said we had to bring it back all filled out this morning. Didn't you even ask Daddy? Then tell *me* which plan and I'll check it: evacuate or stay in the city or wait for you to come and take me away. (Seeing the look of straining to hear) It's for Disaster, Grandma. (*Children trust*)

Vivi in the maze of the long, the lovely drunkenness. The old old noises: baby sounds, screaming of a mother flayed to exasperation; children quarrelling; children playing; singing; laughter.

And Vivi's tears and memories, spilling so fast, half the words not understood.

She had started remembering out loud deliberately, so her mother would know the past was cherished, still lived in her.

Nursing the baby: My friends marvel, and I tell them, oh it's easy to be such a cow. I remember how beautiful my mother seemed nursing my brother, and the milk just flows . . . Was that Davy? It must have been Davy . . .

Lowering a hem: How did you ever . . . when I think how you made everything we wore . . . Tim, just think, seven kids and Mommy sewed everything . . . do I remember you sang while you sewed? That white dress with the red apples on the skirt you fixed over for me, was it Hannah's or Clara's before it was mine?

Washing sweaters: Ma, I'll never forget, one of those days so nice you washed clothes outside; one of the first spring days it must have been. The bubbles just danced up and down while you scrubbed, and we chased after, and you stopped to show us how to blow our own bubbles with green onion stalks . . . you always . . .

"Strong onion, to still make you cry after so many years," her father said, to turn the tears into laughter.

While Richard bent over his homework: where is it now, do we still have it, the Book of the Martyrs? It always seemed so, well—exalted, when you'd put it on the round table and we'd all look at it together; there was even a halo from the lamp. The lamp with the beaded fringe you could move up and down; they're in style again, pulley lamps like that, but without the fringe. You know the book I'm talking about, Daddy, the Book of the Martyrs, the first picture was a bust of Socrates? I wish there was something like that for the children, Mommy, to give them what you . . . (And the tears splashed again)

(What I intended and did not? Stop it, daughter, stop it, leave that time. And he, the hypocrite, sitting there with tears in his eyes too—it was nothing to you then, nothing.)

. . . The time you came to school and I almost died of shame because of your accent and because I knew you knew I was ashamed; how could I? . . . Sammy's harmonica and you danced to it once yes you did you and Davy squealing in your arms . . . That time you bundled us up and walked us down to the railroad station to stay the night 'cause it was heated and we didn't have any coal, that winter of the strike, you didn't think I remembered that, did you, Mommy? . . . How you'd call us out to see the sunsets . . .

Day after day, the spilling memories. Worse now, questions, too. Even the grandchildren: Grandma, in the olden days, when you were little . . .

by Tillie Olsen

It was the afternoons that saved.

While they thought she napped, she would leave the mosaic on the wall (of children's drawings, maps, calendars, pictures, Ann's cardboard dolls with their great ringed questioning eyes) and hunch in the girls' closet, on the low shelf where the shoes stood, and the girls' dresses covered.

For that while she would painfully sheathe against the listening house, the tendrils and noises that knocked, and Vivi's spilling memories. Sometimes it helped to braid and unbraid the sashes that dangled, or to trace the pattern on the hoop slips.

Today she had jacks and children under jet trails to forget. Last night, Ann and Dody silhouetted in the window against a sunset of flaming man-made clouds of jet trail, their jacks' ball accenting the peaceful noise of dinner being made. Had she told them, yes she had told them of how they played jacks in her village though there was no ball, no jacks. Six stones, round and flat, toss them out, the seventh on the back of the hand, toss, catch and swoop up as many as possible, toss again . . .

Of stones (repeating Richard) there are three kinds: earth's fire jetting; rock of layered centuries; crucibled new out of the old. But there was that other—frozen to black glass, never to transform or hold the fossil memory . . . (let not my seed fall on stone). There was an ancient man who fought to heights a great rock that crashed back down eternally—eternal labor, freedom, labor . . . (stone will perish, but the word remain) And you, David, who with a stone slew, screaming: Lord, take my heart of stone and give me flesh.

Who was screaming? Why was she back in the common room of the prison, the sun motes dancing in the shafts of light, and the informer being brought in, a prisoner now, like themselves. And Lisa leaping, yes, Lisa, the gentle and tender, biting at the betrayer's jugular. Screaming and screaming.

No, it is the children screaming. Another of Paul and Sammy's terrible fights?

In Vivi's house. Severely: you are in Vivi's house.

Blows, screams, a call: "Grandma!" For her? O please not for her. Hide, hunch behind the dresses deeper. But a trembling little body hurls itself beside her—surprised, smothered laughter—arms surround her neck, tears rub dry on her cheek, and words too soft to understand whisper into her ear (Is this where you hide too, Grammy? It's my secret place, we have a secret now)

And the sweat beads, and the long shudder seizes.

It seemed the great ear pressed inside now, and the knocking. "We have to go home," she told him, "I grow ill here."

"It is your own fault, Mrs. Bodybusy, you do not rest, you do too much." He raged, but the fear was in his eyes. "It was a serious operation, they told you to take care . . . All right, we will go to where you can rest."

But where? Not home to death, not yet. He had thought to Lenny's yet, to Clara's; beautiful visits with each of the children. She would have to rest first, be stronger. If they could but go to Florida—it glittered before him the never-realized promise of Florida—California: of course. (The money, the money dwindling!) Los Angeles first for sun and rest, then to Lenny's in San Francisco.

He told her the next day. "You saw what Nancy wrote: snow and wind back home, a terrible winter. And look at you—bones and a swollen belly. I called Phil: he said: 'A prescription, Los Angeles sun and rest.'"

"You have sold the house," she cried, "that is why we do not go home. That is why you talk no more of the Haven, that is why there is money for travel. After the children you will drag me to the Haven."

"The Haven! Who thinks of the Haven any more? Tell her, Vivi, tell Mrs. Suspicious: a prescription, sun and rest, to make you healthy . . . And how could I sell the house without *you*?"

At the place of farewells and greetings, of winds of coming and winds of going, they say their good-bys.

They look back at her with eyes of others before them: Richard with her own blue blaze; Ann with the Nordic eyes of Tim; Morty's dreaming brown of a great grandmother he will never know; Dody with the laughing eyes of him who had been her springtime love (who stands beside her now); Vivi's, all tears.

The baby's eyes are closed in sleep.

Good-by, my children.

III

It is to the back of the great city he brought her, to the dwelling places of the cast-off old. Bounded by two lines of amusement piers to the north and to the south, and between a long straight paving rimmed with black benches facing the sands—sands so wide the ocean is only a far fluted edge.

In the brief vacation season, some of the boarded stores fronting the sands open, and families, young people and children may be seen. A little tasseled tram shuttles between the piers, and the lights of roller coasters prink and tweak over those who come to have sensation made in them.

The rest of the year it is abandoned to the old, all else boarded up and still; seemingly empty, except the occasional days and hours when the sun, like a tide, sucks them out of the low rooming houses, casts them onto the

benches and sandy rim of the walk—and sweeps them into decaying enclosures back again.

A few newer apartments glint among the low bleached squares. It is in one of these Lenny's Jeannie has arranged their rooms. "Only a few miles north and south people pay hundreds of dollars a month for just this gorgeous air, Granddaddy, just this ocean closeness."

She had been ill on the plane, lay ill for days in the unfamiliar room. Several times the doctor came by—left medicine she would not take. Several times Jeannie drove in the twenty miles from work, still in her Visiting Nurse uniform, the lightness and brightness of her like a healing.

"Who can believe it is winter?" he said one morning. "Beautiful it is outside like an ad. Come, Mrs. Invalid, come to taste it. You are well enough to sit in here, you are well enough to sit outside. The doctor said it too."

But the benches were encrusted with people, and the sands at the sidewalk's edge. Besides, she had seen the far ruffle of the sea: "there take me," and though she leaned against him, it was she who led.

Plodding and plodding, sitting often to rest, he grumbling. Patting the sand so warm. Once she scooped up a handful, cradling it close to her better eye; peered, and flung it back. And as they came almost to the brink and she could see the glistening wet, she sat down, pulled off her shoes and stockings, left him and began to run. "You'll catch cold," he screamed, but the sand in his shoes weighed him down—he who had always been the agile one—and already the white spray creamed her feet.

He pulled her back, took a handkerchief to wipe off the wet and the sand. "O no," she said, "the sun will dry," seized the square and smoothed it flat, dropped on it a mound of sand, knotted the kerchief corners and tied it to a bag—"to look at with the strong glass" (for the first time in years she explained an action of hers)—and lay down with the little bag against her cheek, looking toward the shore that nurtured life as it first crawled toward consciousness the millions years ago.

He took her one Sunday in the evil-smelling bus, past flat miles of blister houses, to the home of relatives. O what is this? she cried as the light began to smoke and the houses to dim and recede. Smog, he said, everyone knows but you . . . Outside he kept his arms about her, but she walked with hands pushing the heavy air as if to open it, whispered: who has done this?, sat down suddenly to vomit at the curb and for a long while refused to rise.

One's age as seen on the altered face of those known in youth. Is this they he has come to visit? This Max and Rose, smooth and pleasant, introducing them to polite children, disinterested grandchildren, "the whole

family, once a month on Sundays. And why not? We have the room, the help, the food."

Talk of cars, of houses, of success: this son that, that daughter this. And *your* children? Hastily skimped over, the intermarriages, the obscure work—"my doctor son-in-law, Phil"—all he has to offer. She silent in a corner. (Carsick like a baby, he explains.) Years since he has taken her to visit anyone but the children, and old apprehensions prickle: "no incidents," he silently begs, "no incidents." He itched to tell them: "A very sick woman," significantly, indicating her with his eyes, "a very sick woman." Their restricted faces did not react. "Have you thought maybe she'd do better at Palm Springs?" Rose asked. "Or at least a nicer section of the beach, nicer people, a pool." Not to have to say "money" he said instead: "would she have sand to look at through a magnifying glass?" and went on, detail after detail, the old habit betraying of parading the queerness of her for laughter.

After dinner—the others into the living room in men- or women-clusters, or into the den to watch TV—the four of them alone. She sat close to him, and did not speak. Jokes, stories, people they had known, beginning of reminiscence, Russia fifty–sixty years ago. Strange words across the Duncan Phyfe table: *hunger; secret meetings; spies; betrayals; prison; escape*—interrupted by one of the grandchildren: "Commercial's on; any coke left? Gee, you're missing a real hair-raiser." And then a granddaughter (Max proudly: "look at her, an American queen") drove them back. No incident —except that there had been no incidents.

The first few mornings she had taken with her the magnifying glass, but he would sit only on the benches, so she rested at the foot, where slatted bench shadows fell, and unless she turned her hearing aid down, other voices invaded.

Now on the days when the sun shone and she felt well enough, he took her on the tram to where the benches ranged in oblongs, some with tables for checkers or cards. Again the blanket on the sand in the striped shadows, but she no longer brought the magnifying glass. He played cards, and she lay in the sun and looked toward the waters; or they walked—two blocks down to the scaling hotel, two blocks back—past chili-hamburger stands, open-doored bars, Next to New and Perpetual Rummage Sale stores.

Once, out of the aimless walkers, slow and shuffling like themselves, someone ran unevenly toward them, embraced, kissed, wept: "dear friends, old friends." A friend of *hers*, not his: Mrs. Mays who had lived next door to them in Denver when the children were small.

Thirty years are compressed into a dozen sentences; and the present, not even in three. All is told: the children scattered; the husband dead; she lives in a room two blocks up from the sing hall—and points to the domed

auditorium jutting before the pier. The leg? phlebitis; the heavy breathing? that one does not ask. She too comes to the benches each nice day to sit. And tomorrow, tomorrow, are they going to the community sing? Of course he would have heard of it, everybody goes—the big doings they wait for all week. They have never been? She will come to them for dinner tomorrow and they will all go together.

So it is that she sits in the wind of the singing, among the thousand various faces of age.

She had turned off her hearing aid at once they came into the auditorium —as she would have wished to turn off sight.

One by one they streamed by and imprinted on her—and though the savage zest of their singing came voicelessly soft and distant, the faces roared—the faces densened the air—chorded

children-chants, mother-croons, singing of the chained;
love serenades, Beethoven storms, mad Lucia's scream;
drunken joy-songs, keens for the dead, work singing
while from floor to balcony to dome a barefooted sore-covered little girl threaded the sound-thronged tumult, danced her ecstasy of grimace to flutes that scratched at a crossroads village wedding

Yes, faces became sound, and the sound became faces; and faces and sound became weight—pushed, pressed

"Air"—her hand claws his.

"Whenever I enjoy myself . . ." Then he saw the gray sweat on her face. "Here. Up. Help me, Mrs. Mays," and they support her out to where she can gulp the air in sob after sob.

"A doctor, we should get for her a doctor."

"Tch, it's nothing," says Ellen Mays, "I get it all the time . . . You've missed the tram; come to my place . . . close . . . tea. My view. See, she *wants* to come. Steady now, that's how." Adding mysteriously: "Remember your advice, easy to keep your head above water, empty things float. Float."

The singing a fading march for them, tall woman with a swollen leg, weaving little man, and the swollen thinness they help between.

The stench in the hall: mildew? decay? "We sit and rest then climb. My gorgeous view. We help each other and here we are."

The stench along into the slab of room. A washstand for a sink, a box with oilcloth tacked round for a cupboard, a three-burner gas plate. Artificial flowers, colorless with dust. Everywhere pictures foaming: wedding, baby, party, vacation, graduation, family pictures. From the narrow couch under

a slit of window, sure enough the view: lurching rooftops and a scallop of ocean heaving, preening, twitching under the moon.

"While the water heats. Excuse me . . . down the hall." Ellen Mays had gone.

"You'll live?" he asks mechanically, sat down to feel his fright; tried to pull her alongside.

She pushed him away. "For air," she said; stood clinging to the dresser. Then, in a terrible voice:

After a lifetime of room. Of many rooms.

Shhh

You remember how she lived. Eight children. And now one room like a coffin. Shrinking the life of her into one room

She pays rent!

Like a coffin. Rooms and rooms like this. I lie on the quilt and hear them talk Once you went for coffee I walked I saw A Balzac a Chekhov to write it Rummage Alone On scraps

Shhh Mrs. Orator Without Breath. Better here old than in the old country.

And they sang like . . . like . . . *Man, one has to believe.* So strong. For what? To rot, not grow?

Your poor lungs beg you: Please. They sob between each word.

Singing. Singing. She in this poor room with her pictures Max You The Children. And who has meaning? Century after century still all in man not to grow?

"Coffins, garbage, plants: sick woman. O lay down. We will get for you the doctor."

"And when will it end. O, *the end.*" *That* nightmare thought, and this time she writhed, crumpled beside him, seized his hand (for a moment again the weight, the soft distant roaring of humanity) and on the strangled-for breath, begged: "Man . . . will destroy ourselves?"

And looking for answer—in the helpless pity and fear for her (for *her*) that distorted his face—she understood the last months, and knew that she was dying.

IV

"Let us go home," she said after several days.

"You are in training for a cross-country trip? That is why you do not even walk across the room? Here, like a prescription Phil said, till you are stronger from the operation. You want to break doctor's orders?"

She saw the fiction was necessary to him, was silent; then: "At home I will get better. If the doctor here says?"

"And winter? And the visits to Lenny and to Clara? All right," for he saw the tears in her eyes, "I will write Phil, and talk to the doctor."

Days passed. He reported nothing. Jeannie came and took her out for air, past the boarded concessions, the hooded and tented amusement rides, to the end of the pier. They watched the spent waves feeding the new; the gulls in the clouded sky; even up where they sat, the windblown sand stung.

She did not ask to go down the crooked steps to the sea.

Back in her bed, while he was gone to the store, she said: "Jeannie, this doctor, he is not one I can ask questions. Ask him for me, can I go home?"

Jeannie looked at her, said quickly: "Of course, poor Granny, you want your own things around you, don't you? I'll call him tonight . . . Look, I have something to show you," and from her purse unwrapped a large cookie, intricately shaped like a little girl. "Look at the curls—can you hear me well, Granny?—and the darling eyelashes. I just came from a house where they had finished baking them."

"The dimples," she marveled, "there in the knees," holding it to the better light, turning, studying, "like art. Each singly they cut, or a mold?"

"Singly," said Jeannie, "and if it is a child only the mother can make them. O Granny, it's the likeness of a real little girl who died yesterday—Rosita. She was three years old. *Pan del Muerto*, the Bread of the Dead. It was the custom in the part of Mexico they came from."

Still she turned and inspected. "Look, the hollow in the throat, the little cross necklace . . . I think for the mother it is a good thing to be busy with such bread. You know the family?"

Jeannie nodded. "On my rounds. I nursed . . . O Granny, it is like a party; they play songs she liked to dance to. The coffin is lined with pink velvet and she wears a white dress. There are candles . . ."

"In the house?" Surprised, "They keep her in the house?"

"Yes," said Jeannie, "and it is against the health law. I think she is . . . prepared there. The father said it will be sad to bury her here; in Mazatlán they have a feast night with candles each year; everyone picnics on the graves of those they loved until dawn."

"Yes Jeannie, the living must comfort themselves." She closed her eyes.

"You want to sleep, Granny?"

"Yes, tired from the pleasure of you. I may keep the Rosita? There stand it, on the dresser, where I can see; something of my own around me."

In the kitchenette, helping her grandfather unpack the groceries, Jeannie said in her light voice:

"I'm resigning my job, Granddaddy."

"Ah the lucky young man. Which one is he?"

"Too late. You're spoken for." She made a pyramid of cans, unstacked, and built again.

"Something is wrong with the job?"

"With me. I can't be"—she searched for the word—"professional enough. I let myself feel things. And tomorrow I have to report a family . . ." The cans clicked again. "It's not that, either. I just don't know what I want to do, maybe go back to school, maybe go to art school. I thought if you went to San Francisco I'd come along and talk it over with Mommy and Daddy. But I don't see how you can go. She wants to go home. She asked me to ask the doctor."

The doctor told her himself. "Next week you may travel, when you are a little stronger." But next week there was the fever of an infection, and by the time that was over, she could not leave the bed—a rented hospital bed that stood beside the double bed he slept in alone now.

Outwardly the days repeated themselves. Every other afternoon and evening he went out to his new-found cronies, to talk and play cards. Twice a week, Mrs. Mays came. And the rest of time, Jeannie was there.

By the sickbed stood Jeannie's FM radio. Often into the room the shapes of music came. She would lie curled on her side, her knees drawn up, intense in listening (Jeannie sketched her so, coiled, convoluted like an ear), then thresh her hand out and abruptly snap the radio mute—still to lie in her attitude of listening, concealing tears.

Once Jeannie brought in a young Marine to visit, a friend from high-school days she had found wandering near the empty pier. Because Jeannie asked him to, gravely, without self-consciousness, he sat himself cross-legged on the floor and performed for them a dance of his native Samoa.

Long after they left, a tiny thrumming sound could be heard where, in her bed, she strove to repeat the beckon, flight, surrender of his hands, the fluttering footbeats, and his low plaintive calls.

Hannah and Phil sent flowers. To deepen her pleasure, he placed one in her hair. "Like a girl," he said and brought the hand mirror so she could see. She looked at the pulsing red flower, the yellow skull face; a desolate, excited laugh shuddered from her, and she pushed the mirror away—but let the flower burn.

The week Lenny and Helen came, the fever returned. With it the excited laugh, and incessant words. She, who in her life had spoken but seldom and then only when necessary (never having learned the easy, social uses of words), now, in dying, spoke incessantly.

In a half whisper: "Like Lisa she is, your Jeannie. Have I told you of Lisa, she who taught me to read? Of the high-born she was, but noble in herself. I was sixteen; they beat me; my father beat me so I would not go to her. It was forbidden, she was a Tolstoyan. At night, past dogs that howled, terrible dogs my son, in the snows of winter to the road, I to ride in her carriage like a lady to books. To her life was holy, knowledge was

holy, and she taught me to read. They hung her. Everything that happens one must try to understand why. She killed one who betrayed many. Because of betrayal, betrayed all she lived and believed. In one minute she killed, before my eyes (there is so much blood in a human being, my son), in prison with me. All that happens, one must try to understand.

"The name?" Her lips would work. "The name that was their pole star; the doors of the death houses fixed to open on it; I read of it my year of penal servitude. Thuban!" very excited, "Thuban, in ancient Egypt the pole star. Can you see, look out to see it, Jeannie, if it swings around our pole star that seems to *us* not to move.

"Yes, Jeannie, at your age my mother and grandmother had already buried children; . . . yes, Jeannie, it is more than oceans between Olshana and you . . . yes Jeannie they danced and for all the bodies they had they might as well be chickens, and indeed, they flapped their arms, scratched and hopped.

"And Andrei Yefimitch, who for twenty years had never known of it and never wanted to know, said as if he wanted to cry: but why my dear friend this malicious laughter?" Telling to herself half-memorized phrases from her few books. "Pain I answer with tears and cries, baseness with indignation, meanness with repulsion . . . for life may be hated or wearied of, but never despised."

Delirious: "Tell me, my neighbor, Mrs. Mays, the pictures never lived, but what of the flowers? Tell them who ask: no rabbis, no ministers, no priests, no speeches, no ceremonies: ah, false—let the living please themselves. Tell Sammy's boy, he who flies, tell him to go to Stuttgart and see where Davy has no grave. And what?" A conspirator's laugh. "And what? where millions have no graves."

In delirium or not, wanting the radio on; not seeming to listen, the words still jetting, wanting the music on. Once, silencing it abruptly as of old, she began to cry, unconcealed tears this time. "You have pain, Granny?" Jeannie asked.

"The music," she said, "still it is there and we do not hear; knocks, and our poor human ears too weak. What else, what else we do not hear?"

Once she knocked his hand aside as he gave her a pill, swept the bottles from her bedside table: "no pills, let me feel what I feel," and laughed as on his hands and knees he groped to pick them up.

Nighttimes her hand reached across the bed to hold his.

A constant retching began. Her breath was too faint for sustained speech now, but still the lips moved:

When no longer necessary to injure others
Pick pick pick Blind chicken
As a human being responsibility for action

"David!" imperious, "Basin!" and she would vomit, rinse her mouth, the wasted throat working to swallow, and begin the chant again.

She will be better off in the hospital now, the doctor said.

He sent the telegrams to the children, was packing her suitcase, when her hoarse voice startled. She had roused, was pulling herself to sitting.

"Where now?" she asked. "Where now do you drag me?"

"You do not even have to have a baby to go this time," he soothed, looking for the brush to pack. "Remember, after Davy you told me—worthy to have a baby for the pleasure of the hospital?"

"Where now? Not home yet?" Her voice mourned. "Not home yet? Where *is* my home?"

He rose to ease her back. "The doctor, the hospital," he started to explain, but deftly, like a snake, she had slithered out of bed and stood swaying, propped behind the night table.

"Coward," she hissed, "runner."

"You stand," he said senselessly.

"To take me there and run. Afraid of a little vomit."

He reached her as she fell. She struggled against him, slipped from his arms, pulled herself up again.

"Weakling," she taunted, "to leave me there and run. Betrayer. All your life you have run."

He sobbed, telling Jeannie. "A Marilyn Monroe to run for her virtue. Fifty-nine pounds she weighs, the doctor said, and she beats at me like a Dempsey. Betrayer, she cries, and I running like a dog when she calls; day and night, running to her, her vomit, the bedpan . . ."

"She wants you, Granddaddy," said Jeannie. "Isn't that what they call love? I'll see if she sleeps, and if she does, the poor wornout darling, we'll have a party, you and I; I brought us rum babas."

They did not move her. By her bed now stood the tall hooked pillar that held the solutions—blood and glucose—to feed her veins. Jeannie moved down the hall to take over the sickroom, her face so radiant, her grandfather asked her once: "You are in love?" (Shameful the joy, the pure overwhelming joy from being with her grandmother; the peace, the serenity that breathed.) "My darling escape," she answered incoherently, "my darling Granny,"—as if that explained.

Now one by one the children came, those that were able. Hannah, Paul, Sammy. Too late to ask: and what did you learn with your living, Mother, and what do we need to know?

Clara, the eldest, clenched:

Pay me back, Mother, pay me back for all you took from me. Those

others you crowded into your heart. The hands I needed to be for you, the heaviness, the responsibility.
Is this she? Noises the dying make, the crablike hands crawling over the covers. The ethereal singing.

She hears that music, that singing from childhood; forgotten sound—not heard since, since . . . And the hardness breaks like a cry: Where did we lose each other, first mother, singing mother?

Annulled: the quarrels, the gibing, the harshness between; the fall into silence and the withdrawal.

I do not know you, Mother. Mother, I never knew you.

Lenny, suffering not alone for her who was dying, but for that in her which never lived (for that which in him might never live). From him too, unspoken words: *good-by mother who taught me to mother myself.*

Not Vivi, who must stay with her children; not Davy, but he is already here, having to die again with *her* this time, for the living take their dead with them when they die.

Light she grew, like a bird, and like a bird, sound bubbled in her throat while the body fluttered in agony. Night and day, asleep or awake (though indeed there was no difference now) the songs and the phrases leaping.

And he, who had once dreaded a long dying (from fear of himself, from horror of the dwindling money) now desired her quick death profoundly, for *her* sake. He no longer went out, except when Jeannie forced him; no longer laughed, except when, in the bright kitchenette, Jeannie coaxed his laughter (and she, who seemed to hear nothing else, would laugh too, conspiratorial wisps of laughter).

Light, like a bird, the fluttering body, the little claw hands, the beaked shadow on her face; and the throat, bubbling, straining:

He tried not to listen, as he tried not to look on the face in which only the forehead remained familiar, but trapped with her the long nights in that little room, the sounds worked themselves into his consciousness, with their punctuation of death swallows, whimpers, gurglings.

Even in reality (swallow) *life's lack of it*
The bell *Summon what ennobles*
78,000 in one minute (whisper of a scream)
78,000 human beings *destroy ourselves?*

"Ahh Mrs. Miserable," he said, as if she could hear, "all your life working, and now in bed you lie, servants to tend, you do not even need to call to be tended, and still you work. Such hard work it is to die? Such hard work?"

The body threshed, her hand clung in his. A melody, ghost thin, hovered on her lips, and like a guilty ghost, the vision of her bent in listening to it, silencing the record instantly he was near. Now, heedless of his presence, she floated the melody on and on.

"Hid it from me," he complained, "how many times you listened to remember it so?" And tried to think when she had first played it, or first begun to silence her few records when he came near—but could reconstruct nothing. There was only this room with its tall hooked pillar and its swarm of sounds.

An unexamined life not worth
Strong with the not yet in the now
Dogma dead war dead one country

"It helps, Mrs. Philosopher, words from books? It helps?" And it seemed to him that for seventy years she had hidden a tape recorder, infinitely microscopic, within her, that it had coiled infinite mile on mile, trapping every song, every melody, every word read, heard and spoken—and that maliciously she was playing back only what said nothing of him, of the children, of their intimate life together.

"Left us indeed, Mrs. Babbler," he reproached, "you who called others babbler and cunningly saved your words. A lifetime you tended and loved, and now not a word of us, for us. Left us indeed? Left me."

And he took out his solitaire deck, shuffled the cards loudly, slapped them down.

Lift high banner of reason (tatter of an orator's voice) *Justice freedom and light*
Mankind life worthy heroic capacities
Seeks (blur of shudder) *belong human being*

"Words, words," he accused, "and what human beings did *you* seek around you, Mrs. Live Alone, and what mankind think worthy?"

Though even as he spoke, he remembered she had not always been isolated, had not always wanted to be alone (as he knew there had been a voice before this gossamer one; before the hoarse voice that broke from silence to lash, make incidents, shame him—a girl's voice of eloquence that spoke their highest dreams). But again he could reconstruct, image nothing of what had been before, or when, or how, it had changed.

Ace, queen, jack. The pillar shadow fell, so, in two tracks; in the mirror depths glistened a moonlike blob, the empty solution bottle. And it worked in him: *of reason and justice and freedom. Dogma dead:* he remembered the quotation, laughed bitterly. "Hah, good you do not know what you say; good Victor Hugo died and did not see it, his twentieth century."

Deuce, ten, five. Dauntlessly she began a song of their youth of belief:

These things shall be, a loftier race
than e'er the world hath known shall rise
with flame of freedom in their souls
and light of knowledge in their eyes

King, four, jack. "In the twentieth century, hah!"

They shall be gentle, brave and strong
to spill no drop of blood, but dare
all that may plant man's lordship firm
on earth and fire and sea and air

"To spill no drop of blood, hah! So, cadaver, and you too, cadaver Hugo, 'in the twentieth century ignorance will be dead, dogma will be dead, war will be dead, and for all mankind one country—of fulfillment.' Hah!"

And every life (long strangling cough) *shall be a song*

The cards fell from his fingers. Without warning, the bereavement and betrayal he had sheltered—compounded through the years—hidden even from himself—revealed itself,

uncoiled,
released,
sprung

and with it the monstrous shapes of what had actually happened in the century.

A ravening hunger or thirst seized him. He groped into the kitchenette, switched on all three lights, piled a tray—"you have finished your night snack, Mrs. Cadaver, now I will have mine." And he was shocked at the tears that splashed on the tray.

"Salt tears. For free. I forgot to shake on salt?"

Whispered: "Lost, how much I lost."

Escaped to the grandchildren whose childhoods were childish, who had never hungered, who lived unravaged by disease in warm houses of many rooms, had all the school for which they cared, could walk on any street, stood a head taller than their grandparents, towered above—beautiful skins, straight backs, clear straightforward eyes. "Yes, you in Olshana," he said to the town of sixty years ago, "they would be nobility to you."

And was this not the dream then, come true in ways undreamed? he asked.

And are there no other children in the world? he answered, as if in her harsh voice.

And the flame of freedom, the light of knowledge?

And the drop, the drop of blood?

And he thought that at six Jeannie would get up and it would be his turn to go to her room and sleep, that he could press the buzzer and she would come now; that in the afternoon Ellen Mays was coming, and this time they would play cards and he could marvel at how rouge can stand half an inch on the cheek; that in the evening the doctor would come, and he could beg him to be merciful, to stop the feeding solutions, to let her die.

To let her die, and with her their youth of belief out of which her bright, betrayed words foamed; stained words, that on her working lips came stainless.

Hours yet before Jeannie's turn. He could press the buzzer and wake her to come now; he could take a pill, and with it sleep; he could pour more brandy into his milk glass, though what he had poured was not yet touched.

Instead he went back, checked her pulse, gently tended with his knotty fingers as Jeannie had taught.

She was whimpering; her hand crawled across the covers for his. Compassionately he enfolded it, and with his free hand gathered up the cards again. Still was there thirst or hunger ravening in him.

That world of their youth—dark, ignorant, terrible with hate and disease—how was it that living in it, in the midst of corruption, filth, treachery, degradation, they had not mistrusted man nor themselves; had believed so beautifully, so . . . falsely?

"Aaah children," he said out loud, "how we believed, how we belonged." And he yearned to package for each of the children, the grandchildren, for everyone, *that joyous certainty, that sense of moving and being moved, of being one and indivisible with the great of the past, with all mankind.* Package it, stand on corners, in front of stadiums and on crowded beaches, knock on doors, give it as a fabled gift.

"And why not in cereal boxes, in soap packages?" he mocked himself. "Aah. You have taken my senses, cadaver."

Words foamed, died unsounded. Her body writhed; she made kissing motions with her mouth. (Her lips moving as she read, poring over the Book of the Martyrs, the magnifying glass superimposed over the heavy eyeglasses.) *Still she had believed?* "Eva!" he whispered. "Still you believed? You lived by it? These Things Shall Be?"

"One pound soup meat," she answered distinctly, "one soup bone."

"My ears heard you. Ellen Mays was witness: 'Man . . . one has to believe.'" Imploringly: "Eva!"

"Bread, day old." She was mumbling. "Please, in a wooden box . . . for kindling. The thread, hah, the thread breaks. Cheap thread,"—and a gurgling, enormously loud, began in her throat.

"I ask for stone; she gives me bread—day old." He pulled his hand away, shouted: "Who wanted questions? Everything you have to wake?" Then dully, "Ah let me help you turn, poor creature."

Words jumbled, cleared. In a voice of crowded terror:

"Paul, Sammy, don't fight.

"Hannah, have I ten hands?

"How can I give it, Clara, how can I give it if I don't have?"

"You lie," he said sturdily, "there was joy too." Bitterly: "Ah how cheap you speak of us at the last."

As if to rebuke him, as if her voice had no relationship with her flailing body, she sang clearly, beautifully, a school song the children had taught her when they were little; begged:

"Not look my hair where they cut . . ."

(The crown of braids shorn.) And instantly he left the mute old woman poring over the Book of the Martyrs; went past the mother treadling at the sewing machine, singing with the children; past the girl in her wrinkled prison dress, hiding her hair with scarred hands, lifting to him her awkward, shamed, imploring eyes of love; and took her in his arms, dear, personal, fleshed, in all the heavy passion he had loved to rouse from her.

"Eva!"

Her little claw hand beat the covers. How much, how much can a man stand? He took up the cards, put them down, circled the beds, walked to the dresser, opened, shut drawers, brushed his hair, moved his hand bit by bit over the mirror to see what of the reflection he could blot out with each move, and felt that at any moment he would die of what was unendurable. Went to press the buzzer to wake Jeannie, looked down, saw on Jeannie's sketch pad the hospital bed, with *her;* the double bed alongside, with him; the tall pillar feeding into her veins, and their hands, his and hers, clasped, feeding each other. And as if he had been instructed he went to his bed, lay down, holding the sketch as a shield against the monstrous shapes of loss, of betrayal, of death—and with his free hand took hers back into his.

So Jeannie found them in the morning.

That last day the agony was perpetual. Time after time it lifted her almost off the bed, so they had to fight to hold her down. He could not endure and left the room; wept as if there never would be tears enough.

Jeannie came to comfort him. In her light voice she said: Granddaddy, Granddaddy don't cry. She is not there, she promised me. On the last day, she said she would go back to when she first heard music, a little girl on the road of the village where she was born. She promised me. It is a wedding—and like chickens they dance, while the flutes so joyous and vibrant tremble in the air. Leave her there, Granddaddy, it's all right. She promised me. Come back, come back in and help her poor body to die.

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HOLIDAY

by Katherine Anne Porter, who was born at Indian Creek, Texas, in 1890. She was educated in the South and has been awarded numerous honors for her writing. Miss Porter, who now lives in Washington, D.C., has traveled extensively in the United States, Europe, and Mexico and has taught in several universities. Her published works include two collections of short stories, Flowering Judas *and* The Leaning Tower, *and a book of three short novels,* Pale Horse, Pale Rider. *A fourth novel,* Ship of Fools, *published in 1962, was a national best seller.*

At that time I was too young for some of the troubles I was having, and I had not yet learned what to do with them. It no longer can matter what kind of troubles they were, or what finally became of them. It seemed to me then there was nothing to do but run away from them, though all my tradition, background, and training had taught me unanswerably that no one except a coward ever runs away from anything. What nonsense! They should have taught me the difference between courage and foolhardiness, instead of leaving me to find it out for myself. I learned finally that if I still had the sense I was born with, I would take off like a deer at the first warning of certain dangers. But this story I am about to tell you happened before this great truth impressed itself upon me—that we do not run from the troubles and dangers that are truly ours, and it is better to learn what they are earlier than later. And if we don't run from the others, we are fools.

I confided to my friend Louise, a former schoolmate about my own age, not my troubles but my little problem: I wanted to go somewhere for a spring holiday, by myself, to the country, and it should be very simple and nice and, of course, not expensive, and she was not to tell anyone where I had gone; but if she liked, I would send her word now and then, if anything interesting was happening. She said she loved getting letters but hated an-

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swering them; and she knew the very place for me, and she would not tell anybody anything. Louise had then—she has it still—something near to genius for making improbable persons, places, and situations sound attractive. She told amusing stories that did not turn grim on you until a little while later, when by chance you saw and heard for yourself. So with this story. Everything was just as Louise had said, if you like, and everything was, at the same time, quite different.

"I know the very place," said Louise. "A family of real old-fashioned German peasants, in the deep blackland Texas farm country, a household in real patriarchal style—the kind of thing you'd hate to live with but is very nice to visit. Old father, God Almighty himself, with whiskers and all; old mother, matriarch in men's shoes; endless daughters and sons and sons-in-law, and fat babies falling about the place; and fat puppies—my favorite was a darling little black thing named Kuno—cows, calves, and sheep and lambs and goats and turkeys and guineas roaming up and down the shallow green hills, ducks and geese on the ponds. I was there in the summer when the peaches and watermelons were in—"

"This is the end of March," I said, doubtfully.

"Spring comes early there," said Louise. "I'll write to the Müllers about you, you just get ready to go."

"Just where is this paradise?"

"Not far from the Louisiana line," said Louise. "I'll ask them to give you my attic—oh, that was a sweet place! It's a big room, with the roof sloping to the floor on each side, and the roof leaks a little when it rains, so the shingles are all stained in beautiful streaks, all black and gray and mossy green, and in one corner there used to be a stack of dime novels, The Duchess, Ouida, Mrs. E.D.E.N. Southworth, Ella Wheeler Wilcox's poems—one summer they had a lady boarder who was a great reader, and she went off and left her library. I loved it! And everybody was so healthy and good-hearted, and the weather was perfect. . . . How long do you want to stay?"

I hadn't thought of this, so I said at random, "About a month."

A few days later I found myself tossed off like an express package from a dirty little crawling train onto the sodden platform of a country station, where the stationmaster emerged and locked up the waiting room before the train had got round the bend. As he clumped by me he shifted his wad of tobacco to his cheek and asked, "Where you goin'?"

"To the Müller farm," I said, standing beside my small trunk and suitcase with the bitter wind cutting my shoulders through my thin coat.

"Anybody meet you?" he asked, not pausing.

"They *said* so."

"All right," he said, and got into his little ragged buckboard with a sway-backed horse and drove away.

I turned my trunk on its side and sat on it facing the wind and the desolate mud-colored shapeless scene and began making up my first letter to Louise. First I was going to tell her that unless she meant to be a novelist, there was no excuse for her having so much imagination. In daily life, I was going to tell her, there are also such useful things as the plain facts that should be stuck to, through thick and thin. Anything else led to confusion like this. I was beginning to enjoy my letter to Louise when a sturdy boy about twelve years old crossed the platform. As he neared me, he took off his rough cap and bunched it in his thick hand, dirt-stained at the knuckles. His round cheeks, his round nose, his round chin were a cool, healthy red. In the globe of his face, as neatly circular as if drawn in bright crayon, his narrow, long, tip-tilted eyes, clear as pale-blue water, seemed out of place, as if two incompatible strains had collided in making him. They were beautiful eyes, and the rest of the face was not to be taken seriously. A blue woolen blouse buttoned up to his chin ended abruptly at his waist as if he would outgrow it in another half hour, and his blue drill breeches flapped about his ankles. His old clodhopper shoes were several sizes too big for him. Altogether, it was plain he was not the first one to wear his clothes. He was a cheerful, detached, self-possessed apparition against the tumbled brown earth and ragged dark sky, and I smiled at him as well as I could with a face that felt like wet clay.

He smiled back slightly without meeting my eye, motioning for me to take up my suitcase. He swung my trunk to his head and tottered across the uneven platform, down the steps slippery with mud, where I expected to see him crushed beneath his burden like an ant under a stone. He heaved the trunk into the back of his wagon with a fine smash, took my suitcase and tossed it after, then climbed up over one front wheel while I scrambled my way up over the other.

The pony, shaggy as a wintering bear, eased himself into a grudging trot, while the boy, bowed over with his cap pulled down over his ears and eyebrows, held the reins slack and fell into a brown study. I examined the harness, a real mystery. It met and clung in all sorts of unexpected places; it parted company in what appeared to be strategic seats of jointure. It was mended sketchily in risky places with bits of hairy rope. Other seemingly unimportant parts were bound together irrevocably with wire. The bridle was too long for the pony's stocky head, so he had shaken the bit out of his mouth at the start, apparently, and went his own way at his own pace.

Our vehicle was an exhausted specimen of something called a spring wagon, who knows why? There were no springs, and the shallow enclosed platform at the back, suitable for carrying various plunder, was worn away

until it barely reached midway of the back wheels, one side of it steadily scraping the iron tire. The wheels themselves spun not dully around and around in the way of common wheels, but elliptically, being loosened at the hubs, so that we proceeded with a drunken, hilarious swagger, like the rolling motion of a small boat on a choppy sea.

The soaked brown fields fell away on either side of the lane, all rough with winter-worn stubble ready to sink and become earth again. The scanty leafless woods ran along an edge of the field nearby. There was nothing beautiful in those woods now except the promise of spring, for I detested bleakness, but it gave me pleasure to think that beyond this there might be something else beautiful in its own being, a river shaped and contained by its banks, or a field stripped down to its true meaning, plowed and ready for the seed. The road turned abruptly and was almost hidden for a moment, and we were going through the woods. Closer sight of the crooked branches assured me that spring was beginning, if sparely, reluctantly; the leaves were budding in tiny cones of watery green besprinkling all the new shoots; a thin sedate rain began again to fall, not so opaque as a fog, but a mist that merely deepened overhead, and lowered, until the clouds became rain in one swathing, delicate gray.

As we emerged from the woods, the boy roused himself and pointed forward, in silence. We were approaching the farm along the skirts of a fine peach orchard, now faintly colored with young buds, but there was nothing to disguise the gaunt and aching ugliness of the farmhouse itself. In this Texas valley, so gently modulated with small crests and shallows, "rolling country" as the farmers say, the house was set on the peak of the barest rise of ground, as if the most infertile spot had been thriftily chosen for building a shelter. It stood there staring and naked, an intruding stranger, strange even beside the barns ranged generously along the back, low-eaved and weathered to the color of stone.

The narrow windows and the steeply sloping roof oppressed me; I wished to turn away and go back. I had come a long way to be so disappointed, I thought, and yet I must go on, for there could be nothing here for me more painful than what I had left. But as we drew near the house, now hardly visible except for the yellow lamplight in the back, perhaps in the kitchen, my feelings changed again toward warmth and tenderness, or perhaps just an apprehension that I could feel so, maybe, again.

The wagon drew up before the porch, and I started climbing down. No sooner had my foot touched ground than an enormous black dog of the detestable German shepherd breed leaped silently at me, and as silently I covered my face with my arms and leaped back. "Kuno, down!" shouted the boy, lunging at him. The front door flew open and a young girl with yellow

hair ran down the steps and seized the ugly beast by the scruff. "He does not mean anything," she said seriously in English. "He is only a dog."

Just Louise's darling little puppy Kuno, I thought, a year or so older. Kuno whined, apologized by bowing and scraping one front paw on the ground, and the girl holding his scruff said, shyly and proudly, "I teach him that. He has always such bad manners, but I teach him!"

I had arrived, it seemed, at the moment when the evening chores were about to begin. The entire Müller household streamed out of the door, each man and woman going about the affairs of the moment. The young girl walked with me up the porch steps and said, "This is my brother Hans," and a young man paused to shake hands and passed by. "This is my brother Fritz," she said, and Fritz took my hand and dropped it as he went. "My sister Annetje," said the young girl, and a quiet young woman with a baby draped loosely like a scarf over her shoulder smiled and held out her hand. Hand after hand went by, their palms variously younger or older, broad or small, male or female, but all thick hard decent peasant hands, warm and strong. And in every face I saw again the pale, tilted eyes, on every head that taffy-colored hair, as though they might all be brothers and sisters, though Annetje's husband and still another daughter's husband had gone by after greeting me. In the wide hall with a door at front and back, full of cloudy light and the smell of soap, the old mother, also on her way out, stopped to offer her hand. She was a tall strong-looking woman wearing a three-cornered black wool shawl on her head, her skirts looped up over a brown flannel petticoat. Not from her did the young ones get those water-clear eyes. Hers were black and shrewd and searching, a band of hair showed black streaked with gray, her seamed dry face was brown as seasoned bark, and she walked in her rubber boots with the stride of a man. She shook my hand briefly and said in German English that I was welcome, smiling and showing her blackened teeth.

"This is my girl Hatsy," she told me, "and she will show you to your room." Hatsy took my hand as if I were a child needing a guide. I followed her up a flight of steps steep as a ladder, and there we were, in Louise's attic room, with the sloping roof. Yes, the shingles were stained all the colors she had said. There were the dime novels heaped in the corner. For once, Louise had got it straight, and it was homely and familiar, as if I had seen it before. "My mother says we could give you a better place on the downstairs," said Hatsy, in her soft blurred English, "but *she* said in her letter you would like it so." I told her indeed I did like it so. She went down the steep stairs then, and her brother came up as if he were climbing a tree, with the trunk on his head and the suitcase in his right hand, and I could not see what kept the trunk from crashing back to the bottom, as he used the left hand to climb with. He put his burden down and straightened up, wriggling his shoulders

and panting only a little. I thanked him and he pushed his cap back and pulled it forward again, which I took for some sort of polite response, and clattered out hugely. Looking out of my window a few minutes later, I saw him setting off across the fields carrying a lighted lantern and a large steel trap.

I began changing my first letter to Louise. "I'm going to like it here. I don't quite know why, but it's going to be all right. Maybe I can tell you later—"

The sound of the German speech in the household below was part of the pleasantness, for they were not talking to me and did not expect me to answer. All the German I understood then was contained in five small deadly sentimental songs of Heine's, learned by heart; and this was a very different tongue, Low German corrupted by three generations in a foreign country. A dozen miles away, where Texas and Louisiana melted together in a rotting swamp whose sluggish undertow of decay nourished the roots of pine and cedar, a colony of French immigrants had lived out two hundred years of exile, not wholly incorruptible, but mystically faithful to the marrow of their bones, obstinately speaking their old French, by then as strange to the French as it was to the English. I had known many of these families during a certain long summer happily remembered, and here, listening to another language nobody could understand except those of this small farming community, I knew that I was again in a house of perpetual exile. These were solid, practical, hard-bitten, landholding German peasants who stuck their mattocks into the earth deep and held fast wherever they were, because to them life and the land were one indivisible thing; but never in any wise did they confuse nationality with habitation.

I liked the thick warm voices, and it was good not to have to understand what they were saying. I loved that silence which means freedom from the constant pressure of other minds and other opinions and other feelings, that freedom to fold up in quiet and go back to my own center, to find out again, for it is always a rediscovery, what kind of creature it is that rules me finally, makes all the decisions no matter who thinks they make them, even I; who little by little takes everything away except the one thing I cannot live without, and who will one day say, "Now I am all you have left—take me." I paused there a good while listening to this muted unknown language which was silence with music in it; I could be moved and touched but not troubled by it, as by the crying of frogs or the wind in the trees.

The catalpa tree at my window would, I noticed, when it came into leaf, shut off my view of the barns and the fields beyond. When in bloom the branches would almost reach through the window. But now they were a thin screen through which the calves, splotchy red and white, moved prettily

against the weathered darkness of the sheds. The brown fields would soon be green again; the sheep would not look then as they did now, merely lumps of moving earth, but would be washed by the rains and become clean gray. All the beauty of the landscape now was in the harmony of the valley rolling fluently away to the wood's edge. It was an inland country, with the forlorn look of all unloved things; winter in this part of the South is a moribund coma, not the Northern death sleep with the sure promise of resurrection. But in my South, my loved and never-forgotten country, after her long sickness, with only a slight stirring, an opening of the eyes between one breath and the next, between night and day, the earth revives and bursts into the plenty of spring with fruit and flowers together, spring and summer at once under the hot shimmering blue sky.

The freshening wind promised another light sedate rain to come at evening. The voices below-stairs dispersed, rose again, separately calling from the yards and barns. The old woman strode down the path toward the cow sheds, Hatsy running behind her. The woman wore her wooden yoke, with the milking pails covered and closed with iron hasps, slung easily across her shoulders, but her daughter carried two tin milking pails on her arm. When they pushed back the bars of cedar which opened onto the fields, the cows came through lowing and crowding, and the calves scampered each to his own dam with reaching, opened mouths. Then there was the battle of separating the hungry children from their mothers when they had taken their scanty share. The old woman slapped their little haunches with her open palm, Hatsy dragged at their halters, her feet slipping wide in the mud, the cows bellowed and brandished their horns, the calves bawled like rebellious babies. Hatsy's long yellow braids whisked round her shoulders, her laughter was a shrill streak of gaiety above the angry cow voices and the raucous shouting of the old woman.

From the kitchen porch below came the sound of splashing water, the creaking of the pump handle, and the stamping boots of men. I sat in the window watching the darkness come on slowly. All the sounds of the place gathered under the roof while the lamps were being lighted. My own small lamp had a handle on the oil bowl, like a cup's. There was also a lantern with a frosted chimney hanging by a nail on the wall. A voice called to me from the foot of my stairs and I looked down into the face of a dark-skinned, flaxen-haired young woman, far advanced in pregnancy, and carrying a prosperous year-old boy on her hip, one arm clutching him to her, the other raised above her head so that her lantern shone upon their heads. "The supper is now ready," she said, and waited for me to come down before turning away.

In the large square room the whole family was gathering at a long table covered with a red checkered cotton cloth, heaped-up platters of steam-

ing food at either end. A crippled and badly deformed servant girl was setting down pitchers of milk. Her head was so bowed over, her face was almost hidden, and her whole body was maimed in some painful, mysterious way, probably congenital, I supposed, though she seemed wiry and tough. Her knotted hands shook continually, her wagging head kept pace with her restless elbows. She ran unsteadily around the table scattering plates, dodging whoever stood in her way; no one moved aside for her, or spoke to her, or even glanced after her when she vanished into the kitchen.

The men moved forward to their chairs. Father Müller took his patriarch's place at the head of the table, Mother Müller looming behind him like a dark boulder. The young men ranged themselves about one side, the married ones with their wives standing back of their chairs to serve them, for three generations in this country had not made them self-conscious or disturbed their ancient customs. The two sons-in-law and three sons rolled down their shirt sleeves before beginning to eat. Their faces were polished with recent scrubbing and their open collars were damp.

Mother Müller pointed to me, then waved her hand at her household, telling off their names rapidly once more. I was a stranger and a guest, so was seated on the men's side of the table, and Hatsy, whose real name turned out to be Huldah, the maiden of the family, was seated on the children's side of the board, attending to them and keeping them in order. These infants ranged from two years to ten, five in number—not counting the one still straddling his mother's hip behind his father's chair—divided between the two married daughters. The children ravened and gorged and reached their hands into the sugar bowl to sprinkle sugar on everything they ate, solemnly elated over their food and paying no attention to Hatsy, who struggled with them only a little less energetically than she did with the calves, and ate almost nothing. She was about seventeen years old, pale-lipped and too thin, and her sleek fine butter-yellow hair, streaked light and dark, real German peasant hair, gave her an air of fragility. But she shared the big-boned structure, the enormous energy and animal force that was like a bodily presence itself in the room; and seeing Father Müller's pale-gray deep-set choleric eyes and high cheekbones, it was easy to trace the family resemblance around the table: it was plain that poor Mother Müller had never had a child of her own—black-eyed, black-haired South Germany people. True, she had borne them, but that was all; they belonged to their father. Even the tawny Gretchen, expecting another baby, obviously the pet of the family, with the sly smiling manner of a spoiled child, who wore the contented air of a lazy, healthy young animal, seeming always about to yawn, had hair like pulled taffy and those slanted clear eyes. She stood now easing the weight of her little boy on her husband's chair back, reaching with her left arm over his shoulder to refill his plate from time to time.

Annetje's baby drooled comfortably down her back, while she spooned things from platters and bowls for her husband. Whenever their eyes met, they smiled with a gentle, reserved warmth in their eyes, the smile of long and sure friendship.

Father Müller did not in the least believe in his children's marrying and leaving home. Marry, yes, of course; but must that take a son or daughter from him? He always could provide work and a place in the household for his daughters' husbands, and in time he would do the same for his sons' wives. A new room had lately been built on, to the northeast, Annetje explained to me, leaning above her husband's head and talking across the table, for Hatsy to live in when she should be married. Hatsy turned very beautifully pink and ducked her head almost into her plate, then looked up boldly and said, "*Jah, jah,* I am marrit now soon!" Everybody laughed except Mother Müller, who said in German that girls at home never knew when they were well off—no, they must go bringing in husbands. This remark did not seem to hurt anybody's feelings, and Gretchen said it was nice that I was going to be here for the wedding. This reminded Annetje of something, and she spoke in English to the table at large, saying that the Lutheran pastor had advised her to attend church oftener and put her young ones in Sunday School, so that God would give her a blessing with her next child. I counted around again, and sure enough, with Gretchen's unborn, there were eight children at that table under the age of ten; somebody was going to need a blessing in all that crowd, no doubt. Father Müller delivered a short speech to his daughter in German, then turned to me and said, "What I say iss, it iss all craziness to go to church and pay a preacher goot money to talk his nonsense. Say rather that he pay me to come and lissen, then I vill go!" His eyes glared with sudden fierceness above his square speckled gray and yellow beard that sprouted directly out from the high cheekbones. "He thinks, so, that my time maybe costs nothing? That iss goot! Let him pay me!"

Mother Müller snorted and shuffled her feet. "Ach, you talk, you talk! Now you vill make the pastor goot and mad if he hears. Vot ve do, if he vill not chrissen the babies?"

"You give him goot money, he vill chrissen," shouted Father Müller. "You vait und see!"

"Ah sure, dot iss so," agreed Mother Müller. "Only do not let him hear!"

There was a gust of excited talk in German, with much rapping of knife handles on the table. I gave up trying to understand, but watched their faces. It sounded like a pitched battle, but they were agreeing about something. They were united in their tribal skepticisms, as in everything else. I got a powerful impression that they were all, even the sons-in-law, one human being divided into several separate appearances. The crippled servant girl brought in more food and gathered up plates and went away in her limping

run, and she seemed to me the only individual in the house. Even I felt divided into many fragments, having left or lost a part of myself in every place I had traveled, in every life mine had touched, above all, in every death of someone near to me that had carried into the grave some part of my living cells. But the servant, she was whole, and belonged nowhere.

I settled easily enough into the marginal life of the household ways and habits. Day began early at the Müllers', and we ate breakfast by yellow lamplight, with the gray damp winds blowing with spring softness through the open windows. The men swallowed their last cups of steaming coffee standing, with their hats on, and went out to harness the horses to the plows at sunrise. Annetje, with her fat baby slung over her shoulder, could sweep a room or make a bed with one hand, all finished before the day was well begun; and she spent the rest of the day outdoors, caring for the chickens and the pigs. Now and then she came in with a shallow box full of newly hatched chickens, abject dabs of wet fluff, and put them on a table in her bedroom where she might tend them carefully on their first day. Mother Müller strode about hugely, giving orders right and left, while Father Müller, smoothing his whiskers and lighting his pipe, drove away to town with Mother Müller calling out after him final directions and instructions about household needs. He never spoke a word to her or looked at her and appeared not to be listening, but he always returned in a few hours with every commission performed exactly. After I had made my own bed and set my attic in order, there was nothing at all for me to do, and I walked out of this enthusiastic bustle into the lane, feeling extremely useless. But the repose, the almost hysterical inertia of their minds in the midst of this muscular life, communicated itself to me little by little, and I absorbed it gratefully in silence and felt all the hidden knotted painful places in my own mind beginning to loosen. It was easier to breathe, and I might weep, if I pleased. In a very few days I no longer felt like weeping.

One morning I saw Hatsy spading up the kitchen garden plot, and my offer to help, to spread the seeds and cover them, was accepted. We worked at this for several hours each morning, until the warmth of the sun and the stooping posture induced in me a comfortable vertigo. I forgot to count the days, they were one like the other except as the colors of the air changed, deepening and warming to keep step with the advancing season, and the earth grew firmer underfoot with the swelling tangle of crowding roots.

The children, so hungry and noisy at the table, were peaceable little folk who played silent engrossed games in the front yard. They were always kneading mud into loaves and pies and carrying their battered dolls and cotton rag animals through the operations of domestic life. They fed them, put them to bed; they got them up and fed them again, set them to their

chores making more mud loaves; or they would harness themselves to their carts and gallop away to a great shady chestnut tree on the opposite side of the house. Here the tree became the *Turnverein*, and they themselves were again human beings, solemnly ambling about in a dance and going through the motions of drinking beer. Miraculously changed once more into horses, they harnessed themselves and galloped home. They came at call to be fed and put to sleep with the docility of their own toys or animal playmates. Their mothers handled them with instinctive, constant gentleness; they never seemed to be troubled by them. They were as devoted and caretaking as a cat with her kittens.

Sometimes I took Annetje's next to youngest child, a baby of two years, in her little wagon, and we would go down through the orchard and into the lane for a short distance. I would turn again into a smaller lane, smoother because less traveled, and we would go slowly between the aisles of mulberry trees where the fruit was beginning to hang and curl like green furry worms. The baby would sit in a compact mound of flannel and calico, her pale-blue eyes tilted and shining under her cap, her little lower teeth showing in a rapt smile. Sometimes several of the other children would follow along quietly. When I turned, they all turned without question, and we would proceed back to the house as sedately as we had set out.

The narrow lane, I discovered, led to the river, and it became my favorite walk. Almost every day I went along the edge of the naked wood, passionately occupied with looking for signs of spring. The changes there were so subtle and gradual, I found one day that branches of willows and sprays of blackberry vine alike were covered with fine points of green; the color had changed overnight, or so it seemed, and I knew that tomorrow the whole valley and wood and edge of the river would be quick and feathery with golden green blowing in the winds.

And it was so. On that day I did not leave the river until after dark and came home through the marsh with the owls and nightjars crying over my head, calling in a strange broken chorus in the woods until the farthest answering cry was a ghostly echo. When I went through the orchard the trees were freshly budded out with pale bloom, the branches were immobile in the thin darkness, but the flower clusters shivered in a soundless dance of delicately woven light, whirling as airily as leaves in a breeze, as rhythmically as water in a fountain. Every tree was budded out with this living, pulsing fire as fragile and cool as bubbles. When I opened the gate their light shone on my hands like fox fire. When I looked back, the shimmer of golden light was there, it was no dream.

Hatsy was on her knees in the dining room, washing the floor with heavy dark rags. She always did this work at night, so the men with their heavy boots would not be tracking it up again and it would be immaculate in the

morning. She turned her young face to me in a stupor of fatigue. "Ottilie! Ottilie!" she called loudly, and before I could speak, she said, "Ottilie will give you supper. It is waiting, all ready." I tried to tell her that I was not hungry, but she wished to reassure me. "Look, we all must eat. Now, or then, it's no trouble." She sat back on her heels, and raising her head, looked over the window sill at the orchard. She smiled and paused for a moment and said happily, "Now it is come spring. Every spring we have that." She bent again over the great pail of water with her mops.

The crippled servant came in, stumbling perilously on the slippery floor, and set a dish before me, lentils with sausage and red chopped cabbage. It was hot and savory and I was truly grateful, for I found I was hungry, after all. I looked at her—so her name was Ottilie?—and said, "Thank you." "She can't talk," said Hatsy, simply, stating a fact that need not be emphasized. The blurred, dark face was neither young nor old, but crumpled into criss-cross wrinkles, irrelevant either to age or suffering; simply wrinkles, patternless blackened seams as if the perishable flesh had been wrung in a hard cruel fist. Yet in that mutilated face I saw high cheekbones, slanted water-blue eyes, the pupils very large and strained with the anxiety of one peering into a darkness full of danger. She jarred heavily against the table as she turned, her bowed back trembling with the perpetual working of her withered arms, and ran away in aimless, driven haste.

Hatsy sat on her heels again for a moment, tossed her braids back over her shoulder, and said, "That is Ottilie. She is not sick now. She is only like that since she was sick when she was baby. But she can work so well as I can. She cooks. But she cannot talk so you can understand." She went up on her knees, bowed over, and began to scrub again, with new energy. She was really a network of thin taut ligaments and long muscles elastic as woven steel. She would always work too hard, and be tired all her life, and never know that this was anything but perfectly natural; everybody worked all the time, because there was always more work waiting when they had finished what they were doing then. I ate my supper and took my plate to the kitchen and set it on the table. Ottilie was sitting in a kitchen chair with her feet in the open oven, her arms folded, and her head waggling a little. She did not see or hear me.

At home, Hatsy wore an old brown corduroy dress and galoshes without stockings. Her skirts were short enough to show her thin legs, slightly crooked below the knees, as if she had walked too early. "Hatsy, she's a good, quick girl," said Mother Müller, to whom praising anybody or anything did not come easily. On Saturdays, Hatsy took a voluminous bath in a big tub in the closet back of the kitchen, where also were stored the extra chamber pots, slop jars, and water jugs. She then unplaited her yellow hair and

bound up the crinkled floss with a wreath of pink cotton rosebuds, put on her pale-blue China silk dress, and went to the *Turnverein* to dance and drink a seidel of dark-brown beer with her devoted suitor, who resembled her brothers enough to be her brother. On Sundays, the entire family went to the *Turnverein* after copious washings, getting into starched dresses and shirts, and getting the baskets of food stored in the wagons. The servant, Ottilie, would rush out to see them off, standing with both shaking arms folded over her forehead, shading her troubled eyes to watch them to the turn of the lane. Her muteness seemed nearly absolute; she had no coherent language of signs. Yet three times a day she spread that enormous table with solid food, freshly baked bread, huge platters of vegetables, immoderate roasts of meat, extravagant tarts, strudels, pies—enough for twenty people. If neighbors came in for an afternoon on some holiday, Ottilie would stumble into the big north room, the parlor, with its golden-oak melodeon, a harsh-green Brussels carpet, Nottingham lace curtains, crocheted lace antimacassars on the chair backs, to serve them coffee with cream and sugar and thick slices of yellow cake.

Mother Müller sat but seldom in her parlor, and always with an air of formal unease, her knotted big fingers cramped in a cluster. But Father Müller often sat there in the evenings, where no one ventured to follow him unless commanded; he sometimes played chess with his elder son-in-law, who had learned a good while ago that Father Müller was a good player who abhorred an easy victory, and he dared not do less than put up the best fight he was able, but even so, if Father Müller felt himself winning too often, he would roar, "No, you are not trying! You are not doing your best. Now we stop this nonsense!", and the son-in-law would find himself dismissed in temporary disgrace.

Most evenings, however, Father Müller sat by himself and read *Das Kapital.* He would settle deeply into the red plush base rocker and spread the volume upon a low table before him. It was an early edition in blotty black German type, stained and ragged in its leather cover, the pages falling apart, a very bible. He knew whole chapters almost by heart, and added nothing to, took nothing from, the canonical, once-delivered text. I cannot say at that time of my life I had never heard of *Das Kapital,* but I had certainly never known anyone who had read it, though if anyone mentioned it, it was always with profound disapproval. It was not a book one had to read in order to reject it. And here was this respectable old farmer who accepted its dogma as a religion—that is to say, its legendary inapplicable precepts were just, right, proper, one must believe in them, of course; but life, everyday living, was another and unrelated thing. Father Müller was the wealthiest man in his community; almost every neighboring farmer rented land from him, and

some of them worked it on the share system. He explained this to me one evening after he had given up trying to teach me chess. He was not surprised that I could not learn, at least not in one lesson, and he was not surprised either that I knew nothing about *Das Kapital*. He explained his own arrangements to me thus: "These men, they cannot buy their land. The land must be bought, for *Kapital* owns it, and *Kapital* will not give back to the worker the land that is his. Well, somehow, I can always buy land. Why? I do not know. I only know that with my first land here I made good crops to buy more land, and so I rent it cheap, more than anybody else I rent it cheap, I lend money so my neighbors do not fall into the hands of the bank, and so I am not *Kapital*. Someday these workers, they can buy land from me, for less than they can get it anywhere else. Well, that is what I can do, that is all." He turned over a page, and his angry gray eyes looked out at me under his shaggy brows. "I buy my land with my hard work, all my life, and I rent it cheap to my neighbors, and then they say they will not elect my son-in-law, my Annetje's husband, to be sheriff because I am atheist. So then I say, all right, but next year you pay more for your land or more shares of your crops. If I am atheist, I will act like one. So, my Annetje's husband is sheriff, that is all."

He had put a stubby forefinger on a line to mark his place, and now he sank himself into his book, and I left quietly without saying good night.

The *Turnverein* was an octagonal pavilion set in a cleared space in a patch of woods belonging to Father Müller. The German colony came here to sit about in the cool shade, while a small brass band played cloppity country dances. The girls danced with energy and direction, their starched petticoats rustling like dry leaves. The boys were more awkward, but willing; they clutched their partners' waists and left crumpled sweaty spots where they clutched. Here Mother Müller took her ease after a hard week. Her gaunt limbs would relax, her knees spread squarely apart, and she would gossip over her beer with the women of her own generation.

On the other side of the pavilion, Father Müller would sit with the sober grandfathers, their long curved pipes wagging on their chests as they discussed local politics with profound gravity, their hard peasant fatalism tempered only a little by a shrewd worldly distrust of all officeholders not personally known to them, all political plans except their own immediate ones. When Father Müller talked, they listened respectfully, with faith in him as a strong man, head of his own house and his community. They nodded slowly whenever he took his pipe from his mouth and gestured, holding it by the bowl as if it were a stone he was getting ready to throw.

On our way back from the *Turnverein* one evening, Mother Müller said to

me, "Well, now, by the grace of Gott it is all settled between Hatsy and her man. It is next Sunday by this time they will be marrit."

All the folk who usually went to the *Turnverein* on Sundays came instead to the Müller house for the wedding. They brought useful presents, mostly bed linen, pillow covers, a white counterpane, with a few ornaments for the bridal chamber; and the bridegroom's gift to the bride was a necklace, a double string of red coral twigs. Just before the short ceremony began, he slipped the necklace over her head with trembling hands. She smiled up at him shakily and helped him disentangle her short veil from the coral, then they joined hands and turned their faces to the pastor, not letting go until time for the exchange of rings—the widest, thickest, reddest gold bands to be found, no doubt—and at that moment they both stopped smiling and turned a little pale. The groom recovered first, and bent over—he was considerably taller than she—and kissed her on the forehead. His eyes were a deep blue, and his hair not really Müller taffy color, but a light chestnut; a good-looking, gentle-tempered boy, I decided, and he looked at Hatsy as if he liked what he saw. They knelt and clasped hands again for the final prayer, then stood together and exchanged the bridal kiss, a very chaste reserved one, still not on the lips. Then everybody came to shake hands and the men all kissed the bride and the women all kissed the groom. Some of the women whispered in Hatsy's ear, and all burst out laughing except Hatsy, who turned red from her forehead to her throat. She whispered in turn to her husband, who nodded in agreement. She then tried to slip away quietly, but the watchful young girls were after her, and shortly we saw her running through the blossoming orchard, holding up her white ruffled skirts, with all the girls in pursuit, shrieking and calling like excited hunters, for the first to overtake and touch her would be the next bride. They returned, breathless, dragging the lucky one with them, and held her, against her ecstatic resistance, while all the young boys kissed her.

The guests stayed on for a huge supper, and Ottilie came in, wearing a fresh blue apron, sweat beaded in the wrinkles of her forehead and around her formless mouth, and passed the food around the table. The men ate first, and then Hatsy came in with the women for the first time, still wearing her square little veil of white cotton net bound on her hair with peach blossoms shattered in the bride's race. After supper, one of the girls played waltzes and polkas on the melodeon, and everyone danced. The bridegroom drew gallons of beer from a keg set up in the hall, and at midnight everybody went away, warmly emotional and happy. I went down to the kitchen for a pitcher of hot water. The servant was still setting things to rights, hobbling between table and cupboard. Her face was a brown smudge of anxiety, her eyes were wide and dazed. Her uncertain hands rattled among the pans, but nothing could make her seem real, or in any way connected

with the life around her. Yet when I set my pitcher on the stove, she lifted the heavy kettle and poured the scalding water into it without spilling a drop.

The clear honey green of the early morning sky was a mirror of the bright earth. At the edge of the woods there had sprung a reticent blooming of small white and pale-colored flowers. The peach trees were now each a separate nosegay of shell rose and white. I left the house, meaning to take the short path across to the lane of mulberries. The women were deep in the house, the men were away to the fields, the animals were turned into the pastures, and only Ottilie was visible, sitting on the steps of the back porch peeling potatoes. She gazed in my direction with eyes that fell short of me, and seemed to focus on a point midway between us, and gave no sign. Then she dropped her knife and rose, her mouth opened and closed several times, she strained toward me, motioning with her right hand. I went to her, her hands came out and clutched my sleeve, and for a moment I feared to hear her voice. There was no sound from her, but she drew me along after her, full of some mysterious purpose of her own. She opened the door of a dingy, bitter-smelling room, windowless, which opened off the kitchen, beside the closet where Hatsy took her baths. A lumpy narrow cot and a chest of drawers supporting a blistered looking-glass almost filled the space. Ottilie's lips moved, struggling for speech, as she pulled and tumbled over a heap of rubbish in the top drawer. She took out a photograph and put it in my hands. It was in the old style, faded to a dirty yellow, mounted on cardboard elaborately clipped and gilded at the edges.

I saw a girl child about five years old, a pretty smiling German baby, looking curiously like a slightly elder sister of Annetje's two-year-old, wearing a frilled frock and a prodigious curl of blonde hair on the crown of her head. The strong legs, round as sausages, were encased in long white ribbed stockings, and the square firm feet were laced into old-fashioned soft-soled black boots. Ottilie peered over the picture, twisted her neck, and looked up into my face. I saw the slanted water-blue eyes and the high cheekbones of the Müllers again, mutilated, almost destroyed, but unmistakable. This child was what she had been, and she was without doubt the elder sister of Annetje and Gretchen and Hatsy; in urgent pantomime she insisted that this was so—she patted the picture and her own face, and strove terribly to speak. She pointed to the name written carefully on the back, Ottilie, and touched her mouth with her bent knuckles. Her head wagged in her perpetual nod; her shaking hand seemed to flap the photograph at me in a roguish humor. The bit of cardboard connected her at once somehow to the world of human beings I knew; for an instant some filament lighter than cobweb spun itself out between that living center in her and in me, a fila-

ment from some center that held us all bound to our inescapable common source, so that her life and mine were kin, even a part of each other, and the painfulness and strangeness of her vanished. She knew well that she had been Ottilie, with those steady legs and watching eyes, and she was Ottilie still within herself. For a moment, being alive, she knew she suffered, for she stood and shook with silent crying, smearing away her tears with the open palm of her hand. Even while her cheeks were wet, her face changed. Her eyes cleared and fixed themselves upon that point in space which seemed for her to contain her unaccountable and terrible troubles. She turned her head as if she had heard a voice and disappeared in her staggering run into the kitchen, leaving the drawer open and the photograph face downward on the chest.

At midday meal she came hurrying and splashing coffee on the white floor, restored to her own secret existence of perpetual amazement, and again I had become a stranger to her like all the rest, but she was no stranger to me, and could not be again.

The youngest brother came in, holding up an opossum he had caught in his trap. He swung the furry body from side to side, his eyes fairly narrowed with pride as he showed us the mangled creature. "No, it is cruel, even for the wild animals," said gentle Annetje to me, "but boys love to kill, they love to hurt things. I am always afraid he will trap poor Kuno." I thought privately that Kuno, a wolfish, ungracious beast, might well prove a match for any trap. Annetje was full of silent, tender solicitudes. The kittens, the puppies, the chicks, the lambs and calves were her special care. She was the only one of the women who caressed the weanling calves when she set the pans of milk before them. Her child seemed as much a part of her as if it were not yet born. Still, she seemed to have forgotten that Ottilie was her sister. So had all the others. I remembered how Hatsy had spoken her name but had not said she was her sister. Their silence about her was, I realized, exactly that—simple forgetfulness. She moved among them as invisible to their imaginations as a ghost. Ottilie their sister was something painful that had happened long ago and now was past and done for; they could not live with that memory or its visible reminder—they forgot her in pure self-defense. But I could not forget her. She drifted into my mind like a bit of weed carried in a current and caught there, floating but fixed, refusing to be carried away. I reasoned it out. The Müllers, what else could they have done with Ottilie? By a physical accident in her childhood, she had been stripped of everything but her mere existence. It was not a society or a class that pampered its invalids and the unfit. So long as one lived, one did one's share. This was her place, in this family she had been born and must die; did she suffer? No one asked, no one looked to see. Suffering went with life, suffering and labor. While one lived one worked, that was all, and with-

out complaints, for no one had time to listen, and everybody had his own troubles. So, what else could they have done with Ottilie? As for me, I could do nothing but promise myself that I would forget her, too; and to remember her for the rest of my life.

Sitting at the long table, I would watch Ottilie clattering about in her tormented haste, bringing in that endless food that represented all her life's labors. My mind would follow her into the kitchen, where I could see her peering into the great simmering kettles, the crowded oven, her ruined hands always lifting and stirring, and paring and chopping, her whole body a mere machine of torture. Straight up to the surface of my mind the thought would come urgently, clearly, as if driving time toward the desired event: Let it be now, let it be *now*. Not even tomorrow, no, today. Let her sit down quietly in her rickety chair by the stove and fold those arms, and let us find her there like that, with her head fallen forward on her knees. I would wait, hoping she might not come again, ever again, through that door I gazed at with wincing eyes, as if I might see something unendurable enter. Then she would come, and it was only Ottilie, after all, in the bosom of her family, and one of its most useful and competent members; and they with a deep right instinct had learned to live with her disaster on its own terms, and hers; they had accepted and then made use of what was for them only one more painful event in a world full of troubles, many of them much worse than this. So, a step at a time, I followed the Müllers as nearly as I could in their acceptance of Ottilie and the use they made of her life, for in some way that I could not quite explain to myself, I found great virtue and courage in their steadiness and refusal to feel sorry for anybody, least of all for themselves.

Gretchen bore her child, a son, conveniently between the hours of supper and bedtime, one evening of friendly domestic-sounding rain. The next day brought neighboring women from miles around, and the child was bandied about among them as if he were a new kind of medicine ball. Sedate and shy at dances, emotional at weddings, they were ribald and jocose at births. Over coffee and beer the talk grew broad, the hearty gutturals were swallowed in the belly of laughter; those honest hard-working wives and mothers saw life for a few hours as a hearty low joke, and it did them good. The baby bawled and suckled like a young calf, and the men of the family came in for a look and added their joyful improprieties.

Cloudy weather drove them home earlier than they had meant to go. The whole sky was lined with smoky black and gray vapor hanging in ragged wisps like soot in a chimney. The edges of the woods turned dull purple as the horizon reddened slowly, then faded, and all across the sky ran a deep shuddering mumble of thunder. All the Müllers hurried about getting into rubber boots and oilcloth overalls, shouting to each other, making their

plan of action. The youngest boy came over the ridge of the hill with Kuno helping him to drive the sheep into the fold. Kuno was barking, the sheep were baaing and bleating, the horses freed from the plows were excited; they whinnied and trotted at the lengths of their halters, their ears laid back. The cows were bawling in distress and the calves cried back to them. All the men went out among the animals to round them up and quiet them and get them enclosed safely. Even as Mother Müller, her half-dozen petticoats looped about her thighs and tucked into her hip boots, was striding to join them in the barns, the cloud rack was split end to end by a shattering blow of lightning, and the cloudburst struck the house with the impact of a wave against a ship. The wind broke the windowpanes and the floods poured through. The roof beams strained and the walls bent inward, but the house stood to its foundations. The children were huddled into the inner bedroom with Gretchen. "Come and sit on the bed with me now," she told them calmly, "and be still." She sat up with a shawl around her, suckling the baby. Annetje came then and left her baby with Gretchen, too; and standing at the doorstep with one arm caught over the porch rail, reached down into the furious waters which were rising to the very threshold and dragged in a half-drowned lamb. I followed her. We could not make ourselves heard above the cannonade of thunder, but together we carried the creature into the hall under the stairs, where we rubbed the drowned fleece with rags and pressed his stomach to free him from the water and finally got him sitting up with his feet tucked under him. Annetje was merry with triumph and kept saying in delight, "Alive, alive! Look!"

We left him there when we heard the men shouting and beating at the kitchen door and ran to open it for them. They came in, Mother Müller among them, wearing her yoke and milk pails. She stood there with the water pouring from her skirts, the three-cornered piece of black oilcloth on her head dripping, her rubber boots wrinkled down with the weight of her petticoats. She and Father Müller stood near each other, looking like two gnarled lightning-struck old trees, his beard and oilcloth garments streaming, both their faces suddenly dark and old and tired, tired once for all; they would never be rested again in their lives. Father Müller suddenly roared at her, "Go get yourself dry clothes. Do you want to make yourself sick?"

"Ho," she said, taking off her milk yoke and setting the pails on the floor. "Go change yourself. I bring you dry socks." One of the boys told me she had carried a day-old calf on her back up a ladder against the inside wall of the barn and had put it safely in the hayloft behind a barricade of bales. Then she had lined up the cows in the stable, and sitting on her milking stool in the rising water, she had milked them all. She seemed to think nothing of it.

"Hatsy," she called, "come help with this milk!" Little pale Hatsy came

flying, barefoot because she had been called in the midst of taking off her wet shoes. Her new husband followed her, rather shy of his mother-in-law.

"Let me," he said, wishing to spare his dear bride such heavy work, and started to lift the great pails. "No!" shouted Mother Müller, so the poor young man nearly jumped out of his shirt. "Not you. The milk is not business for a man." He fell back and stood there with dark rivulets of mud seeping from his boots, watching Hatsy pour the milk into pans. Mother Müller started to follow her husband to attend him, but said at the door, "Where is Ottilie?", and no one knew, no one had seen her. "Find her," said Mother Müller. "Tell her we want supper, now."

Hatsy motioned to her husband, and together they tiptoed to the door of Ottilie's room and opened it silently. The light from the kitchen showed them Ottilie, sitting by herself, folded up on the edge of the bed. Hatsy threw the door wide open for more light and called in a high penetrating voice as if to a deaf person or one at a great distance, "Ottilie! Suppertime. We are hungry!", and the young pair left the kitchen to look under the stairway to see how Annetje's lamb was getting on. Then Annetje, Hatsy, and I began sweeping the dirty water and broken glass from the floors of the hall and dining room.

The storm lightened gradually, but the flooding rain continued. At supper there was talk about the loss of animals and their replacement. All the crops must be replanted, the season's labor was for nothing. They were all tired and wet, but they ate heartily and calmly, to strengthen themselves against all the labor of repairing and restoring which must begin early tomorrow morning.

By morning the drumming on the roof had almost ceased; from my window I looked upon a sepia-colored plain of water moving slowly to the valley. The roofs of the barns sagged like the ridgepoles of a tent, and a number of drowned animals floated or were caught against the fences. At breakfast, Mother Müller sat groaning over her coffee cup. "Ach," she said, "what it is to have such a pain in the head. Here too." She thumped her chest. "All over. Ach, Gott, I'm sick." She got up sighing hoarsely, her cheeks flushed, calling Hatsy and Annetje to help her in the barn.

They all came back very soon, their skirts draggled to the knees, and the two sisters were supporting their mother, who was speechless and could hardly stand. They put her to bed, where she lay without moving, her face scarlet. Everybody was confused; no one knew what to do. They tucked the quilts about her, and she threw them off. They offered her coffee, cold water, beer, but she turned her head away. The sons came in and stood beside her and joined the cry: "*Mutterchen, Mutti, Mutti,* what can we do? Tell us, what do you need?" But she could not tell them. It was impossible to ride the twelve miles to town for a doctor; fences and bridges were down,

the roads were washed out. The family crowded into the room, unnerved, in panic, lost unless the sick woman should come to herself and tell them what to do for her. Father Müller came in, and kneeling beside her, he took hold of her hands and spoke to her most lovingly, and when she did not answer him, he broke out crying openly, in a loud voice, the great tears rolling, "Ach, Gott, Gott. A hundert tousand tollars in the bank"—he glared around at his family and spoke broken English to them, as if he were a stranger to himself and had forgotten his own language—"and tell me, tell, what goot does it?"

This frightened them, and all at once, together, they screamed and called and implored her in a tumult utterly beyond control. The noise of their grief and terror filled the place. In the midst of this, Mother Müller died.

In the midafternoon the rain passed, and the sun was a disk of brass in a cruelly bright sky. The waters flowed thickly down to the river, leaving the hill bald and brown, with the fences lying in a flattened tangle, the young peach trees stripped of bloom and sagging at the roots. In the woods had occurred a violent eruption of ripe foliage of a jungle thickness, glossy and burning, a massing of hot peacock green with cobalt shadows.

The household was in such silence, I had to listen carefully to know that anyone lived there. Everyone, even the younger children, moved on tiptoe and spoke in whispers. All afternoon the thud of hammers and the whine of a saw went on monotonously in the barn loft. At dark, the men brought in a shiny coffin of new yellow pine with rope handles and set it in the hall. It lay there on the floor for an hour or so, where anyone passing had to step over it. Then Annetje and Hatsy, who had been washing and dressing the body, appeared in the doorway and motioned. "You bring it in now."

Mother Müller lay in state in the parlor throughout the night, in her black silk dress with a scrap of white lace at the collar and a small lace cap on her hair. Her husband sat in the plush chair near her, looking at her face, which was very contemplative, gentle, and remote. He wept at intervals, silently, wiping his face with a big handkerchief. His daughters brought him coffee from time to time. He fell asleep there toward morning.

The light burned in the kitchen nearly all night, too, and the sound of Ottilie's heavy boots thumping about unsteadily was accompanied by the locust whirring of the coffee mill and the smell of baking bread. Hatsy came to my room. "There's coffee and cake," she said, "you'd better have some," and turned away crying, crumbling her slice in her hand. We stood about and ate in silence. Ottilie brought in a fresh pot of coffee, her eyes bleared and fixed, her gait as aimless-looking and hurried as ever, and when she spilled some on her own hand, she did not seem to feel it.

For a day longer they waited; then the youngest boy went to fetch the

Lutheran pastor, and a few neighbors came back with them. By noon many more had arrived, spattered with mud, the horses heaving and sweating. At every greeting the family gave way and wept afresh, as naturally and openly as children. Their faces were drenched and soft with their tears; there was a comfortable relaxed look in the muscles of their faces. It was good to let go, to have something to weep for that nobody need excuse or explain. Their tears were at once a luxury and a cure of souls. They wept away the hard core of secret trouble that is in the heart of each separate man, secure in a communal grief; in sharing it, they consoled each other. For a while, they would visit the grave and remember, and then life would arrange itself again in another order, yet it would be the same. Already the thoughts of the living were turning to tomorrow, when they would be at the work of rebuilding and replanting and repairing—even now, today, they would hurry back from the burial to milk the cows and feed the chickens, and they might weep again and again for several days, until their tears should heal them at last.

On that day I realized, for the first time, not death, but the terror of dying. When they took the coffin out to the little country hearse and I saw that the procession was about to form, I went to my room and lay down. Staring at the ceiling, I heard and felt the ominous order and purpose in the movements and sounds below—the creaking harness and hoofbeats and grating wheels, the muted grave voices—and it was as if my blood fainted and receded with fright, while my mind stayed wide-awake to receive the awful impress. Yet when I knew they were leaving the yard, the terror began to leave me. As the sounds receded, I lay there not thinking, not feeling, in a mere drowse of relief and weariness.

Through my half-sleep I heard the howling of a dog. It seemed to be in a dream, and I was troubled to awaken. I dreamed that Kuno was caught in the trap; then I thought he was really caught, it was no dream and I must wake, because there was no one but me to let him out. I came broad awake, the cry rushed upon me like a wind, and it was not the howl of a dog. I ran downstairs and looked into Gretchen's room. She was curled up around her baby, and they were both asleep. I ran to the kitchen.

Ottilie was sitting in her broken chair with her feet in the edge of the open oven, where the heat had died away. Her hands hung at her sides, the fingers crooked into the palm; her head lay back on her shoulders, and she howled with a great wrench of her body, an upward reach of the neck, without tears. At sight of me she got up and came over to me and laid her head on my breast, and her hands dangled forward a moment. Shuddering, she babbled and howled and waved her arms in a frenzy through the open window over the stripped branches of the orchard toward the lane where the procession had straightened out into formal order. I took hold of her arms

where the unnaturally corded muscles clenched and strained under her coarse sleeves; I led her out to the steps and left her sitting there, her head wagging.

In the barnyard there remained only the broken-down spring wagon and the shaggy pony that had brought me to the farm on the first day. The harness was still a mystery, but somehow I managed to join pony, harness, and wagon not too insecurely, or so I could only hope; and I pushed and hauled and tugged at Ottilie and lifted her until she was in the seat and I had the reins in hand. We careened down the road at a grudging trot, the pony jolting like a churn, the wheels spinning elliptically in a truly broad comedy swagger. I watched the jovial antics of those wheels with attention, hoping for the best. We slithered into round pits of green mud and jogged perilously into culverts where small bridges had been. Once, in what was left of the main road, I stood up to see if I might overtake the funeral train; yes, there it was, going inchmeal up the road over the little hill, a bumbling train of black beetles crawling helter-skelter over clods.

Ottilie, now silent, was doubled upon herself, slipping loosely on the edge of the seat. I caught hold of her stout belt with my free hand, and my fingers slipped between her clothes and bare flesh, ribbed and gaunt and dry against my knuckles. My sense of her realness, her humanity, this shattered being that was a woman, was so shocking to me that a howl as doglike and despairing as her own rose in me unuttered and died again, to be a perpetual ghost. Ottilie slanted her eyes and peered at me, and I gazed back. The knotted wrinkles of her face were grotesquely changed, she gave a choked little whimper, and suddenly she laughed out, a kind of yelp but unmistakably laughter, and clapped her hands for joy, the grinning mouth and suffering eyes turned to the sky. Her head nodded and wagged with the clownish humor of our trundling lurching progress. The feel of the hot sun on her back, the bright air, the jolly senseless staggering of the wheels, the peacock green of the heavens: something of these had reached her. She was happy and gay, and she gurgled and rocked in her seat, leaning upon me and waving loosely around her as if to show me what wonders she saw.

Drawing the pony to a standstill, I studied her face for a while and pondered my ironical mistake. There was nothing I could do for Ottilie, selfishly as I wished to ease my heart of her; she was beyond my reach as well as any other human reach, and yet, had I not come nearer to her than I had to anyone else in my attempt to deny and bridge the distance between us, or rather, her distance from me? Well, we were both equally the fools of life, equally fellow fugitives from death. We had escaped for one day more at least. We would celebrate our good luck, we would have a little stolen holiday, a breath of spring air and freedom on this lovely, festive afternoon.

Ottilie fidgeted, uneasy at our stopping. I flapped the reins, the pony

moved on, we turned across the shallow ditch where the small road divided from the main traveled one. I measured the sun westering gently; there would be time enough to drive to the river down the lane of mulberries and to get back to the house before the mourners returned. There would be plenty of time for Ottilie to have supper ready. They need not even know she had been gone.

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EVERYTHING THAT RISES MUST CONVERGE

by Flannery O'Connor

Her doctor had told Julian's mother that she must lose twenty pounds on account of her blood pressure, so on Wednesday nights Julian had to take her downtown on the bus for a reducing class at the Y. The reducing class was designed for working girls over fifty, who weighed from 165 to 200 pounds. His mother was one of the slimmer ones, but she said ladies did not tell their age or weight. She would not ride on the buses by herself at night since they had been integrated, and because the reducing class was one of her few pleasures, necessary for her health, and *free*, she said Julian could at least put himself out to take her, considering all she did for him. Julian did not like to consider all she did for him, but every Wednesday night he braced himself and took her.

She was almost ready to go, standing before the hall mirror, putting on her hat, while he, his hands behind him, appeared pinned to the door frame, waiting like Saint Sebastian for the arrows to begin piercing him. The hat was new and had cost her seven dollars and a half. She kept saying, "Maybe I shouldn't have paid that for it. No, I shouldn't have. I'll take it off and return it tomorrow. I shouldn't have bought it."

Julian raised his eyes to heaven. "Yes, you should have bought it," he said. "Put it on and let's go." It was a hideous hat. A purple velvet flap came down on one side of it and stood up on the other; the rest of it was green and looked like a cushion with the stuffing out. He decided it was less

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comical than jaunty and pathetic. Everything that gave her pleasure was small and depressed him.

She lifted the hat one more time and set it down slowly on top of her head. Two wings of gray hair protruded on either side of her florid face, but her eyes, sky-blue, were as innocent and untouched by experience as they must have been when she was ten. Were it not that she was a widow who had struggled fiercely to feed and clothe and put him through school and who was supporting him still, "until he got on his feet," she might have been a little girl that he had to take to town.

"It's all right, it's all right," he said. "Let's go." He opened the door himself and started down the walk to get her going. The sky was a dying violet and the houses stood out darkly against it, bulbous liver-colored monstrosities of a uniform ugliness though no two were alike. Since this had been a fashionable neighborhood forty years ago, his mother persisted in thinking they did well to have an apartment in it. Each house had a narrow collar of dirt around it in which sat, usually, a grubby child. Julian walked with his hands in his pockets, his head down and thrust forward and his eyes glazed with the determination to make himself completely numb during the time he would be sacrificed to her pleasure.

The door closed and he turned to find the dumpy figure, surmounted by the atrocious hat, coming toward him. "Well," she said, "you only live once and paying a little more for it, I at least won't meet myself coming and going."

"Some day I'll start making money," Julian said gloomily—he knew he never would—"and you can have one of those jokes whenever you take the fit." But first they would move. He visualized a place where the nearest neighbors would be three miles away on either side.

"I think you're doing fine," she said, drawing on her gloves. "You've only been out of school a year. Rome wasn't built in a day."

She was one of the few members of the Y reducing class who arrived in hat and gloves and who had a son who had been to college. "It takes time," she said, "and the world is in such a mess. This hat looked better on me than any of the others, though when she brought it out I said, 'Take that thing back. I wouldn't have it on my head,' and she said, 'Now wait till you see it on,' and when she put it on me, I said, 'We-ull,' and she said, 'If you ask me, that hat does something for you and you do something for the hat, and besides,' she said, 'with that hat, you won't meet yourself coming and going.'"

Julian thought he could have stood his lot better if she had been selfish, if she had been an old hag who drank and screamed at him. He walked along, saturated in depression, as if in the midst of his martyrdom he had lost his faith. Catching sight of his long, hopeless, irritated face, she stopped

suddenly with a grief-stricken look, and pulled back on his arm. "Wait on me," she said. "I'm going back to the house and take this thing off and tomorrow I'm going to return it. I was out of my head. I can pay the gas bill with that seven-fifty."

He caught her arm in a vicious grip. "You are not going to take it back," he said. "I like it."

"Well," she said, "I don't think I ought . . ."

"Shut up and enjoy it," he muttered, more depressed than ever.

"With the world in the mess it's in," she said, "it's a wonder we can enjoy anything. I tell you, the bottom rail is on the top."

Julian sighed.

"Of course," she said, "if you know who you are, you can go anywhere." She said this every time he took her to the reducing class. "Most of them in it are not our kind of people," she said, "but I can be gracious to anybody. I know who I am."

"They don't give a damn for your graciousness," Julian said savagely. "Knowing who you are is good for one generation only. You haven't the foggiest idea where you stand now or who you are."

She stopped and allowed her eyes to flash at him. "I most certainly do know who I am," she said, "and if you don't know who you are, I'm ashamed of you."

"Oh hell," Julian said.

"Your great-grandfather was a former governor of this state," she said. "Your grandfather was a prosperous landowner. Your grandmother was a Godhigh."

"Will you look around you," he said tensely, "and see where you are now?" and he swept his arm jerkily out to indicate the neighborhood, which the growing darkness at least made less dingy.

"You remain what you are," she said. "Your great-grandfather had a plantation and two hundred slaves."

"There are no more slaves," he said irritably.

"They were better off when they were," she said. He groaned to see that she was off on that topic. She rolled onto it every few days like a train on an open track. He knew every stop, every junction, every swamp along the way, and knew the exact point at which her conclusion would roll majestically into the station: "It's ridiculous. It's simply not realistic. They should rise, yes, but on their own side of the fence."

"Let's skip it," Julian said.

"The ones I feel sorry for," she said, "are the ones that are half white. They're tragic."

"Will you skip it?"

"Suppose we were half white. We would certainly have mixed feelings."

"I have mixed feelings now," he groaned.

"Well let's talk about something pleasant," she said. "I remember going to Grandpa's when I was a little girl. Then the house had double stairways that went up to what was really the second floor—all the cooking was done on the first. I used to like to stay down in the kitchen on account of the way the walls smelled. I would sit with my nose pressed against the plaster and take deep breaths. Actually the place belonged to the Godhighs but your grandfather Chestny paid the mortgage and saved it for them. They were in reduced circumstances," she said, "but reduced or not, they never forgot who they were."

"Doubtless that decayed mansion reminded them," Julian muttered. He never spoke of it without contempt or thought of it without longing. He had seen it once when he was a child before it had been sold. The double stairways had rotted and been torn down. Negroes were living in it. But it remained in his mind as his mother had known it. It appeared in his dreams regularly. He would stand on the wide porch, listening to the rustle of oak leaves, then wander through the high-ceilinged hall into the parlor that opened onto it and gaze at the worn rugs and faded draperies. It occurred to him that it was he, not she, who could have appreciated it. He preferred its threadbare elegance to anything he could name and it was because of it that all the neighborhoods they had lived in had been a torment to him —whereas she had hardly known the difference. She called her insensitivity "being adjustable."

"And I remember the old darky who was my nurse, Caroline. There was no better person in the world. I've always had a great respect for my colored friends," she said. "I'd do anything in the world for them and they'd . . ."

"Will you for God's sake get off that subject?" Julian said. When he got on a bus by himself, he made it a point to sit down beside a Negro, in reparation as it were for his mother's sins.

"You're mighty touchy tonight," she said. "Do you feel all right?"

"Yes I feel all right," he said. "Now lay off."

She pursed her lips. "Well, you certainly are in a vile humor," she observed. "I just won't speak to you at all."

They had reached the bus stop. There was no bus in sight and Julian, his hands still jammed in his pockets and his head thrust forward, scowled down the empty street. The frustration of having to wait on the bus as well as ride on it began to creep up his neck like a hot hand. The presence of his mother was borne in upon him as she gave a pained sigh. He looked at her bleakly. She was holding herself very erect under the preposterous hat, wearing it like a banner of her imaginary dignity. There was in him an evil urge to break her spirit. He suddenly unloosened his tie and pulled it off and put it in his pocket.

She stiffened. "Why must you look like *that* when you take me to town?" she said. "Why must you deliberately embarrass me?"

"If you'll never learn where you are," he said, "you can at least learn where I am."

"You look like a—thug," she said.

"Then I must be one," he murmured.

"I'll just go home," she said. "I will not bother you. If you can't do a little thing like that for me . . ."

Rolling his eyes upward, he put his tie back on. "Restored to my class," he muttered. He thrust his face toward her and hissed, "True culture is in the mind, the *mind*," he said, and tapped his head, "the mind."

"It's in the heart," she said, "and in how you do things and how you do things is because of who you *are*."

"Nobody in the damn bus cares who you are."

"I care who I am," she said icily.

The lighted bus appeared on top of the next hill and as it approached, they moved out into the street to meet it. He put his hand under her elbow and hoisted her up on the creaking step. She entered with a little smile, as if she were going into a drawing room where everyone had been waiting for her. While he put in the tokens, she sat down on one of the broad front seats for three which faced the aisle. A thin woman with protruding teeth and long yellow hair was sitting on the end of it. His mother moved up beside her and left room for Julian beside herself. He sat down and looked at the floor across the aisle where a pair of thin feet in red and white canvas sandals were planted.

His mother immediately began a general conversation meant to attract anyone who felt like talking. "Can it get any hotter?" she said and removed from her purse a folding fan, black with a Japanese scene on it, which she began to flutter before her.

"I reckon it might could," the woman with the protruding teeth said, "but I know for a fact my apartment couldn't get no hotter."

"It must get the afternoon sun," his mother said. She sat forward and looked up and down the bus. It was half filled. Everybody was white. "I see we have the bus to ourselves," she said. Julian cringed.

"For a change," said the woman across the aisle, the owner of the red and white canvas sandals. "I come on one the other day and they were thick as fleas—up front and all through."

"The world is in a mess everywhere," his mother said. "I don't know how we've let it get in this fix."

"What gets my goat is all those boys from good families stealing automobile tires," the woman with the protruding teeth said. "I told my boy, I said you may not be rich but you been raised right and if I ever catch you

in any such mess, they can send you on to the reformatory. Be exactly where you belong."

"Training tells," his mother said. "Is your boy in high school?"

"Ninth grade," the woman said.

"My son just finished college last year. He wants to write but he's selling typewriters until he gets started," his mother said.

The woman leaned forward and peered at Julian. He threw her such a malevolent look that she subsided against the seat. On the floor across the aisle there was an abandoned newspaper. He got up and got it and opened it out in front of him. His mother discreetly continued the conversation in a lower tone but the woman across the aisle said in a loud voice, "Well that's nice. Selling typewriters is close to writing. He can go right from one to the other."

"I tell him," his mother said, "that Rome wasn't built in a day."

Behind the newspaper Julian was withdrawing into the inner compartment of his mind where he spent most of his time. This was a kind of mental bubble in which he established himself when he could not bear to be a part of what was going on around him. From it he could see out and judge but in it he was safe from any kind of penetration from without. It was the only place where he felt free of the general idiocy of his fellows. His mother had never entered it but from it he could see her with absolute clarity.

The old lady was clever enough and he thought that if she had started from any of the right premises, more might have been expected of her. She lived according to the laws of her own fantasy world, outside of which he had never seen her set foot. The law of it was to sacrifice herself for him after she had first created the necessity to do so by making a mess of things. If he had permitted her sacrifices, it was only because her lack of foresight had made them necessary. All of her life had been a struggle to act like a Chestny without the Chestny goods, and to give him everything she thought a Chestny ought to have; but since, said she, it was fun to struggle, why complain? And when you had won, as she had won, what fun to look back on the hard times! He could not forgive her that she had enjoyed the struggle and that she thought *she* had won.

What she meant when she said she had won was that she had brought him up successfully and had sent him to college and that he had turned out so well—good looking (her teeth had gone unfilled so that his could be straightened), intelligent (he realized he was too intelligent to be a success), and with a future ahead of him (there was of course no future ahead of him). She excused his gloominess on the grounds that he was still growing up and his radical ideas on his lack of practical experience. She said he didn't

yet know a thing about "life," that he hadn't even entered the real world—when already he was as disenchanted with it as a man of fifty.

The further irony of all this was that in spite of her, he had turned out so well. In spite of going to only a third-rate college, he had, on his own initiative, come out with a first-rate education; in spite of growing up dominated by a small mind, he had ended up with a large one; in spite of all her foolish views, he was free of prejudice and unafraid to face facts. Most miraculous of all, instead of being blinded by love for her as she was for him, he had cut himself emotionally free of her and could see her with complete objectivity. He was not dominated by mother.

The bus stopped with a sudden jerk and shook him from his meditation. A woman from the back lurched forward with little steps and barely escaped falling in his newspaper as she righted herself. She got off and a large Negro got on. Julian kept his paper lowered to watch. It gave him a certain satisfaction to see injustice in daily operation. It confirmed his view that with a few exceptions there was no one worth knowing within a radius of three hundred miles. The Negro was well dressed and carried a briefcase. He looked around and then sat down on the other end of the seat where the woman with the red and white canvas sandals was sitting. He immediately unfolded a newspaper and obscured himself behind it. Julian's mother's elbow at once prodded insistently into his ribs. "Now you see why I won't ride on these buses by myself," she whispered.

The woman with the red and white canvas sandals had risen at the same time the Negro sat down and had gone further back in the bus and taken the seat of the woman who had got off. His mother leaned forward and cast her an approving look.

Julian rose, crossed the aisle, and sat down in the place of the woman with the canvas sandals. From this position, he looked serenely across at his mother. Her face had turned an angry red. He stared at her, making his eyes the eyes of a stranger. He felt his tension suddenly lift as if he had openly declared war on her.

He would have liked to get in conversation with the Negro and to talk with him about art or politics or any subject that would be above the comprehension of those around them, but the man remained entrenched behind his paper. He was either ignoring the change of seating or had never noticed it. There was no way for Julian to convey his sympathy.

His mother kept her eyes fixed reproachfully on his face. The woman with the protruding teeth was looking at him avidly as if he were a type of monster new to her.

"Do you have a light?" he asked the Negro.

Without looking away from his paper, the man reached in his pocket and handed him a packet of matches.

"Thanks," Julian said. For a moment he held the matches foolishly. A No Smoking sign looked down upon him from over the door. This alone would not have deterred him; he had no cigarettes. He had quit smoking some months before because he could not afford it. "Sorry," he muttered and handed back the matches. The Negro lowered the paper and gave him an annoyed look. He took the matches and raised the paper again.

His mother continued to gaze at him but she did not take advantage of his momentary discomfort. Her eyes retained their battered look. Her face seemed to be unnaturally red, as if her blood pressure had risen. Julian allowed no glimmer of sympathy to show on his face. Having got the advantage, he wanted desperately to keep it and carry it through. He would have liked to teach her a lesson that would last her a while, but there seemed no way to continue the point. The Negro refused to come out from behind his paper.

Julian folded his arms and looked stolidly before him, facing her but as if he did not see her, as if he had ceased to recognize her existence. He visualized a scene in which, the bus having reached their stop, he would remain in his seat and when she said, "Aren't you going to get off?" he would look at her as at a stranger who had rashly addressed him. The corner they got off on was usually deserted, but it was well lighted and it would not hurt her to walk by herself the four blocks to the Y. He decided to wait until the time came and then decide whether or not he would let her get off by herself. He would have to be at the Y at ten to bring her back, but he could leave her wondering if he was going to show up. There was no reason for her to think she could always depend on him.

He retired again into the high-ceilinged room sparsely settled with large pieces of antique furniture. His soul expanded momentarily but then he became aware of his mother across from him and the vision shriveled. He studied her coldly. Her feet in little pumps dangled like a child's and did not quite reach the floor. She was training on him an exaggerated look of reproach. He felt completely detached from her. At that moment he could with pleasure have slapped her as he would have slapped a particularly obnoxious child in his charge.

He began to imagine various unlikely ways by which he could teach her a lesson. He might make friends with some distinguished Negro professor or lawyer and bring him home to spend the evening. He would be entirely justified but her blood pressure would rise to 300. He could not push her to the extent of making her have a stroke, and moreover, he had never been successful at making any Negro friends. He had tried to strike up an acquaintance on the bus with some of the better types, with ones that looked like professors or ministers or lawyers. One morning he had sat down next to a distinguished-looking dark brown man who had answered his questions

with a sonorous solemnity but who had turned out to be an undertaker. Another day he had sat down beside a cigar-smoking Negro with a diamond ring on his finger, but after a few stilted pleasantries, the Negro had rung the buzzer and risen, slipping two lottery tickets into Julian's hand as he climbed over him to leave.

He imagined his mother lying desperately ill and his being able to secure only a Negro doctor for her. He toyed with that idea for a few minutes and then dropped it for a momentary vision of himself participating as a sympathizer in a sit-in demonstration. This was possible but he did not linger with it. Instead, he approached the ultimate horror. He brought home a beautiful suspiciously Negroid woman. Prepare yourself, he said. There is nothing you can do about it. This is the woman I've chosen. She's intelligent, dignified, even good, and she's suffered and she hasn't thought it *fun*. Now persecute us, go ahead and persecute us. Drive her out of here, but remember, you're driving me too. His eyes were narrowed and through the indignation he had generated, he saw his mother across the aisle, purple-faced, shrunken to the dwarflike proportions of her moral nature, sitting like a mummy beneath the ridiculous banner of her hat.

He was tilted out of his fantasy again as the bus stopped. The door opened with a sucking hiss and out of the dark a large, gaily dressed, sullen-looking colored woman got on with a little boy. The child, who might have been four, had on a short plaid suit and a Tyrolean hat with a blue feather in it. Julian hoped that he would sit down beside him and that the woman would push in beside his mother. He could think of no better arrangement.

As she waited for her tokens, the woman was surveying the seating possibilities—he hoped with the idea of sitting where she was least wanted. There was something familiar-looking about her but Julian could not place what it was. She was a giant of a woman. Her face was set not only to meet opposition but to seek it out. The downward tilt of her large lower lip was like a warning sign: DON'T TAMPER WITH ME. Her bulging figure was encased in a green crepe dress and her feet overflowed in red shoes. She had on a hideous hat. A purple velvet flap came down on one side of it and stood up on the other; the rest of it was green and looked like a cushion with the stuffing out. She carried a mammoth red pocketbook that bulged throughout as if it were stuffed with rocks.

To Julian's disappointment, the little boy climbed up on the empty seat beside his mother. His mother lumped all children, black and white, into the common category, "cute," and she thought little Negroes were on the whole cuter than little white children. She smiled at the little boy as he climbed on the seat.

Meanwhile the woman was bearing down upon the empty seat beside Julian. To his annoyance, she squeezed herself into it. He saw his mother's

face change as the woman settled herself next to him and he realized with satisfaction that this was more objectionable to her than it was to him. Her face seemed almost gray and there was a look of dull recognition in her eyes, as if suddenly she had sickened at some awful confrontation. Julian saw that it was because she and the woman had, in a sense, swapped sons. Though his mother would not realize the symbolic significance of this, she would feel it. His amusement showed plainly on his face.

The woman next to him muttered something unintelligible to herself. He was conscious of a kind of bristling next to him, a muted growling like that of an angry cat. He could not see anything but the red pocketbook upright on the bulging green thighs. He visualized the woman as she had stood waiting for her tokens—the ponderous figure, rising from the red shoes upward over the solid hips, the mammoth bosom, the haughty face to the green and purple hat.

His eyes widened.

The vision of the two hats, identical, broke upon him with the radiance of a brilliant sunrise. His face was suddenly lit with joy. He could not believe that Fate had thrust upon his mother such a lesson. He gave a loud chuckle so that she would look at him and see that he saw. She turned her eyes on him slowly. The blue in them seemed to have turned a bruised purple. For a moment he had an uncomfortable sense of her innocence, but it lasted only a second before principle rescued him. Justice entitled him to laugh. His grin hardened until it said to her as plainly as if he were saying aloud: Your punishment exactly fits your pettiness. This should teach you a permanent lesson.

Her eyes shifted to the woman. She seemed unable to bear looking at him and to find the woman preferable. He became conscious again of the bristling presence at his side. The woman was rumbling like a volcano about to become active. His mother's mouth began to twitch slightly at one corner. With a sinking heart, he saw incipient signs of recovery on her face and realized that this was going to strike her suddenly as funny and was going to be no lesson at all. She kept her eyes on the woman and an amused smile came over her face as if the woman were a monkey that had stolen her hat. The little Negro was looking up at her with large fascinated eyes. He had been trying to attract her attention for some time.

"Carver!" the woman said suddenly. "Come heah!"

When he saw that the spotlight was on him at last, Carver drew his feet up and turned himself toward Julian's mother and giggled.

"Carver!" the woman said. "You heah me? Come heah!"

Carver slid down from the seat but remained squatting with his back against the base of it, his head turned slyly around toward Julian's mother, who was smiling at him. The woman reached a hand across the aisle and

snatched him to her. He righted himself and hung backwards on her knees, grinning at Julian's mother. "Isn't he cute?" Julian's mother said to the woman with the protruding teeth.

"I reckon he is," the woman said without conviction.

The Negress yanked him upright but he eased out of her grip and shot across the aisle and scrambled, giggling wildly, onto the seat beside his love.

"I think he likes me," Julian's mother said, and smiled at the woman. It was the smile she used when she was being particularly gracious to an inferior. Julian saw everything lost. The lesson had rolled off her like rain on a roof.

The woman stood up and yanked the little boy off the seat as if she were snatching him from contagion. Julian could feel the rage in her at having no weapon like his mother's smile. She gave the child a sharp slap across his leg. He howled ouch and then thrust his head into her stomach and kicked his feet against her shins. "Be-have," she said vehemently.

The bus stopped and the Negro who had been reading the newspaper got off. The woman moved over and set the little boy down with a thump between herself and Julian. She held him firmly by the knee. In a moment he put his hands in front of his face and peeped at Julian's mother through his fingers.

"I see yooooooo!" she said and put her hand in front of her face and peeped at him.

The woman slapped his hand down. "Quit yo' foolishness," she said, "before I knock the living Jesus out of you!"

Julian was thankful that the next stop was theirs. He reached up and pulled the cord. The woman reached up and pulled it at the same time. Oh my God, he thought. He had the terrible intuition that when they got off the bus together, his mother would open her purse and give the little boy a nickel. The gesture would be as natural to her as breathing. The bus stopped and the woman got up and lunged to the front, dragging the child, who wished to stay on, after her. Julian and his mother got up and followed. As they neared the door, Julian tried to relieve her of her pocketbook.

"No," she murmured, "I want to give the little boy a nickel."

"No!" Julian hissed. "No!"

She smiled down at the child and opened her bag. The bus door opened and the woman picked him up by the arm and descended with him, hanging at her hip. Once in the street she set him down and shook him.

Julian's mother had to close her purse while she got down the bus step but as soon as her feet were on the ground, she opened it again and began to rummage inside. "I can't find but a penny," she whispered, "but it looks like a new one."

"Don't do it!" Julian said fiercely between his teeth. There was a street-

light on the corner and she hurried to get under it so that she could better see into her pocketbook. The woman was heading off rapidly down the street with the child still hanging backward on her hand.

"Oh little boy!" Julian's mother called and took a few quick steps and caught up with them just beyond the lamppost. "Here's a bright new penny for you," and she held out the coin, which shone bronze in the dim light.

The huge woman turned and for a moment stood, her shoulders lifted and her face frozen with frustrated rage, and stared at Julian's mother. Then all at once she seemed to explode like a piece of machinery that had been given one ounce of pressure too much. Julian saw the black fist swing out with the red pocketbook. He shut his eyes and cringed as he heard the woman shout, "He don't take nobody's pennies!" When he opened his eyes, the woman was disappearing down the street with the little boy staring wide-eyed over her shoulder. Julian's mother was sitting on the sidewalk.

"I told you not to do that," Julian said angrily. "I told you not to do that!"

He stood over her for a minute, gritting his teeth. Her legs were stretched out in front of her and her hat was on her lap. He squatted down and looked her in the face. It was totally expressionless. "You got exactly what you deserved," he said. "Now get up."

He picked up her pocketbook and put what had fallen out back in it. He picked the hat up off her lap. The penny caught his eye on the sidewalk and he picked that up and let it drop before her eyes into the purse. Then he stood up and leaned over and held his hand out to pull her up. She remained immobile. He sighed. Rising above them on either side were black apartment buildings, marked with irregular rectangles of light. At the end of the block a man came out of a door and walked off in the opposite direction. "All right," he said, "suppose somebody happens by and wants to know why you're sitting on the sidewalk?"

She took the hand and, breathing hard, pulled heavily up on it and then stood for a moment, swaying slightly as if the spots of light in the darkness were circling around her. Her eyes, shadowed and confused, finally settled on his face. He did not try to conceal his irritation. "I hope this teaches you a lesson," he said. She leaned forward and her eyes raked his face. She seemed trying to determine his identity. Then, as if she found nothing familiar about him, she started off with a headlong movement in the wrong direction.

"Aren't you going on to the Y?" he asked.

"Home," she muttered.

"Well, are we walking?"

For answer she kept going. Julian followed along, his hands behind him. He saw no reason to let the lesson she had had go without backing it up with an explanation of its meaning. She might as well be made to understand what had happened to her. "Don't think that was just an uppity Negro

woman," he said. "That was the whole colored race which will no longer take your condescending pennies. That was your black double. She can wear the same hat as you, and to be sure," he added gratuitously (because he thought it was funny), "it looked better on her than it did on you. What all this means," he said, "is that the old world is gone. The old manners are obsolete and your graciousness is not worth a damn." He thought bitterly of the house that had been lost for him. "You aren't who you think you are," he said.

She continued to plow ahead, paying no attention to him. Her hair had come undone on one side. She dropped her pocketbook and took no notice. He stooped and picked it up and handed it to her but she did not take it.

"You needn't act as if the world has come to an end," he said, "because it hasn't. From now on you've got to live in a new world and face a few realities for a change. Buck up," he said, "it won't kill you."

She was breathing fast.

"Let's wait on the bus," he said.

"Home," she said thickly.

"I hate to see you behave like this," he said. "Just like a child. I should be able to expect more of you." He decided to stop were he was and make her stop and wait for a bus. "I'm not going any farther," he said, stopping. "We're going on the bus."

She continued to go on as if she had not heard him. He took a few steps and caught her arm and stopped her. He looked into her face and caught his breath. He was looking into a face he had never seen before. "Tell Grandpapa to come get me," she said.

He stared, stricken.

"Tell Caroline to come get me," she said.

Stunned, he let her go and she lurched forward again, walking as if one leg were shorter than the other. A tide of darkness seemed to be sweeping her from him. "Mother!" he cried. "Darling, sweetheart, wait!" Crumpling, she fell to the pavement. He dashed forward and fell at her side, crying, "Mamma, Mamma!" He turned her over. Her face was fiercely distorted. One eye, large and staring, moved slightly to the left as if it had become unmoored. The other remained fixed on him, raked his face again, found nothing and closed.

"Wait here, wait here!" he cried and jumped up and began to run for help toward a cluster of lights he saw in the distance ahead of him. "Help, help!" he shouted, but his voice was thin, scarcely a thread of sound. The lights drifted farther away the faster he ran and his feet moved numbly as if they carried him nowhere. The tide of darkness seemed to sweep him back to her, postponing from moment to moment his entry into the world of guilt and sorrow.

1964: *from The New Yorker*

THE EMBARKMENT FOR CYTHERA

by John Cheever

Tom and Jessica Coliver lived in Proxmire Manor, a place that was known up and down the suburban railroad line as the place where the lady got arrested. The incident had taken place five or six years before, but it had the endurance of a legend, and the lady had seemed briefly to be the genius of the pretty place. The facts are simple. With the exception of one robbery, still unsolved, the eight-man police force of Proxmire Manor had never found anything to do. Their only usefulness was to direct traffic at weddings and large cocktail parties. They listened day and night on the interstate police radio to the crimes and alarms in other communities—car thefts, mayhem, drunkenness, and murder—but the blotter in Proxmire Manor was clean. The burden of this idleness on their self-esteem was heavy as, armed with pistols and bandoleers of ammunition, they spent their days writing parking tickets for the cars left at the railroad station. It was like a child's game, ticketing commuters for the most trifling infractions of the rules the police themselves invented, and they played it enthusiastically.

The lady—Mrs. Lemuel Jameson—had similar problems. Her children were away at school, her housework was done by a maid, and though she played cards and lunched with friends, she was often made ill-tempered by abrasive boredom. Coming home from an unsuccessful shopping trip in New York one afternoon, she found her car ticketed for being a little over a white line. She tore the ticket to pieces. Later that afternoon, a policeman found the pieces in the dirt and took them to the police station, where they were pasted together.

The police were excited, of course, at this open challenge to their authority. Mrs. Jameson was served with a summons. She called her friend Judge Flint—he was a member of the Club—and asked him to fix it. He said

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that he would, but later that afternoon he had an attack of acute appendicitis and was taken to the hospital. When Mrs. Jameson's name was called in traffic court and there was no response, the police were alert. A warrant for her arrest was issued, the first such warrant in years. In the morning two patrolmen, heavily armed and in fresh uniforms and in the company of an old police matron, drove to Mrs. Jameson's house with the warrant. A maid opened the door and said that Mrs. Jameson was sleeping. With at least a hint of force, they entered the beautiful drawing room and told the maid to wake Mrs. Jameson. When Mrs. Jameson heard that the police were downstairs, she was indignant. She refused to move. The maid went downstairs, and in a minute or two Mrs. Jameson heard the heavy steps of the policemen. She was horrified. Would they dare enter her bedroom? The ranking officer spoke to her from the hall. "You get out of bed, lady, and come with us, or we'll get you up." Mrs. Jameson began to scream. The police matron, reaching for her shoulder holster, entered the bedroom. Mrs. Jameson went on screaming. The matron told her to get up and dress or they would take her to the station house in her night clothes. When Mrs. Jameson started for the bathroom, the matron followed her and she began to scream again. She was hysterical. She screamed at the policemen when she encountered them in the upstairs hallway, but she let herself be led out to the car and driven to the station house. Here she began to scream again. She finally paid the one-dollar fine and was sent home in a taxi.

Mrs. Jameson was determined to have the policemen fired, and the moment she walked into her house she began to organize her campaign. Counting over her neighbors for someone who would be eloquent and sympathetic, she thought of Peter Dolmetch, a freelance television writer, who rented the Fulsoms' gatehouse. No one liked him, but Mrs. Jameson sometimes invited him to her cocktail parties, and he was indebted to her. She called and told him her story. "I can't believe it, darling," he said. She said that she was asking him, because of his natural eloquence, to defend her. "I'm against Fascism, darling," he said, "wherever it raises its ugly head." She then called the mayor and demanded a hearing. It was set for eight-thirty that night. Mr. Jameson happened to be away on business. She called a few friends, and by noon everyone in Proxmire Manor knew that she had been humiliated by a policewoman, who followed her into the bathroom and sat on the edge of the tub while she dressed, and that Mrs. Jameson had been taken to the station house at the point of a gun. Fifteen or twenty neighbors showed up for the hearing. The mayor and his councilmen numbered seven, and the two patrolmen and the matron were also there. When the meeting was called to order, Peter stood and asked, "Has Fascism come to Proxmire Manor? Is the ghost of Hitler stalking our tree-shaded streets? Must we, in the privacy of our homes, dread the tread of the Storm Troopers' boots on

our sidewalks and the pounding of the mailed fist on the door?" On and on he went. He must have spent all day writing it. It was all aimed at Hitler, with only a few passing references to Mrs. Jameson. The audience began to cough, to yawn, and then to excuse themselves. When the protest was dismissed and the meeting adjourned, there was no one left but the principals, and Mrs. Jameson's case was lost, but it was not forgotten. The conductor on the train, passing the green hills, would say, "They arrested a lady there yesterday"; then, "They arrested a lady there last month"; and presently, "That's the place where the lady got arrested." That was Proxmire Manor.

The village stood on three leafy hills north of the city, and was handsome and comfortable, and seemed to have eliminated, through adroit social pressures, the thorny side of human nature. This knowledge was forced on Jessica Coliver one afternoon when a neighbor, Laura Hilliston, came in for a glass of sherry. "What I wanted to tell you," Laura said, "is that Grace Lockhart is a slut." Jessica heard the words down the length of the room as she was pouring sherry, and wondered if she had heard correctly, the remark seemed so callous. What kind of tidings were these to carry from house to house? She was never sure—how could one be, it was all so experimental—of the exact nature and intent of the society in which she lived, but did it really embrace this kind of thing?

Laura Hilliston laughed. Her laughter was healthy and her teeth were white. She sat on the sofa, a heavy woman with her feet planted squarely on the rug. Her hair was brown. So were her large, soft eyes. Her face was fleshy, but with a fine ruddiness. She was long married and had three grown sons, but she had recently stepped out of the country of love—briskly and without a backward glance, as if she had spent too much time in its steaming jungles. She was through with all *that*, she had told her wretched husband. She had put on some perfume for the visit, and she wore a thick necklace of false gold that threw a brassy light up onto her features. Her shoes had high heels, and her dress was tight, but these lures were meant to establish her social position and not to catch the eyes of a man.

"I just thought you ought to know," Laura said. "It isn't mere gossip. She has been intimate with just about everybody. I mean the milkman, and that old man who reads the gas meter. That nice fresh-faced boy who used to deliver the laundry lost his job because of her. The truck used to be parked there for hours at a time. Then she began to buy her groceries from Narobi's, and one of the delivery boys had quite a lot of trouble. Her husband's a nice-looking man, and they say he puts up with it for the sake of the children. He adores the children. But what I really wanted to say is that we're getting her out. They have a twenty-eight-thousand-dollar mortgage with a repair clause, and Charlie Peterson at the bank has just told them

that they'll have to put a new roof on the house. Of course, they can't afford this, and so Bumps Trigger is going to give them what they paid for the place and they'll have to go somewhere else. I just thought you might like to know."

"Thank you," Jessica said. "Will you have some more sherry?"

"Oh, no, thank you. I must get along. We're going to the Wishings'. Aren't you?"

"Yes, we are," Jessica said.

Laura put on a short mink jacket and stepped out of the house with that grace, that circumspection, that gentle and unmistakable poise of a lady who has said farewell to love.

Then the back doorbell rang. The cook was out with the baby, and so Jessica went to the back door and let in one of Mr. Narobi's grocery boys. She wondered if he was the one Mrs. Lockhart had tried to seduce. He was a slender young man with brown hair and blue eyes that shed their light evenly, as the eyes of the young will, and were so unlike the eyes of the old—those haggard lanterns that shed no light at all. She would have liked to ask him about Mrs. Lockhart, but this, of course, was not possible. She gave him a quarter tip, and he thanked her politely, and she went upstairs to bathe and dress for the Wishings' dance.

The Wishings' dance was an annual affair. As Mrs. Wishing kept explaining, they gave it each year before the rugs were put down. There was a three-piece orchestra, a fine dinner with glazed salmon, *bœuf en daube*, a dark, flowery claret, and a bar for drinks. By quarter after ten, Jessica felt bored and would have asked Tom to take her home, but he was in another room. Lovely and high-spirited, she was seldom bored. Watching the dancers, she thought of poor Mrs. Lockhart, who was being forced out of this society. On the other hand, she knew how easy, how mistaken it was to assume that the exceptions—the drunkard and the lewd—penetrate, through their excesses, the carapace of immortal society. Did Mrs. Lockhart know more about mankind than she, Jessica? Who did have the power of penetration? Was it the priest who saw how their hands trembled when they reached for the chalice, the doctor who had seen them stripped of their clothing, or the psychiatrist who had seen them stripped of their obdurate pride, and who was now dancing with a fat woman in a red dress? And what was penetration worth? What did it matter that the drunken and unhappy woman in the corner dreamed frequently that she was being chased through a grove of trees by a score of naked lyric poets? Jessica was bored, and she thought her dancing neighbors were bored, too. Loneliness was one thing, and she knew herself how sweet it could make lights and company seem, but boredom was something else, and why, in this most prosperous and equitable world, should everyone seem so bored and disappointed? She

asked Bumps Trigger to get her a drink, and he brought her back a glass of dark bourbon. She felt a profound nostalgia, a longing for some emotional island or peninsula that she had not even discerned in her dreams. She seemed to know something about its character—it was not a paradise, but its elevating possibilities of emotional richness and freedom stirred her. It was the stupendous feeling that one could do much better than this; that the reality was not Mrs. Wishing's dance; that the world was not divided into rigid parliaments of good and evil but was ruled by the absolute authority and range of her desire.

She began to dance then, and danced until three, when the band stopped playing. Her feelings had changed from boredom to a ruthless greed for pleasure. She did not ever want the party to stop, and stayed until dawn.

On Sunday night, Tom took a plane to Detroit, planning to be gone three weeks. On Monday night, alone in the house with her son and the cook, Jessica had a sentimental dream. The landscape was romantic. It was evening, and since there was no trace anywhere of mechanical things—automobile tracks and the noise of planes—it seemed to her to be evening in another century. The sun had set, but a polished afterglow lighted up the sky. There was a winding stream with alders, and on the farther banks the ruins of a castle. She spread a white cloth on the grass and set this with long-necked wine bottles and a loaf of new bread, whose fragrance and warmth was a part of the dream. Upstream a man was swimming naked in a pool. He spoke to her in French, and it was part of the dream's lightness that it all happened in another country, another time. She saw the man pull himself up onto the bank and dry himself with a cloth while she went on setting out the things for supper.

She was waked from this dream by the barking of a dog. It was 3 A.M. She heard the wind. It was changing its quarter and beginning to blow from the northwest. She was about to fall asleep when she heard the front door come open. Sweat started at her armpits and her young heart strained its muscles, although she knew it was only the wind that had opened the door. Not long ago, a thief had broken into a house in the neighborhood. In the garden, behind a lilac bush, a pile of cigarette ends had been found, where he must have waited patiently for hours for the lights of the house to be turned out. He had made an opening in a window with a glass cutter, rifled a wall safe of cash and jewelry, and left by the front door. In reporting the theft, the police had described his movements in detail: He had waited in the garden. He had entered by a back window. He had gone through the kitchen and pantry into the dining room. But who was he? Had he been tall or short, heavy or slender? Had his heart throbbed with terror in the dark rooms, or had he experienced the thief's supreme sense of triumph over a pretentious

and gullible society? He had left traces of himself—cigarette ends, footprints, broken glass, and a rifled safe—but he had never been found, and so he remained disembodied and faceless.

It was the wind, she told herself; no thief would have left the door standing open. Now she could feel the cold air spreading through the house, rising up the stairs and moving the curtains in the hall. She got out of bed and put on a wrapper. She turned on the hall light and started down the stairs, asking herself what it was she was afraid of in the dark rooms below. She was afraid of the dark, like a primitive or a child, but why? What was there about darkness that threatened her? She was afraid of the dark as she was afraid of the unknown, and what was the unknown but the force of evil, and why should she be afraid of this? She turned on the lights one after another. The rooms were empty, and the wind was enjoying the liberty of the place, scattering the mail on the hall table and peering under the edge of the rug. The wind was cold, and she shivered as she closed and locked the front door, but now she was unafraid and very much herself. In the morning she had a cold.

The doctor came several times during that week, and when she got no better he ordered her to go to the hospital. In the middle of the morning, she went upstairs to pack. She had been to the hospital in recent years only once, to have her son, and then the drives of pregnancy had carried her unthinkingly through her preparations. This time she carried no life within her; she carried, instead, an infection. And, alone in her bedroom, choosing a nightgown and a hairbrush, she felt as if she had been singled out to make some mysterious voyage. She was not a sentimental woman, and she had no sad thoughts about parting from the pleasant room she shared with her husband. She felt weary but not sick, although there was a cutting pain in her chest. A stranger watching her would have thought she was insane. Why did she empty the carnations into the wastebasket and rinse out the vase? Why did she count her stockings, lock her jewelry box and hide the key, glance at her bank balance, dust off the mantelpiece, and stand in the middle of the room, looking as if she was listening to distant music? The foolish impulse to dust the mantelpiece was irresistible, but she had no idea why she did it, and anyhow it was time to go.

The hospital was new, and conscientious efforts had been made to make it a cheerful place, but her loveliness—you might say her elegance—was put at a disadvantage by the undisguisable atmosphere of regimentation, and she looked terribly out of place. A wheelchair was brought for her, but she refused to use it. She would have looked crestfallen and ridiculous, she knew, with her coat bunched up around her middle and her purse in her lap. A nurse took her upstairs and led her into a pleasant room, where she was told to undress and get into bed. While she was undressing, someone

brought her lunch on a tray. It was a small matter, but she found it disconcerting to be given a chop and some canned fruit while she was half naked and before the clocks had struck noon. She ate her lunch dutifully and the doctor came at two and told her she could count on being in the hospital ten days or two weeks. He would call Tom. She fell asleep, and woke at five with a fever.

The imagery of her fever was similar to the imagery of love. Her reveries were spacious, and she seemed to be promised the revelation of some truth that lay at the center of the labyrinthine and palatial structures where she wandered. The fever, as it got higher, eased the pain in her breast and made her indifferent to the heavy beating of her heart. The fever dreams seemed like a healthy employment of her imagination to distract her from the struggle that went on in her breast. She was standing at the head of a broad staircase with red walls. Many people were climbing the stairs. They had the attitudes of pilgrims. The climb was gruelling and lengthy, and when she reached the summit she found herself in a grove of lemon trees and lay down on the grass to rest. When she woke from this dream, her nightgown and the bed linen were soaked with sweat. She rang for a nurse, who changed them.

She felt much better when this was done. She felt that the fever had been a crisis and that, passing safely through it, she had triumphed over her illness. At nine the nurse gave her some medicine and said good night. Some time later she felt the lassitude of fever returning. She rang, but no one came, and she could not resist the confusion in her mind as her temperature rose. The labored beating of her heart sounded like a drum. She confused it with a drum in her mind, and saw a circle of barbaric dancers. The dance was long, rising to a climax, and at the moment of the climax, when she thought her heart would burst, she woke, shaking with a fresh chill and wet with sweat. A nurse finally came and changed her clothing and her linen again. She was relieved to be dry and warm. The two attacks of fever had weakened her but left her with a feeling of childish contentment. She felt wakeful, got out of bed, and by supporting herself on the furniture made her way to the window to see the night.

While she watched, clouds covered the moon. It must have been late, because most of the windows were dark. Then a window in the wall at her left was lighted, and she saw a nurse bring a young woman and her husband into a room identical with the one where she sat in the dark. The young woman was pregnant but not having labor pains. She undressed in the bathroom and got into bed while her husband was unpacking her bag. The window, like all the others, was hung with a Venetian blind, but no one had bothered to close the slats, and the exposure of this intimate scene, long past midnight, was startling. When the unpacking was done, he unfastened

the front of her nightgown, knelt beside the bed, and laid his head on her breasts. He remained this way for several minutes without moving. Then he got up—he must have heard the nurse approach—and covered his wife. The nurse came in and snapped the blind shut.

Jessica heard a night bird calling, and wondered what bird it was, what it looked like, what it was up to, what its prey was. There was a deep octave of thunder, magnificent and homely, as if someone in heaven had moved a chest of drawers. Then there was some lightning, distant and discolored, and a moment later a shower of rain dressed the earth. The sound of the rain seemed to Jessica, with the cutting pain in her breast, like the repeated attentions of a lover. It fell on the flat roofs of the hospital, the lawns, and the leaves in the wood. The pain in her chest seemed to spread and sharpen in proportion to her stubborn love of the night, and she felt for the first time in her life an unwillingness to leave any of this; a fear as senseless and powerful as her fear of the dark when she went down to shut the door; a horror of death.

Tom got home the next day, and came to the hospital every evening. Facing her in an armchair, he drank whiskey and read the paper. One night he kissed her, locked the door, and began to throw off his clothing. To her own astonishment, she began to cry.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I wasn't thinking. I suppose you must still be tired." He meant to be gentle, but he was only baffled, and when he sat down in the chair again, with his face half in the light, she saw the bewilderment he always suffered when he was frustrated in expressing the importunate, cheerful, and vulgar demands of his body.

At the end of two weeks she went home, although she still felt unlike herself and tired easily. The drugs that cured her depressed her. She felt, like any convalescent, unnaturally sentient, as if there was some persistent imbalance in her appetites, her loss of strength, giving her an illusion of spirituality—which did not, however, overwhelm her abundant common sense. She stood, late one afternoon, at her window watching the ring of golden light that crowned the eastern hills at that season and time of day. It rested also on the Babcocks' lawn, the Fillmores' ranch house, the stone walls of the church, the Thompsons' chimney—lambent, and as yellow and clear as strained honey, and really a ring, because, as she watched, she saw at the base of the hill a clear demarcation between the yellow light and the rising dark, and watched the band of light lift past the Babcocks' lawn, the Fillmores' ranch house, the stone walls of the church, and the Thompsons' chimney, up into thin air. The street was empty, or nearly so. Everyone in Proxmire Manor had two cars and no one walked, with the exception of old Mr. Cosden, who belonged to the generation that took constitutionals. Up

the street he came, his blue eyes fixed on the last piece of yellow light that touched the church steeple, as if exclaiming to himself, "How wonderful, how wonderful it is!" He passed, and then a much stranger figure took her attention—a tall man with unusually long arms. He was a stray, she decided; he must live in the slums of Parthenia. In his right hand he carried an umbrella and a pair of rubbers. He was terribly stooped, and to see where he was going had to crane his neck forward and upward like an adder. He had not bent his back over a whetstone or a workbench or under the weight of a brick hod or at any other honest task. It was the stoop of weak-mindedness, abnegation, and bewilderment. He had never had any occasion to straighten his back in self-esteem. Stooped with shyness as a child, stooped with loneliness as a youth, stooped now under an invisible burden of social disregard, he walked with his long arms reaching nearly to his knees. His wide, thin mouth was set in a silly half grin, meaningless and sad, but the best face he had been able to hit on. As he approached the house, the beating of her heart seemed to correspond to his footsteps, the cutting pain returned to her breast, and she felt the return of her fear of darkness, evil, and death. Carrying his umbrella and rubbers, although there was not a cloud in the sky, he duck-footed out of sight.

A few nights later, Jessica was driving back from the village of Parthenia. The street was lighted erratically by the few stores that hung on at the edge of town—general stores smelling of stale bread and bitter oranges, where those in the neighborhood who were too lazy, too tired, or too infirm to go to the palatial shopping centers bought their coffee rings, beer, and hamburgers. The darkness of the street was sparsely, irregularly checkered with light, and she saw the tall man crossing one of these apertures, throwing a long, crooked shadow ahead of him on the paving. He held a heavy bag of groceries in each arm. He was no more stooped than before—the curvature of his spine seemed set—but the bags must be heavy, and she pitied him. She drove on, evoking defensively the worlds of difference that lay between them and the chance that he would have misunderstood her kindness had she offered to give him a ride. But when she had completed her defense it seemed so shallow, idle, and selfish that she turned the car around in her own driveway and drove back toward Parthenia. Her best instinct was to help him—to make some peace between his figure and her irrational fear of death—and why should she deny herself this? He would have passed the lighted stores by this time, she decided, and she drove slowly up the dark street, looking for his stooped figure. When she saw him, she turned the car around and stopped. "Can I help you?" she asked. "Can I give you a ride? You seem to have so much to carry." He turned and looked at the beautiful stranger without quite relaxing his half grin, and she wondered if he wasn't a deaf-mute as well as weak-minded. Then a look of distrust

touched the grin. There was no question about what he was feeling. She was from that world that had gulled him, pelted him with snowballs, and rifled his lunchbox. His mother had told him to beware of strangers and here was a beautiful stranger, perhaps the most dangerous of all. "No!" he said. "No, no!" She drove on, wondering what was at the bottom of her impulse; wondering, in the end, why she should scrutinize a simple attempt at kindness.

On Thursday the maid was off, and Jessica took care of the baby. He slept after lunch, and she woke him at four, lifting him out of his crib and letting the blankets fall. They were alone. The house was quiet. She carried him into the kitchen, put him in his high chair, and opened a can of figs. Sleepy and docile and pale, he followed her with his eyes, and smiled sweetly when their eyes met. His shift was stained and wet, and she wore a wrapper. She sat by him at the table, with her face only a few inches from his, and they spooned the figs out of the can. He shuddered now and then with what seemed to be pleasure. The quiet house, the still kitchen, the pale and docile boy in his stained shift, her round white arms on the table, the comfortable slovenliness of eating from a can were all part of an intimacy so intense and yet so tranquil that it seemed to her as if she and the baby were the same flesh and blood, subjects of the same heart, all mingled and at ease. What a comfort, she thought, is one's skin. . . . But it was time then to change the boy, time to dress herself, time to take up cheerfully the other side of her life. Carrying the child through the living room, she saw, out of the window, the stooped figure with his rubbers and umbrella.

A wind was blowing, and he moved indifferently through a diagonal fall of yellow leaves, craning his neck like an adder, his back bent under its impossible burden. She held the baby's head against her breast, foolishly, instinctively, as if to protect his eyes from some communicable evil. She turned away from the window, and shortly afterward there was a loud pounding on the back door. How had he found where she lived, and what did he want? He might have recognized her car in the driveway; he might have asked who she was, the village was that small. He had not come to thank her for her attempted kindness. She felt sure of that. He had come—in his foolishness—to accuse her of something. Was he dangerous? Was there any danger left in Proxmire Manor? She put the boy down and went toward the back door, summoning her self-respect. When she opened it, there was Mr. Narobi's good-looking grocery boy.

He made it all seem laughable—came in beaming and with a kind of radiance that seemed to liberate her from this absurd chain of anxieties.

"You're new?" she asked.

"Yes."

"I don't know your name."

"Emile. It's a funny name. My father was French."

"Did he come from France?"

"Oh, no. Quebec. French Canadian."

"What does he do?"

"When people used to ask me that, I used to say, 'He plays the harp.' He's dead. He died when I was little. My mother works at the florist's—Barnum's—on Green Street. Maybe you know her?"

"I don't think I do. Would you like a beer?"

"Sure. Why not? It's my last stop."

She asked if he wanted something to eat, and got him some crackers and cheese.

"I'm always hungry," he said.

She brought the baby into the kitchen and they all three sat at the table while he ate and drank. Stuffing his mouth with cheese, he seemed to be a child. His gaze was clear and disarming. She couldn't meet it without a stir in her blood. And was this sluttishness? Was she worse than Mrs. Lockhart? Would she be dragged figuratively out of Proxmire Manor at the tail of a cart? She didn't care.

"Nobody ever gave me a beer before," he said. "They give me Cokes, sometimes. I guess they don't think I'm old enough. But I drink. Martinis, whiskey, everything."

"How old are you?"

"Nineteen. Now I have to go."

"Please don't go," she said.

He stood at the table, covering her with his wide gaze, and she wondered what would happen if she reached out to him. Would he run out of the kitchen? Would he shout, "Unhand me!"? He seemed ripe; he seemed ready for the picking; and yet there was something else in the corner of his eyes—reserve, wariness. He perhaps had a vision of something better, and if he had, she would encourage him with all her heart. Go and love the drum majorette, the girl next door.

"Oh, I'd like to stay," he said. "It's nice here. But it's Thursday, and I have to take my mother shopping. Thank you very much."

The Moonlite Drive-In was divided into three magnificent parts. There was the golf links, the roller rink, and the vast amphitheatre itself, where thousands of darkened cars were arranged in the form of an ancient arena, spread out beneath the tree of night. Above the deep thunder from the rink and the noise from the screen, you could hear—high in the air and so like the sea that a blind man would be deceived—the noise of traffic on the great Northern Expressway that flows southward from Montreal to the Shenandoah, engorging in its cloverleafs and brilliantly engineered gradings the

green playing fields, rose gardens, barns, farms, meadows, trout streams, forests, homesteads, and churches of a golden past. The population of this highway gathered for their meals in a string of identical restaurants, where the murals, the urinals, the menus, and the machines for vending sacred medals were uniform. It was some touching part of the autumn night and the hazards of the road that so many of these travellers pleaded for the special protection of gentle St. Christopher and the blessings of the Holy Virgin.

An exit (Exit 307) curved away from the Northern Expressway down toward the Moonlite, and here was everything a man might need: the means for swift travel, food, exercise, skill (the golf links), and in the dark cars of the amphitheatre a place to perform the rites of spring—or, in this case, the rites of autumn. It was an autumn night, and the air was full of pollen and decay. Emile sat in the back seat with Louise Mecker. Charlie Putney, his best friend, was in the front seat with Doris Pluzinski. They were all drinking whiskey out of paper cups, and they were all in various stages of undress. On the screen a woman exclaimed, "I want to put on innocence, like a bright, new dress. I want to feel clean again!" Then she slammed a door.

Emile was proud of his skin, but the mention of cleanliness aroused his doubts and misgivings. He blushed. These parties were a commonplace of his generation, and if he hadn't participated in them he would have got himself a reputation as a prude and a faggot. Four boys in his high-school class had been arrested for selling pornography and heroin. They had approached him, but the thought of using narcotics and obscene pictures disgusted him. His sitting undressed in the back seat of a car might be accounted for by the fact that the music he danced to and the movies he watched dealt less and less with the heart and more and more with overt sexuality, as if the rose gardens and playing fields buried under the Expressway were enjoying a revenge. What is the grade-crossing tender standing in the autumn sun thinking of? Why has the postmaster such a dreamy look? Why does the judge presiding at General Sessions seem so restless? Why does the cabdriver frown and sigh? What is the shoeshine boy thinking of as he stares out into the rain? What darkens the mind and torments the flesh of the truck driver on the Expressway? What are the thoughts of the old gardener dusting his roses, the garage mechanic on his back under the Chevrolet, the idle lawyer, the sailor waiting for the fog to lift, the drunkard, the soldier? The times were venereal, and Emile was a child of the times.

Louise Mecker was a tomato, but her looseness seemed only to be one aspect of a cheerful disposition. She did what she was expected to do to get along, and this was part of it. And yet in her readiness she sometimes seemed to debase and ridicule the seat of desire, toward which he still pre-

served some vague and tender feelings. When the lilac under his bedroom window bloomed in the spring and he could smell its fragrance as he lay in bed, some feeling, as strong as ambition but without a name, moved him. Oh, I want—I want to do so well, he thought, sitting naked at the Moonlite. But what did he want to do? Be a jet pilot? Discover a waterfall in Africa? Manage a supermarket? Whatever it was, he wanted something that would correspond to his sense that life was imposing; something that would confirm his feeling that, as he stood at the window of Narobi's grocery store watching the men and women on the sidewalk and the stream of clouds in the sky, the procession he saw was a majestic one.

He thought of Jessica, who by giving him a beer had penetrated into his considerations. In the last six or eight months, he had been bewildered by the sudden interest men and women took in his company. They seemed to want something from him and to want it ardently, and although he was not an innocent or a fool, he was genuinely uncertain about what it was they wanted. His own desires were violent. While he was shaving in the morning, a seizure of sexual need doubled him up with pain and made him groan. "Cut yourself, dear?" his mother asked. And yet he was a young man who could be dissuaded from the most violent sexual excitement by the sight of a pear tree blooming in a back yard. Louise satisfied him, but Mrs. Coliver excited a much broader realm of desire. He thought of her—oddly enough—as a tragic figure, frail, lonely, and misunderstood. Her husband, whoever he was, would be obtuse, stupid, and clumsy. Weren't all men his age? She was a fair prisoner in a tower.

Halfway through the feature, they got dressed and, with the cutout open and the radio blaring "Take It Easy, Greasy," roared out of the Moonlite onto the Expressway, jeopardizing their lives and the lives in every car they passed (men, women, and children in arms), but gentle St. Christopher or the mercies of the Holy Virgin spared them and got Emile safely home. He climbed the stairs, kissed his mother good night—she was studying an article in *Reader's Digest* about the pancreas—and went to bed. Lying in bed, he decided, quite innocently, that he was tired of tomatoes, movies, and paper cups, and that he would become Mrs. Coliver's lover.

He went to the house three or four times a week. Jessica was usually alone in the late afternoon, and he timed his visits. He wondered if he should bring her a present—a box of candy or something like that. Sometimes she seemed to be waiting for him. No one had ever been so attentive. She seemed interested in all the facts of his life—that his father had been a surveyor, that Emile drove a second-hand Buick, that he had done well at school. She usually gave him a beer and sat with him in the kitchen. Her company excited him. It made him feel that some of her worldliness, some

of her finesse, would rub off on him and get him out of the grocery business. Suddenly, one afternoon, she said quite shyly, "You know, you're beautiful."

He wondered if she hadn't lost her marbles. He had heard that women sometimes did. Had he been wasting his time? He didn't want to be the lover of a woman who had lost her marbles. He knew he wasn't beautiful. If he was beautiful, someone would have said so before. . . . And if he *had* been beautiful, and had been convinced of this, he would have concealed it—not through modesty but through an instinct of self-preservation. He sensed that uncommon beauty, like any other uncommon gift, would entail responsibilities, and he would have wanted to evade them. At this level he resisted her praise flatly. But at another level, and one much more wary, appeared her right to say what she felt. Was it possible that people could love and praise one another openly without having lost their marbles? This was what he had wanted, this was what he had planned, but it was all in the wrong terms. "Oh, I'm not beautiful," he said earnestly, and finished his beer. "Now I have to get back to the store."

Jessica went shopping a few days later. She took a midmorning train and sat with her neighbor, Gertrude Bender. Gertrude had silver-gilt hair, skinned back in a chignon with such preciseness and skill that Jessica wondered how it had been accomplished. She had matching silver-gilt furs, and rattled six gold bracelets. She was a pretty, shallow woman who wielded the inarguable powers of great wealth and whose voice was shrill. She talked about her daughter Betty. "She's worried about her schoolwork, but I tell her, 'Betty,' I tell her, 'don't you worry about your schoolwork. Do you think what I learned in school got me where I am today? Develop a good figure and learn the forks. That's all that matters.'"

In the seat in front of Jessica there was an old lady whose head was bowed under the weight of a hat covered with cloth roses. A family occupied the facing seats across the aisle—a mother and three children. They were poor. Their clothing was cheap and threadbare, and the woman's face was worn. One of her children was sick and lay across her lap, sucking his thumb. He was two or three years old, but it was hard to guess his age, he was so pale and thin. There were sores on his forehead and sores on his thin legs. The lines around his mouth were as deep as those on the face of a man. He seemed sick and miserable, but stubborn and obdurate at the same time, as if he held in his fist a promise of something bewildering and festive that he would not relinquish in spite of his sickness and the strangeness of the train. He sucked his thumb noisily and would not move from his position in the midst of life. His mother bent over him as she must have done when she nursed him, and sang him a lullaby as they passed Parthenia, Gatesbridge, Tuxon Valley, and Tokinsville.

Gertrude said, "I don't understand people who lose their looks when they

don't have to. I mean what's the point of going through life looking like an old laundry bag? Now, take Molly Singleton. She goes up to the Club on Saturday nights wearing those thick eyeglasses and an ugly dress and wonders why she doesn't have a good time. There's no point in going to parties if you're going to depress everyone. I'm no girl and I know it, but I still have all the partners I want and I like to give the boys a thrill. I like to see them perk up. It's amazing what you can do. Why, one of the grocery boys wrote me a love letter. I wouldn't tell Eddie—I wouldn't tell anyone—because the poor kid might lose his job, but what's the sense of living if you don't generate a little excitement once in a while?"

Jessica was jealous. That the rush of feeling she suffered was plainly ridiculous didn't diminish its power. She seemed, unknowingly, to have convinced herself of the fact that Emile worshipped her, and the possibility that he worshipped them all, that she might be at the bottom of his list of attractions, was a shock. It was all absurd, and it was all true. She seemed to have rearranged all of her values around his image, to have come unthinkingly to depend upon his admiration. The fact that she cared at all about his philandering was painfully humiliating.

She left New York in the middle of the afternoon and called Narobi's when she got back. She ordered a loaf of bread, garlic salt, endive—nothing she needed. He was there fifteen or twenty minutes later.

"Emile?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Did you ever write a letter to Mrs. Bender?"

"Mrs. who?"

"Mrs. Bender."

"I haven't written a letter since last Christmas. My uncle sent me ten dollars and I wrote a letter and thanked him."

"Emile, you must know who Mrs. Bender is."

"No, I don't. She probably buys her groceries somewhere else."

"Are you telling the truth, Emile?"

"Sure."

"Oh, I'm making such a damn fool of myself," she said, and began to cry.

"Don't be sad," he said. "Please don't! I like you very much, I think you're fascinating, but I wouldn't want to make you sad."

"Emile, I'm going to Nantucket on Saturday, to close up the house there. Would you like to come with me?"

"Sure, I'd love to."

He didn't, in the end, have to do anything.

When he had gone, she was alone in the dark house. She had done what she wanted; she had acted on her deepest instincts, and who would be

harmed? . . . Who wouldn't? Her husband, her son, her friends, her neighbors, even her old Uncle Lawrence, dying in Palo Alto, would suffer, but the person who seemed most vulnerable to her then was Emile's mother. She had never seen Mrs. Cranmer. She could not imagine what the woman looked like. She got into the car and drove to the florist shop on Green Street. There was a bell attached to the door and, inside, the smell of flowers. Mrs. Cranmer came out of the back, taking a pencil from her bleached hair and smiling like a child.

Emile's mother was one of those widows who keep themselves in a constant state of readiness for some call, some invitation, some meeting that will never take place, because the lover is dead. You find them answering the telephone in the back-street cabstands of little towns, their hair freshly bleached, their nails painted, their high-arched shoes ready for dancing with someone who cannot come. They sell nightgowns, flowers, stationery, and candy, and the lowest in their ranks sell movie tickets. They are always in a state of readiness, they have all known the love of a good man, and it is in his memory that they struggle through the snow and mud in high heels. Mrs. Cranmer's face was painted brightly, her dress was silk, and there were bows on her high-heeled pumps. She was a small, plump woman, with her waist cinctured in sternly, like a cushion with a noose around it. She looked like a figure that had stepped from a comic book, although there was nothing comic about her.

Jessica ordered some roses, and Mrs. Cranmer passed the order on to someone in the back and said, "They'll be ready in a minute." The doorbell rang and another customer came in—a thick-featured man with a white plastic button in his right ear that was connected by an electrical cord to his vest. He spoke heavily. "I want something for a deceased," he said. Mrs. Cranmer was diplomatic, and through a series of delicate indirections tried to discover his relationship to the corpse. Would he like a blanket of flowers, at perhaps forty dollars, or something a little less expensive? He gave his information readily, but only in reply to direct questions. The corpse was his sister. Her children were scattered. "I guess I'm the closest she had left," he said confusedly, and Jessica, waiting for her roses, felt a premonition of death. She must die—she must be the subject of some such discussion in a flower shop, and close her eyes forever on a world that distracted her with its beauty. The image, hackneyed and poignant, that came to her was of life as a diversion, a festival from which she was summoned by the secret police of extinction, when the dancing and the music were at their best. I do not want to leave, she thought. I do not ever want to leave. Mrs. Cranmer gave her the roses, and she went home.

Emile went to the airport alone on Saturday morning. Jessica had bought the plane tickets and made all the arrangements, and she had asked him

not to speak to her on the plane. He wore new shoes and a new pair of pants, and walked with a bounce in order to feel the thickness of the new soles and to feel the nice play of muscle as it worked up his legs and back into his shoulders. He had never been on a plane before, and he was disappointed to find that it was not as sleek as the planes in magazine advertisements, and that the fuselage was dented and stained with smoke. He got a window seat and watched the activity on the field, feeling that as soon as the plane was airborne he would begin a new life of motion, comfort, and freedom. Hadn't he always dreamed of going here and there and making friends in different places and being easily accepted as a man of strength and intelligence and not a grocery boy without a future or a destiny, and had he ever doubted that his dreams would come true? Jessica was the last but one to get on. She was wearing a fur coat, and the dark skins made her appear to him like a visitor from another continent, where everything was beautiful, orderly, and luxurious. She didn't look in his direction. A drunken sailor took the seat beside Emile and fell asleep. Emile was disappointed. Watching the planes that passed over Parthenia and Proxmire Manor, he had assumed that the people who travelled in them were of a high order. In a little while they were off the ground.

It was charming. At the distance of a few hundred feet, all the confused and mistaken works of man seemed orderly and charming, and the higher they got above the roofs of Long Island the more it seemed to him that the lives lived there must be full of love and happiness, and he smiled down broadly at the earth and its population. The sensation he had looked forward to, of being airborne, he did not have; flying was not what he had anticipated, and it seemed to him that the engines of the plane were struggling to resist gravity and hold them in their place among the thin clouds. The sea they were crossing was dark and colorless, and as they lost sight of land he felt in himself a corresponding sense of loss, as if at this point some sustaining bond with his green past had been cut. The island, when he saw it below them on the sea, with a cuff of foam on its northeast edge, looked so small and flat that he wondered why anyone should want to go there. When he left the plane, she was waiting for him by the steps, and they walked through the airport and got a cab. She told the driver, "First I want to go into the village and get some groceries, and then I want to go to Madamquid."

"What do you want to go to Madamquid for?" the driver asked. "There's nobody out there now."

"I have a cottage out there," she said.

They drove across a bleak landscape, but one so closely associated with her youth and her happiness that the bleakness escaped her. In the village, they stopped at the grocery store where she had always traded, and she asked

Emile to wait outside. When she had bought the groceries, a boy wearing the white apron and bent in exactly the same attitude as Emile was when she first saw him carried them out to the taxi. She gave him a tip and looked up and down the street for Emile. He was standing in front of the drugstore with some other young men his age.

Her courage left her then. The society of the bored and the disappointed, from which she had hoped to escape, seemed battlemented, implacable, and splendid—a creation useful to concert halls, hospitals, bridges, and courthouses, and one that she was not fit to enter. She had wanted to bring into her life the freshness of a journey and had achieved nothing but a galling sense of moral shabbiness.

"You want me to get your boy friend?" the cabdriver asked.

"He's not my boy friend," Jessica said. "He's just come out to help me move some things."

Emile saw her then, and crossed the street, and they started for Madamquid. She felt so desperate that she took his hand, not expecting him to support her, but he turned to her with wonderful largess, a smile so strong and tender that she felt the blood pour back into her heart. They were heading out to the point, where there was nothing to see but the cream-colored dunes, with their scalp locks of knife grass, and the dark autumn ocean. He was perplexed by this. One of the several divisions in his world was that group of people who went away for the summer—who closed their houses in June and bought no more groceries until September—and, never having enjoyed any such migratory privileges himself, he had imagined the places where they went as having golden sands and purple seas, the houses palatial and pink-walled, with patios and swimming pools, like the houses he saw in the movies. There was nothing like that here, and he couldn't believe that even in the long, hot days of summer this place would look less of a wilderness. Were there fleets of sailboats, deck chairs, and beach umbrellas? There was no trace of summery furniture now. She pointed out the house to him and he saw a big, shingled building on a bluff. He could see that it was big—it was big, all right—but if you were going to build a summer house, why not build something neat and compact, something that would be nice to look at? But maybe he was wrong, maybe there was something to be learned here; she seemed so pleased at the sight of the old place that he was willing to suspend judgment. She paid off the cabdriver and tried to open the front door, but the lock had rusted in the salt air and he had to help. He finally got the door open, and she went in and he carried in the bags and then, of course, the groceries.

She knew well enough that the place was homely—it was meant to be—but the lemony smell of the matchboard walls seemed to her like the fragrance of the lives that had been spent there in the sunny months. Her

sister's old violin music, her brother's German textbooks, the water color of a thistle her aunt had painted seemed like the essence of their lives. And while she had quarrelled with her brother and her sister and they no longer communicated with each other, all her memories now were kind and gentle. "I've always been happy here," she said, "I've always been terribly happy here. That's why I wanted to come back. It's cold now, of course, but we can light some fires." She noticed then, on the wall at her left, the pencil markings where each Fourth of July her uncle had stood them up against the matchboard and recorded their growth. Afraid that Emile might see this incriminating evidence of her age, she said, "Let's put the groceries in the icebox."

"That's a funny word, icebox," he said. "I never heard it before. It's a funny thing to call a frigidaire. But you speak differently, you know—people like you. You say lots of different things. Now, you say 'divine'—you say lots of things are 'divine'—but, you know, my mother, she wouldn't ever use that word, excepting when she was speaking of God."

Frightened by the chart in the hallway, she wondered if there was anything else incriminating in the house, and remembered the gallery of family photographs in the upstairs hall. Here were pictures of her in school uniforms, in catboats, and many pictures of her playing on the beach with her son. While he put the groceries away, she went upstairs and hid the pictures in a closet. Then they walked down the bluff to the beach.

It was surprisingly warm for that time of year. The wind was southerly; in the night it would probably change around to the southwest, bringing rain. All along the beach, the waves from Portugal rolled in. There was the noise of a detonation, the roar of furling water, and then the glistening discharge fanned out on the sand, faded, and sank. Ahead of her, at the high-water mark, she saw a sealed bottle with a note inside and ran to pick it up. What did she expect? The secret of the Spada treasure, or a proposal of marriage from a French sailor? She handed Emile the bottle and he broke it open on a stone. The note was written in pencil. "To whomever in the whole wide world may read this I am a 18 yr old college boy, sitting on the beach at Madamquid on Sept. 8. . . ." His sense of the act of setting his name and address adrift on the tide was rhapsodic, but the bottle must have returned to where he stood a little while after he had walked away. Emile asked if he could go swimming, and then bent down to unlace his new shoes. One of the laces knotted and his face got red. She dropped to her knees and undid it herself. He got out of his clothes hurriedly in order to display his youth and his brawn, but he asked her earnestly if she minded if he took off his underpants. He stood with his back to her while he did this, and then walked off into the sea. It was colder than he had expected. His shoulders and his buttocks tightened and his head shook. Naked and shiver-

ing, he seemed pitiful, vain, and fair—a common young man trying to find some pleasure and adventure in his life. He dove into a wave and then came lunging back to where she stood. His teeth were chattering. She threw her coat over him and they went back to the house.

She had been right about the wind. After midnight, or later, it came out of the southwest, spouting rain, and as she had done ever since she was a child, she got out of bed and crossed the room to close the windows. He woke and heard the sound of her bare feet on the wooden floor. He couldn't see her in the dark, but as she came back toward the bed her step sounded heavy and old.

It rained in the morning. They walked on the beach, and Jessica cooked a chicken. Looking for a bottle of wine, she found a long-necked green bottle of Moselle, like the bottle she had set out in her dream of the picnic and the ruined castle. Emile ate most of the chicken. At four they took a cab to the airport, and flew back to New York. In the train out to Proxmire Manor he sat several seats ahead of her, reading the paper. Tom met her at the station and was pleased to have her back. The baby was awake, and Jessica sat in a chair in their bedroom singing, "Sleep, my little one, sleep. Thy Father guards the sheep. . . ." She sang until both the baby and Tom were asleep.

Emile was at the house the next afternoon with a scheme. Some friends of his had a shack at the edge of town where they took girls, and Jessica and he could meet there. He admitted that it wasn't much of a place, but he could get a clean blanket and some curtains for the windows. He might even paint the inside. He was excited, and she saw that there wouldn't be any point in stating her objections, although the idea disgusted her. He told her the next afternoon that he was going ahead with his plans for improving the shack. He had bought some paint and a roller and was going to do the walls that night. It would be ready for the weekend. She put him off that weekend, but he was angry. The next Saturday, they met in Boston. She told Tom that she had to go north to see her aunt. Her aunt was not in Boston—she was in Florida—but Tom didn't question her explanation.

She and Emile flew in separate planes. He arrived an hour later than she, and went to her room, where they spent the afternoon. Later they went out for a walk. It was very cold, and, looking at the façades and campaniles of Copley Square, she was moved by the thought that Boston had once thought itself the sister city of Florence, that vale of flowers. The wind scored her face. He stopped to look at a ring in a jeweller's window. It was a man's ring, a star sapphire set in gold. The ring did not interest her, but it seemed to hold him. She shook with the cold while he admired the stone.

"It's pretty, isn't it," he said. "I mean the star caught in the stone. I wonder how much it costs. I'm going in and ask."

"Don't, Emile," she said. "I'm frozen. And anyhow, those things are always terribly expensive."

"I'll just ask. It won't take a minute."

She waited for him in the shelter of the door. "Eight hundred dollars!" he exclaimed when he came out. "Think of that. Eight hundred dollars."

"I told you it would be expensive."

"Eight hundred dollars. But it was pretty, though, wasn't it? And I suppose if you needed money you could always sell it. I mean, they must fix the price on things like that, don't you think? It would be sort of like an investment. You know, if I had eight hundred dollars, I might buy a ring like that. I just might. People, when they saw the ring, they would always know that you were worth eight hundred dollars. Waiters. Like that. I mean they would respect you when you were wearing a ring like that."

It seemed to her that he was deliberately debasing their relationship and forcing her into the humiliating position of buying him the ring, but she was mistaken; the idea had never occurred to him.

"Do you want me to buy you the ring, Emile?"

"Oh, no, I wasn't thinking about that. It just caught my eye. You know how things catch your eye."

"I'll buy it for you."

"No, no, forget about it."

They had dinner in a restaurant and went to a movie. Walking back to the hotel, he bought a newspaper, and he sat reading it in her room while she undressed and brushed her hair. "I'm hungry," he said suddenly. His tone was petulant. "At home I get a bowl of cornflakes or a sandwich—something before I go to bed." He stood up, put his hands on his stomach, and shouted, "I'm hungry! I just don't get enough to eat in these restaurants. I'm still growing. I have to have three big meals a day and sometimes something in between!"

"Well, why don't you go down and get something to eat?"

"Well."

"Do you need money?"

"Sort of."

"Here," she said. "Here's some money. Go down and get some supper."

He went out, but he didn't return. At midnight she locked the door and went to sleep. In the morning she dressed, went to the jeweller's, and bought the ring. "Oh, I remember you," the clerk said. "I saw you last night. I saw you standing outside the door when your son came in to ask the price." It was a blow, and she supposed she could be seen to flinch. She thought that perhaps the winter dark and pale light in the street had made her seem

old. "You're a very generous mother," the clerk said when he took her check and passed her the box. She called Emile's room and when he came down she gave him the ring. His pleasure and gratitude were not, she thought, mercenary and crass but only a natural response to the ancient tokens of love, the immemorial power of stones and fine gold. It was a foggy afternoon, all the planes were grounded, and they went back on the train, sitting in different cars.

He sat by the window, watching the landscape. Somewhere south of Boston, the train passed a suburban tract of houses. They were new, and although the architects and the gardeners had rung a few changes here and there, the effect was monotonous. What interested him was that rising in the center of the development was a large, ugly, loaf-shaped, and colorless escarpment of granite, too steep to hold the foundations of a house. It was the only form on the landscape that had not succumbed to change. It could not be dynamited. It could not be quarried and carried away piecemeal. It was useless, and it was invincible. Some boys his age were climbing the steep face, and he guessed this was their last refuge.

It was late and it was getting cold, and he could remember the sense of the season and the hour when it was time to leave off playing and go home to study. Near where he lived, there was a similar rock, and he had climbed it on winter afternoons, to smoke cigarettes and talk with his friends about the future. He could remember grasping for handholds on the steep face, and how the rough stone pulled at his best school clothes, but what he remembered most clearly was how once his feet were on the ground he had a sense of awakening to a whole new life, the arrival at a new state of consciousness, as clearly unlike his past as sleep is unlike waking. Standing at the foot of the cliff at that hour and season—about to go home and study but not yet on the path—he would stare at the yards and the trees and the lighted houses with a galvanic sense of discovery. How forceful and interesting the world had seemed in the early winter light! How new it all seemed. He must have been familiar with every window, roof, tree, and landmark in the place, but he felt as if he were seeing it all for the first time.

How old he had grown since then.

They met ten days or two weeks later, in a New York hotel. She was there first and ordered some whiskey and roast-beef sandwiches. When he came in, she poured herself a drink and made one for him, and he ate both the sandwiches she had ordered. She was wearing a bracelet, made of silver bells, that she had bought long ago in Casablanca. She had been given a Mediterranean cruise as a Christmas present by a rich elderly cousin, and in her travels she had never been able to escape a genuine and oppressive sense of gratitude to the old lady. When she saw Lisbon, she thought, Oh, Cousin Martha, I wish you could see Lisbon! When she saw Rhodes, she

thought, Oh, Cousin Martha, I wish you could see Rhodes! Standing in the Casbah at dusk, she thought, Oh, Cousin Martha, I wish you could see how purple the skies are above Africa! Remembering this, she gave the silver bells a shake.

"Do you have to wear that bracelet?" he asked.

"Of course not," she said.

"I hate that kind of junky stuff," he said. "You've got lots of nice jewelry—those sapphires. I don't see why you want to wear junk. Those bells are driving me crazy. Every time you move they jingle. They get on my nerves."

"I'm sorry, darling," she said. She took off the bracelet. He seemed ashamed or confused by his harshness; he had never before been harsh or callous with her.

"Sometimes I wonder why it happened to me like this," he said. "I mean, I couldn't have had anything better, I know that. You're beautiful and you're fascinating—you're the most fascinating woman I ever saw—but sometimes I wonder—wondered—why it should happen to me this way. I mean, some fellows—right away they get a pretty young girl, she lives next door, their folks are friendly, they go to the same schools, the same dances, they go dancing together, they fall in love and get married. But I guess that's not for poor people. No pretty girls live next door to me. There aren't any pretty girls on my street. Oh, I'm glad it happened to me the way it did, but I can't stop wondering what it would have been like some other way. I mean like in Nantucket that weekend. That was the big football weekend, and I was thinking, there we were, all alone in that gloomy old house—that was a real gloomy place, rainy and everything—while some fellows were driving in convertibles to the football game."

"I must seem terribly old."

"Oh, no. No, you don't. It isn't that. . . . Only once. That was in Nantucket, too. It was raining in the night. It began to rain and you got up to shut the window."

"And I seemed terribly old?"

"Just for a minute. . . . Not really. But you see, you're used to comfort, you're different. Two cars, plenty of clothes. I'm just a poor kid."

"Does it matter?"

"Oh, I know you think it doesn't, but it does. When you go into a restaurant, you never look at the prices. Now, your husband, he can buy you all these things. He can buy you anything you want, he's loaded, but I'm just a poor kid. I guess I'm sort of a lone wolf. I guess most poor people are. I'll never live in a house like yours. I'll never get to join a country club. I'll never have a place at the beach. And I'm still hungry," he said, looking at the empty sandwich plate. "I'm still growing, you know. I have to have lunch. I don't want to seem ungrateful or anything, but I'm hungry."

by John Cheever

"You go down to the dining room, darling," she said, "and get some lunch. Here's five dollars." She kissed him, and then as soon as he was gone she left the hotel herself.

She wandered around the streets—she had no place to go—wondering what had been the first in the chain of events that had brought her to where she was. The barking of a dog, the dream of a castle, or her boredom at Mrs. Wishing's dance? She waited for the crushing pain of guilt and retribution, but the blow seemed suspended, and the thought of Emile eating his lunch put some blessed distance between her and him; they were individuals once more. She took a train home, her only anxiety then being that he would follow her and insist on some roaring confrontation—insist at least on a scene—although she should have known him better than this. The afternoon passed quietly, and they never met again except in passing. Driving down Green Street one evening, she saw him with a big blonde—a girl two or three inches taller than he. Tom never once suspected what had been going on, and she bought her groceries someplace else.

1965: *from The Sewanee Review*

REVELATION

by Flannery O'Connor

The doctor's waiting room, which was very small, was almost full when the Turpins entered and Mrs. Turpin, who was very large, made it look even smaller by her presence. She stood looming at the head of the magazine table set in the center of it, a living demonstration that the room was inadequate and ridiculous. Her little bright black eyes took in all the patients as she sized up the seating situation. There was one vacant chair and a place on the sofa occupied by a blond child in a dirty blue romper who should have been told to move over and make room for the lady. He was five or six, but Mrs. Turpin saw at once that no one was going to tell him to move over. He was slumped down in the seat, his arms idle at his sides and his eyes idle in his head; his nose ran unchecked.

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Mrs. Turpin put a firm hand on Claud's shoulder and said in a voice that included anyone who wanted to listen, "Claud, you sit in that chair there," and gave him a push down into the vacant one. Claud was florid and bald and sturdy, somewhat shorter than Mrs. Turpin, but he sat down as if he were accustomed to doing what she told him to.

Mrs. Turpin remained standing. The only man in the room besides Claud was a lean stringy old fellow with a rusty hand spread out on each knee, whose eyes were closed as if he were asleep or dead or pretending to be so as not to get up and offer her his seat. Her gaze settled agreeably on a well-dressed grey-haired lady whose eyes met hers and whose expression said: if that child belonged to me, he would have some manners and move over—there's plenty of room there for you and him too.

Claud looked up with a sigh and made as if to rise.

"Sit down," Mrs. Turpin said. "You know you're not supposed to stand on that leg. He has an ulcer on his leg," she explained.

Claud lifted his foot onto the magazine table and rolled his trouser leg up to reveal a purple swelling on a plump marble-white calf.

"My!" the pleasant lady said. "How did you do that?"

"A cow kicked him," Mrs. Turpin said.

"Goodness!" said the lady.

Claud rolled his trouser leg down.

"Maybe the little boy would move over," the lady suggested, but the child did not stir.

"Somebody will be leaving in a minute," Mrs. Turpin said. She could not understand why a doctor—with as much money as they made charging five dollars a day to just stick their head in the hospital door and look at you—couldn't afford a decent-sized waiting room. This one was hardly bigger than a garage. The table was cluttered with limp-looking magazines and at one end of it there was a big green glass ash tray full of cigaret butts and cotton wads with little blood spots on them. If she had had anything to do with the running of the place, that would have been emptied every so often. There were no chairs against the wall at the head of the room. It had a rectangular-shaped panel in it that permitted a view of the office where the nurse came and went and the secretary listened to the radio. A plastic fern in a gold pot sat in the opening and trailed its fronds down almost to the floor. The radio was softly playing gospel music.

Just then the inner door opened and a nurse with the highest stack of yellow hair Mrs. Turpin had ever seen put her face in the crack and called for the next patient. The woman sitting beside Claud grasped the two arms of her chair and hoisted herself up; she pulled her dress free from her legs and lumbered through the door where the nurse had disappeared.

Mrs. Turpin eased into the vacant chair, which held her tight as a corset.

"I wish I could reduce," she said, and rolled her eyes and gave a comic sigh.

"Oh, *you* aren't fat," the stylish lady said.

"Ooooo I am too," Mrs. Turpin said. "Claud he eats all he wants to and never weighs over one hundred and seventy-five pounds, but me I just look at something good to eat and I gain some weight," and her stomach and shoulders shook with laughter. "You can eat all you want to, can't you, Claud?" she asked, turning to him.

Claud only grinned.

"Well, as long as you have such a good disposition," the stylish lady said, "I don't think it makes a bit of difference what size you are. You just can't beat a good disposition."

Next to her was a fat girl of eighteen or nineteen, scowling into a thick blue book which Mrs. Turpin saw was entitled *Human Development*. The girl raised her head and directed her scowl at Mrs. Turpin as if she did not like her looks. She appeared annoyed that anyone should speak while she tried to read. The poor girl's face was blue with acne and Mrs. Turpin thought how pitiful it was to have a face like that at that age. She gave the girl a friendly smile but the girl only scowled the harder. Mrs. Turpin herself was fat but she had always had good skin, and, though she was forty-seven years old, there was not a wrinkle in her face except around her eyes from laughing too much.

Next to the ugly girl was the child, still in exactly the same position, and next to him was a thin leathery old woman in a cotton print dress. She and Claud had three sacks of chicken feed in their pump house that was in the same print. She had seen from the first that the child belonged with the old woman. She could tell by the way they sat—kind of vacant and white-trashy, as if they would sit there until Doomsday if nobody called and told them to get up. And at right angles but next to the well-dressed pleasant lady was a lank-faced woman who was certainly the child's mother. She had on a yellow sweat shirt and wine-colored slacks, both gritty-looking, and the rims of her lips were stained with snuff. Her dirty yellow hair was tied behind with a little piece of red paper ribbon. Worse than niggers any day, Mrs. Turpin thought.

The gospel hymn playing was, "When I looked up and He looked down," and Mrs. Turpin, who knew it, supplied the last line mentally, "And wona these days I know I'll we-eara crown."

Without appearing to, Mrs. Turpin always noticed people's feet. The well-dressed lady had on red and grey suede shoes to match her dress. Mrs. Turpin had on her good black patent leather pumps. The ugly girl had on Girl Scout shoes and heavy socks. The old woman had on tennis shoes and the white-trashy mother had on what appeared to be bedroom slippers, black

straw with gold braid threaded through them—exactly what you would have expected her to have on.

Sometimes at night when she couldn't go to sleep, Mrs. Turpin would occupy herself with the question of who she would have chosen to be if she couldn't have been herself. If Jesus had said to her before he made her, "There's only two places available for you. You can either be a nigger or white-trash," what would she have said? "Please, Jesus, please," she would have said, "just let me wait until there's another place available," and he would have said, "No, you have to go right now and I have only those two places so make up your mind." She would have wiggled and squirmed and begged and pleaded but it would have been no use and finally she would have said, "All right, make me a nigger then—but that don't mean a trashy one." And he would have made her a neat clean respectable negro woman, herself but black.

Next to the child's mother was a red-headed youngish woman, reading one of the magazines and working on a piece of chewing gum, hell for leather, as Claud would say. Mrs. Turpin could not see the woman's feet. She was not white-trash, just common. Sometimes Mrs. Turpin occupied herself at night naming the classes of people. On the bottom of the heap were most colored people, not the kind she would have been if she had been one, but most of them; then next to them—not above, just away from—were the white-trash; then above them were the home-owners, and above them the home-and-land owners, to which she and Claud belonged. Above she and Claud were people with a lot of money and much bigger houses and much more land. But here the complexity of it would begin to bear in on her, for some of the people with a lot of money were common and ought to be below she and Claud and some of the people who had good blood had lost their money and had to rent and then there were colored people who owned their homes and land as well. There was a colored dentist in town who had two red Lincolns and a swimming pool and a farm with registered white-face cattle on it. Usually by the time she had fallen asleep all the classes of people were moiling and roiling around in her head, and she would dream they were all crammed in together in a box car, being ridden off to be put in a gas oven.

"That's a beautiful clock," she said and nodded to her right. It was a big wall clock, the face encased in a brass sunburst.

"Yes, it's very pretty," the stylish lady said agreeably. "And right on the dot too," she added, glancing at her watch.

The ugly girl beside her cast an eye upward at the clock, smirked, then looked directly at Mrs. Turpin and smirked again. Then she returned her eyes to her book. She was obviously the lady's daughter because, although they didn't look anything alike as to disposition, they both had the same

shape of face and the same blue eyes. On the lady they sparkled pleasantly but in the girl's seared face they appeared alternately to smolder and to blaze.

What if Jesus had said, "All right, you can be white-trash or a nigger or ugly"!

Mrs. Turpin felt an awful pity for the girl, though she thought it was one thing to be ugly and another to act ugly.

The woman with the snuff-stained lips turned around in her chair and looked up at the clock. Then she turned back and appeared to look a little to the side of Mrs. Turpin. There was a cast in one of her eyes. "You want to know wher you can get you one of themther clocks?" she asked in a loud voice.

"No, I already have a nice clock," Mrs. Turpin said. Once somebody like her got a leg in the conversation, she would be all over it.

"You can get you one with green stamps," the woman said. "That's most likely wher he got hisn. Save you up enough, you can get you most anythang. I got me some joo'ry."

Ought to have got you a wash rag and some soap, Mrs. Turpin thought.

"I get contour sheets with mine," the pleasant lady said.

The daughter slammed her book shut. She looked straight in front of her, directly through Mrs. Turpin and on through the yellow curtain and the plate glass window which made the wall behind her. The girl's eyes seemed lit all of a sudden with a peculiar light, an unnatural light like night road signs give. Mrs. Turpin turned her head to see if there was anything going on outside that she should see, but she could not see anything. Figures passing cast only a pale shadow through the curtain. There was no reason the girl should single her out for her ugly looks.

"Miss Finley," the nurse said, cracking the door. The gum-chewing woman got up and passed in front of her and Claud and went into the office. She had on red high-heeled shoes.

Directly across the table, the ugly girl's eyes were fixed on Mrs. Turpin as if she had some very special reason for disliking her.

"This is wonderful weather, isn't it?" the girl's mother said.

"It's good weather for cotton if you can get the niggers to pick it," Mrs. Turpin said, "but niggers don't want to pick cotton any more. You can't get the white folks to pick it and now you can't get the niggers—because they got to be right up there with the white folks."

"They gonna *try* anyways," the white-trash woman said, leaning forward.

"Do you have one of those cotton-picking machines?" the pleasant lady asked.

"No," Mrs. Turpin said, "they leave half the cotton in the field. We don't have much cotton anyway. If you want to make it farming now, you

have to have a little of everything. We got a couple of acres of cotton and a few hogs and chickens and just enough white-face that Claud can look after them himself."

"One thang I don't want," the white-trash woman said, wiping her mouth with the back of her hand. "Hogs. Nasty stinking things, a-gruntin and a-rootin all over the place."

Mrs. Turpin gave her the merest edge of her attention. "Our hogs are not dirty and they don't stink," she said. "They're cleaner than some children I've seen. Their feet never touch the ground. We have a pig-parlor—that's where you raise them on concrete," she explained to the pleasant lady, "and Claud scoots them down with the hose every afternoon and washes off the floor." Cleaner by far than that child right there, she thought. Poor nasty little thing. He had not moved except to put the thumb of his dirty hand into his mouth.

The woman turned her face away from Mrs. Turpin. "I know I wouldn't scoot down no hog with no hose," she said to the wall.

You wouldn't have no hog to scoot down, Mrs. Turpin said to herself.

"A-gruntin and a-rootin and a-groanin," the woman muttered.

"We got a little of everything," Mrs. Turpin said to the pleasant lady. "It's no use in having more than you can handle yourself with help like it is. We found enough niggers to pick our cotton this year but Claud he has to go after them and take them home again in the evening. They can't walk that half a mile. No they can't. I tell you," she said and laughed merrily, "I sure am tired of buttering up niggers, but you got to love em if you want em to work for you. When they come in the morning, I run out and I say, 'Hi yawl this morning?' and when Claud drives them off to the field I just wave to beat the band and they just wave back." And she waved her hand rapidly to illustrate.

"Like you read out of the same book," the lady said, showing she understood perfectly.

"Child, yes," Mrs. Turpin said. "And when they come in from the field, I run out with a bucket of icewater. That's the way it's going to be from now on," she said. "You may as well face it."

"One thang I know," the white-trash woman said. "Two thangs I ain't going to do: love no niggers or scoot down no hog with no hose." And she let out a bark of contempt.

The look that Mrs. Turpin and the pleasant lady exchanged indicated they both understood that you had to *have* certain things before you could *know* certain things. But every time Mrs. Turpin exchanged a look with the lady, she was aware that the ugly girl's peculiar eyes were still on her, and she had trouble bringing her attention back to the conversation.

"When you got something," she said, "you got to look after it." And when

you ain't got a thing but breath and britches, she added to herself, you can afford to come to town every morning and just sit on the Court House coping and spit.

A grotesque revolving shadow passed across the curtain behind her and was thrown palely on the opposite wall. Then a bicycle clattered down against the outside of the building. The door opened and a colored boy glided in with a tray from the drug store. It had two large red and white paper cups on it with tops on them. He was a tall, very black boy in discolored white pants and a green nylon shirt. He was chewing gum slowly, as if to music. He set the tray down in the office opening next to the fern and stuck his head through to look for the secretary. She was not in there. He rested his arms on the ledge and waited, his narrow bottom stuck out, swaying slowly to the left and right. He raised a hand over his head and scratched the base of his skull.

"You see that button there, boy?" Mrs. Turpin said. "You can punch that and she'll come. She's probably in the back somewhere."

"Is thas right?" the boy said agreeably, as if he had never seen the button before. He leaned to the right and put his finger on it. "She sometime out," he said and twisted around to face his audience, his elbows behind him on the counter. The nurse appeared and he twisted back again. She handed him a dollar and he rooted in his pocket and made the change and counted it out to her. She gave him fifteen cents for a tip and he went out with the empty tray. The heavy door swung to slowly and closed at length with the sound of suction. For a moment no one spoke.

"They ought to send all them niggers back to Africa," the white-trash woman said. "That's wher they come from in the first place."

"Oh, I couldn't do without my good colored friends," the pleasant lady said.

"There's a heap of things worse than a nigger," Mrs. Turpin agreed. "It's all kinds of them just like it's all kinds of us."

"Yes, and it takes all kinds to make the world go round," the lady said in her musical voice.

As she said it, the raw-complexioned girl snapped her teeth together. Her lower lip turned downwards and inside out, revealing the pale pink inside of her mouth. After a second it rolled back up. It was the ugliest face Mrs. Turpin had ever seen anyone make and for a moment she was certain that the girl had made it at her. She was looking at her as if she had known and disliked her all her life—all of Mrs. Turpin's life, it seemed too, not just all the girl's life. Why, girl, I don't even know you, Mrs. Turpin said silently.

She forced her attention back to the discussion. "It wouldn't be practical to send them back to Africa," she said. "They wouldn't want to go. They got it too good here."

"Wouldn't be what they wanted–if I had anythang to do with it," the woman said.

"It wouldn't be a way in the world you could get all the niggers back over there," Mrs. Turpin said. "They'd be hiding out and lying down and turning sick on you and wailing and hollering and raring and pitching. It wouldn't be a way in the world to get them over there."

"They got over here," the trashy woman said. "Get back like they got over."

"It wasn't so many of them then," Mrs. Turpin explained.

The woman looked at Mrs. Turpin as if here was an idiot indeed but Mrs. Turpin was not bothered by the look, considering where it came from.

"Nooo," she said, "they're going to stay here where they can go to New York and marry white folks and improve their color. That's what they all want to do, every one of them, improve their color."

"You know what comes of that, don't you?" Claud asked.

"No, Claud, what?" Mrs. Turpin said.

Claud's eyes twinkled. "White-faced niggers," he said with never a smile.

Everybody in the office laughed except the white-trash and the ugly girl. The girl gripped the book in her lap with white fingers. The trashy woman looked around her from face to face as if she thought they were all idiots. The old woman in the feed sack dress continued to gaze expressionless across the floor at the high-top shoes of the man opposite her, the one who had been pretending to be asleep when the Turpins came in. He was laughing heartily, his hands still spread out on his knees. The child had fallen to the side and was lying now almost face down in the old woman's lap.

While they recovered from their laughter, the nasal chorus on the radio kept the room from silence.

"You go to blank blank
And I'll go to mine
But we'll all blank along
To-geth-ther,

And all along the blank
We'll hep eachother out
Smile-ling in any kind of
Weath-ther!"

Mrs. Turpin didn't catch every word but she caught enough to agree with the spirit of the song and it turned her thoughts sober. To help anybody out that needed it was her philosophy of life. She never spared herself when she found somebody in need, whether they were white or black, trash or decent. And of all she had to be thankful for, she was most thankful that this was

so. If Jesus had said, "You can be high society and have all the money you want and be thin and svelte-like, but you can't be a good woman with it," she would have had to say, "Well don't make me that then. Make me a good woman and it don't matter what else, how fat or how ugly or how poor!" Her heart rose. He had not made her a nigger or white-trash or ugly! He had made her herself and given her a little of everything. Jesus, thank you! she said. Thank you thank you thank you! Whenever she counted her blessings she felt as buoyant as if she weighed one hundred and twenty-five pounds instead of one hundred and eighty.

"What's wrong with your little boy?" the pleasant lady asked the white-trashy woman.

"He has a ulcer," the woman said proudly. "He ain't give me a minute's peace since he was born. Him and her are just alike," she said, nodding at the old woman, who was running her leathery fingers through the child's pale hair. "Look like I can't get nothing down them two but Co' Cola and candy."

That's all you try to get down em, Mrs. Turpin said to herself. Too lazy to light the fire. There was nothing you could tell her about people like them that she didn't know already. And it was not just that they didn't have anything. Because if you gave them everything, in two weeks it would all be broken or filthy or they would have chopped it up for lightwood. She knew all this from her own experience. Help them you must, but help them you couldn't.

All at once the ugly girl turned her lips inside out again. Her eyes were fixed like two drills on Mrs. Turpin. This time there was no mistaking that there was something urgent behind them.

Girl, Mrs. Turpin exclaimed silently, I haven't done a thing to you! The girl might be confusing her with somebody else. There was no need to sit by and let herself be intimidated. "You must be in college," she said boldly, looking directly at the girl. "I see you reading a book there."

The girl continued to stare and pointedly did not answer.

Her mother blushed at this rudeness. "The lady asked you a question, Mary Grace," she said under her breath.

"I have ears," Mary Grace said.

The poor mother blushed again. "Mary Grace goes to Wellesley College," she explained. She twisted one of the buttons on her dress. "In Massachusetts," she added with a grimace. "And in the summer she just keeps right on studying. Just reads all the time, a real book worm. She's done real well at Wellesley; she's taking English and Math and History and Psychology and Social Studies," she rattled on, "and I think it's too much. I think she ought to get out and have fun."

The girl looked as if she would like to hurl them all through the plate glass window.

"Way up north," Mrs. Turpin murmured and thought, well, it hasn't done much for her manners.

"I'd almost rather to have him sick," the white-trash woman said, wrenching the attention back to herself. "He's so mean when he ain't. Look like some children just take natural to meanness. It's some gets bad when they get sick but he was the opposite. Took sick and turned good. He don't give me no trouble now. It's me waitin to see the doctor," she said.

If I was going to send anybody back to Africa, Mrs. Turpin thought, it would be your kind, woman. "Yes, indeed," she said aloud, but looking up at the ceiling, "it's a heap of things worse than a nigger." And dirtier than a hog, she added to herself.

"I think people with bad dispositions are more to be pitied than anyone on earth," the pleasant lady said in a voice that was decidedly thin.

"I thank the Lord he has blessed me with a good one," Mrs. Turpin said. "The day has never dawned that I couldn't find something to laugh at."

"Not since she married me anyways," Claud said with a comical straight face.

Everybody laughed except the girl and the white-trash.

Mrs. Turpin's stomach shook. "He's such a caution," she said, "that I can't help but laugh at him."

The girl made a loud ugly noise through her teeth.

Her mother's mouth grew thin and tight. "I think the worst thing in the world," she said, "is an ungrateful person. To have everything and not appreciate it. I know a girl," she said, "who has parents who would give her anything, a little brother who loves her dearly, who is getting a good education, who wears the best clothes, but who can never say a kind word to anyone, who never smiles, who just criticises and complains all day long."

"Is she too old to paddle?" Claud asked.

The girl's face was almost purple.

"Yes," the lady said, "I'm afraid there's nothing to do but leave her to her folly. Some day she'll wake up and it'll be too late."

"It never hurt anyone to smile," Mrs. Turpin said. "It just makes you feel better all over."

"Of course," the lady said sadly, "but there are just some people you can't tell anything to. They can't take criticism."

"If it's one thing I am," Mrs. Turpin said with feeling, "it's grateful. When I think who all I could have been besides myself and what all I got, a little of everything, and a good disposition besides, I just feel like shouting, 'Thank you, Jesus, for making everything the way it is!' It could have been different!" For one thing, somebody else could have got Claud. At the

thought of this, she was flooded with gratitude and a terrible pang of joy ran through her. "Oh thank you, Jesus, thank you!" she cried aloud.

The book struck her directly over her left eye. It struck almost at the same instant that she realized the girl was about to hurl it. Before she could utter a sound, the raw face came crashing across the table toward her, howling. The girl's fingers sank like clamps into the soft flesh of her neck. She heard the mother cry out and Claud shout, "Whoa!" There was an instant when she was certain that she was about to be in an earthquake.

All at once her vision narrowed and she saw everything as if it were happening in a small room far away, or as if she were looking at it through the wrong end of a telescope. Claud's face crumpled and fell out of sight. The nurse ran in, then out, then in again. Then the gangling figure of the doctor rushed out of the inner door. Magazines flew this way and that as the table turned over. The girl fell with a thud and Mrs. Turpin's vision suddenly reversed itself and she saw everything large instead of small. The eyes of the white-trashy woman were staring hugely at the floor. There the girl, held down on one side by the nurse and on the other by her mother, was wrenching and turning in their grasp. The doctor was kneeling astride her, trying to hold her arm down. He managed after a second to sink a long needle into it.

Mrs. Turpin felt entirely hollow except for her heart which swung from side to side as if it were agitated in a great empty drum of flesh.

"Somebody that's not busy call for the ambulance," the doctor said in the off-hand voice young doctors adopt for terrible occasions.

Mrs. Turpin could not have moved a finger. The old man who had been sitting next to her skipped nimbly into the office and made the call, for the secretary still seemed to be gone.

"Claud!" Mrs. Turpin called.

He was not in his chair. She knew she must jump up and find him but she felt like some one trying to catch a train in a dream, when everything moves in slow motion and the faster you try to run the slower you go.

"Here I am," a suffocated voice, very unlike Claud's, said.

He was doubled up in the corner on the floor, pale as paper, holding his leg. She wanted to get up and go to him but she could not move. Instead, her gaze was drawn slowly downward to the churning face on the floor, which she could see over the doctor's shoulder.

The girl's eyes stopped rolling and focussed on her. They seemed a much lighter blue than before, as if a door that had been tightly closed behind them was now open to admit light and air.

Mrs. Turpin's head cleared and her power of motion returned. She leaned forward until she was looking directly into the fierce brilliant eyes. There was no doubt in her mind that the girl did know her, knew her in

some intense and personal way, beyond time and place and condition. "What you got to say to me?" she asked hoarsely and held her breath, waiting, as for a revelation.

The girl raised her head. Her gaze locked with Mrs. Turpin's. "Go back to hell where you came from, you old wart hog," she whispered. Her voice was low but clear. Her eyes burned for a moment as if she saw with pleasure that her message had struck its target.

Mrs. Turpin sank back in her chair.

After a moment the girl's eyes closed and she turned her head wearily to the side.

The doctor rose and handed the nurse the empty syringe. He leaned over and put both hands for a moment on the mother's shoulders, which were shaking. She was sitting on the floor, her lips pressed together, holding Mary Grace's hand in her lap. The girl's fingers were gripped like a baby's around her thumb. "Go on to the hospital," he said. "I'll call and make the arrangements.

"Now let's see that neck," he said in a jovial voice to Mrs. Turpin. He began to inspect her neck with his first two fingers. Two little moon-shaped lines like pink fish bones were indented over her windpipe. There was the beginning of an angry red swelling above her eye. His fingers passed over this also.

"Lea' me be," she said thickly and shook him off. "See about Claud. She kicked him."

"I'll see about him in a minute," he said and felt her pulse. He was a thin grey-haired young man, given to pleasantries. "Go home and have yourself a vacation the rest of the day," he said and patted her on the shoulder.

Quit your pattin me, Mrs. Turpin growled to herself.

"And put an ice pack over that eye," he said. Then he went and squatted down beside Claud and looked at his leg. After a moment he pulled him up and Claud limped after him into the office.

Until the ambulance came, the only sounds in the room were the tremulous moans of the girl's mother, who continued to sit on the floor. The white-trash woman did not take her eyes off the girl. Mrs. Turpin looked straight ahead at nothing. Presently the ambulance drew up, a long dark shadow, behind the curtain. The attendants came in and set the stretcher down beside the girl and lifted her expertly onto it and carried her out. The nurse helped the mother gather up her things. The shadow of the ambulance moved silently away and the nurse came back in the office.

"That ther girl is going to be a lunatic, ain't she?" the white-trash woman asked the nurse, but the nurse kept on to the back and never answered her.

by Flannery O'Connor

"Yes, she's going to be a lunatic," the white-trash woman said to the rest of them.

"Po' critter," the old woman murmured. The child's face was still in her lap. His eyes looked idly out over her knees. He had not moved during the disturbance except to draw one leg up under him.

"I thank Gawd," the white-trash woman said fervently, "I ain't a lunatic."

Claud came limping out and the Turpins went home.

As their pick-up truck turned into their own dirt road and made the crest of the hill, Mrs. Turpin gripped the window ledge and looked out suspiciously. The land sloped gracefully down through a field dotted with lavender weeds and at the start of the rise their small yellow frame house, with its little flower beds spread out around it like a fancy apron, sat primly in its accustomed place between two giant hickory trees. She would not have been startled to see a burnt wound between two blackened chimneys.

Neither of them felt like eating so they put on their house clothes and lowered the shade in the bedroom and lay down, Claud with his leg on a pillow and herself with a damp washcloth over her eye. The instant she was flat on her back, the image of a razor-backed hog with warts on its face and horns coming out behind its ears snorted into her head. She moaned, a low quiet moan.

"I am not," she said tearfully, "a wart hog. From hell." But the denial had no force. The girl's eyes and her words, even the tone of her voice, low but clear, directed only to her, brooked no repudiation. She had been singled out for the message, though there was trash in the room to whom it might justly have been applied. The full force of this fact struck her only now. There was a woman there who was neglecting her own child but she had been overlooked. The message had been given to Ruby Turpin, a respectable, hard-working, church-going woman. The tears dried. Her eyes began to burn instead with wrath.

She rose on her elbow and the washcloth fell into her hand. Claud was lying on his back, snoring. She wanted to tell him what the girl had said. At the same time, she did not wish to put the image of herself as a wart hog from hell into his mind.

"Hey, Claud," she muttered and pushed his shoulder.

Claud opened one pale baby blue eye.

She looked into it warily. He did not think about anything. He just went his way.

"Wha, whasit?" he said and closed the eye again.

"Nothing," she said. "Does your leg pain you?"

"Hurts like hell," Claud said.

"It'll quit terreckly," she said and lay back down. In a moment Claud was snoring again. For the rest of the afternoon they lay there. Claud slept.

She scowled at the ceiling. Occasionally she raised her fist and made a small stabbing motion over her chest as if she were defending her innocence to invisible guests who were like the comforters of Job, reasonable-seeming but wrong.

About five-thirty Claud stirred. "Got to go after those niggers," he sighed, not moving.

She was looking straight up as if there were unintelligible handwriting on the ceiling. The protuberance over her eye had turned a greenish-blue. "Listen here," she said.

"What?"

"Kiss me."

Claud leaned over and kissed her loudly on the mouth. He pinched her side and their hands interlocked. Her expression of ferocious concentration did not change. Claud got up, groaning and growling, and limped off. She continued to study the ceiling.

She did not get up until she heard the pick-up truck coming back with the negroes. Then she rose and thrust her feet in her brown oxfords, which she did not bother to lace, and stumped out onto the back porch and got her red plastic bucket. She emptied a tray of ice cubes into it and filled it half full of water and went out into the back yard. Every afternoon after Claud brought the hands in, one of the boys helped him put out hay and the rest waited in the back of the truck until he was ready to take them home. The truck was parked in the shade under one of the hickory trees.

"Hi yawl this evening?" Mrs. Turpin asked grimly, appearing with the bucket and the dipper. There were three women and a boy in the truck.

"Us doin nicely," the oldest woman said. "Hi you doin?" and her gaze stuck immediately on the dark lump on Mrs. Turpin's forehead. "You done fell down, ain't you?" she asked in a solicitous voice. The old woman was dark and almost toothless. She had on an old felt hat of Claud's set back on her head. The other two women were younger and lighter and they both had new bright green sun hats. One of them had hers on her head; the other had taken hers off and the boy was grinning beneath it.

Mrs. Turpin set the bucket down on the floor of the truck. "Yawl hep yourselves," she said. She looked around to make sure Claud had gone. "No. I didn't fall down," she said, folding her arms. "It was something worse than that."

"Ain't nothing bad happen to you!" the old woman said. She said it as if they all knew that Mrs. Turpin was protected in some special way by Divine Providence. "You just had you a little fall."

"We were in town at the doctor's office for where the cow kicked Mr. Turpin," Mrs. Turpin said in a flat tone that indicated they could leave off their foolishness. "And there was this girl there. A big fat girl with her face

all broke out. I could look at that girl and tell she was peculiar but I couldn't tell how. And me and her mama were just talking and going along and all of a sudden WHAM! She throws this big book she was reading at me and . . ."

"Naw!" the old woman cried out.

"And then she jumps over the table and commences to choke me."

"Naw!" they all exclaimed, "naw!"

"Hi come she do that?" the old woman asked. "What ail her?"

Mrs. Turpin only glared in front of her.

"Somethin ail her," the old woman said.

"They carried her off in an ambulance," Mrs. Turpin continued, "but before she went she was rolling on the floor and they were trying to hold her down to give her a shot and she said something to me." She paused. "You know what she said to me?"

"What she say?" they asked.

"She said," Mrs. Turpin began, and stopped, her face very dark and heavy. The sun was getting whiter and whiter, blanching the sky overhead so that the leaves of the hickory tree were black in the face of it. She could not bring forth the words. "Something real ugly," she muttered.

"She sho shouldn't said nothin ugly to you," the old woman said. "You so sweet. You the sweetest lady I know."

"She pretty too," the one with the hat on said.

"And stout," the other one said. "I never knowed no sweeter white lady."

"That's the truth befo' Jesus," the old woman said. "Amen! You des as sweet and pretty as you can be."

Mrs. Turpin knew just exactly how much negro flattery was worth and it added to her rage. "She said," she began again and finished this time with a fierce rush of breath, "that I was an old wart hog from hell."

There was an astounded silence.

"Where she at!" the youngest woman cried in a piercing voice. "Lemme see her. I'll kill her!"

"I'll kill her with you!" the other one cried.

"She b'long in the sylum," the old woman said emphatically. "You the sweetest white lady I know."

"She pretty too," the other two said. "Stout as she can be and sweet. Jesus satisfied with her!"

"Deed he is," the old woman declared.

Idiots! Mrs. Turpin growled to herself. You could never say anything intelligent to a nigger. You could talk at them but not with them. "Yawl ain't drunk your water," she said shortly. "Leave the bucket in the truck when you're finished with it. I got more to do than just stand around and pass the time of day," and she moved off and into the house.

She stood for a moment in the middle of the kitchen. The dark protuberance over her eye looked like a miniature tornado cloud which might any moment sweep across the horizon of her brow. Her lower lip protruded dangerously. She squared her massive shoulders. Then she marched into the front of the house and out the side door and started down the road to the pig parlor. She had the look of a woman going single-handed, weaponless, into battle.

The sun was a deep yellow now like a harvest moon and was riding westward very fast over the far tree line as if it meant to reach the hogs before she did. The road was rutted and she kicked several good-sized stones out of her path as she strode along. The pig parlor was on a little knoll at the end of a lane that ran off from the side of the barn. It was a square of concrete as large as a small room, with a board fence about four feet high around it. The concrete floor sloped slightly so that the hog wash could drain off into a trench where it was carried to the field for fertilizer. Claud was standing on the outside, on the edge of the concrete, hanging onto the top board, hosing down the floor inside. The hose was connected to the faucet of a water trough nearby.

Mrs. Turpin climbed up beside him and glowered down at the hogs inside. There were seven long-snouted bristly shoats in it—tan with liver-colored spots—and an old sow a few weeks off from farrowing. She was lying on her side grunting. The shoats were running about shaking themselves like idiot children, their little slit pig eyes searching the floor for anything left. She had read that pigs were the most intelligent animal. She doubted it. They were supposed to be smarter than dogs. There had even been a pig astronaut. He had performed his assignment perfectly but died of a heart attack afterwards because they left him in his electric suit, sitting upright throughout his examination when naturally a hog should be on all fours.

A-gruntin and a-rootin and a-groanin.

"Gimme that hose," she said, yanking it away from Claud. "Go on and carry them niggers home and then get off that leg."

"You look like you might have swallowed a mad dog," Claud observed, but he got down and limped off. He paid no attention to her humors.

Until he was out of earshot, Mrs. Turpin stood on the side of the pen, holding the hose and pointing the stream of water at the hind quarters of any shoat that looked as if it might try to lie down. When he had had time to get over the hill, she turned her head slightly and wrathful eyes scanned the path. He was nowhere in sight. She turned back again and seemed to gather herself up. Her shoulders rose and she drew in her breath.

"What do you send me a message like that for?" she said in a low fierce voice, barely above a whisper but with the force of a shout in its concentrated fury. "How am I a hog and me both? How am I saved and from hell

too?" Her free fist was knotted and with the other she gripped the hose, blindly pointing the stream of water in and out of the eye of the old sow whose outraged squeal she did not hear.

The pig parlor commanded a view of the back pasture where their twenty beef cows were gathered around the hay-bales Claud and the boy had put out. The freshly cut pasture sloped down to the highway. Across it was their cotton field and beyond that a dark green dusty wood which they owned as well. The sun was behind the wood, very red, looking over the paling of trees like a farmer inspecting his own hogs.

"Why me?" she rumbled. "It's no trash around here, black or white, that I haven't given to. And break my back to the bone every day working. And do for the church."

She appeared to be the right size woman to command the arena before her. "How am I a hog?" she demanded. "Exactly how am I like them?" and she jabbed the stream of water at the shoats. "There was plenty of trash there. It didn't have to be me.

"If you like trash better, go get yourself some trash then," she railed. "You could have made me trash. Or a nigger. If trash is what you wanted why didn't you make me trash?" She shook her fist with the hose in it and a watery snake appeared momentarily in the air. "I could quit working and take it easy and be filthy," she growled. "Lounge about the sidewalks all day drinking root beer. Dip snuff and spit in every puddle and have it all over my face. I could be nasty.

"Or you could have made me a nigger. It's too late for me to be a nigger," she said with deep sarcasm, "but I could act like one. Lay down in the middle of the road and stop traffic. Roll on the ground."

In the deepening light everything was taking on a mysterious hue. The pasture was growing a peculiar glassy green and the streak of highway had turned lavender. She braced herself for a final assault and this time her voice rolled out over the pasture. "Go on," she yelled, "call me a hog! Call me a hog again. From hell. Call me a wart hog from hell. Put the bottom rail on top. There'll still be a top and bottom!"

A garbled echo returned to her.

A final surge of fury shook her and she roared, "Who do you think you are?"

The color of everything, field and crimson sky, burned for a moment with a transparent intensity. The question carried over the pasture and across the highway and the cotton field and returned to her clearly like an answer from beyond the wood.

She opened her mouth but no sound came out of it.

A tiny truck, Claud's, appeared on the highway, heading rapidly out of sight. Its gears scraped thinly. It looked like a child's toy. At any moment

a bigger truck might smash into it and scatter Claud's and the niggers' brains all over the road.

Mrs. Turpin stood there, her gaze fixed on the highway, all her muscles rigid, until in five or six minutes the truck reappeared, returning. She waited until it had had time to turn into their own road. Then like a monumental statue coming to life, she bent her head slowly and gazed, as if through the very heart of mystery, down into the pig parlor at the hogs. They had settled all in one corner around the old sow who was grunting softly. A red glow suffused them. They appeared to pant with a secret life.

Until the sun slipped finally behind the tree line, Mrs. Turpin remained there with her gaze bent to them as if she were absorbing some abysmal life-giving knowledge. At last she lifted her head. There was only a purple streak in the sky, cutting through a field of crimson and leading, like an extension of the highway, into the descending dusk. She raised her hands from the side of the pen in a gesture hieratic and profound. A visionary light settled in her eyes. She saw the streak as a vast swinging bridge extending upward from the earth through a field of living fire. Upon it a vast horde of souls were rumbling toward heaven. There were whole companies of white-trash, clean for the first time in their lives, and bands of black niggers in white robes, and battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs. And bringing up the end of the procession was a tribe of people whom she recognized at once as those who, like herself and Claud, had always had a little of everything and the God-given wit to use it right. She leaned forward to observe them closer. They were marching behind the others with great dignity, accountable as they had always been for good order and common sense and respectable behavior. They alone were on key. Yet she could see by their shocked and altered faces that even their virtues were being burned away. She lowered her hands and gripped the rail of the hog pen, her eyes small but fixed unblinkingly on what lay ahead. In a moment the vision faded but she remained where she was, immobile.

At length she got down and turned off the faucet and made her slow way on the darkening path to the house. In the woods around her the invisible cricket choruses had struck up, but what she heard were the voices of the souls climbing upward into the starry field and shouting hallelujah.

1966: *from The New Yorker*

THE BULGARIAN POETESS

by John Updike, whose literary works now number ten—two collections of short stories; two volumes of verse; four novels, which include the widely acclaimed Rabbit, Run *and* The Centaur; *a book of parodies and essays; and a book for children,* A Child's Calendar. *Although not First-Prize winners, two other stories of Mr. Updike's appeared in the annual O. Henry Prize Story collections—"Wife-Wooing" in 1961 and "The Doctor's Wife" in 1962. Mr. Updike was born in Pennsylvania in 1932 but now lives in Ipswich, Massachusetts with his wife and four children.*

"Your poems. Are they difficult?"

She smiled and, unaccustomed to speaking English, answered carefully, drawing a line in the air with two delicately pinched fingers holding an imaginary pen. "They are difficult—to write."

He laughed, startled and charmed. "But not to read?"

She seemed puzzled by his laugh, but did not withdraw her smile, though its corners deepened in a defensive, feminine way. "I think," she said, "not so very."

"Good." Brainlessly he repeated "Good," disarmed by her unexpected quality of truth. He was, himself, a writer, this fortyish young man, Henry Bech, with his thinning curly hair and melancholy Jewish nose, the author of one good book and three others, the good one having come first. By a kind of oversight, he had never married. His reputation had grown while his powers declined. As he felt himself sink, in his fiction, deeper and deeper into eclectic sexuality and bravura narcissism, as his search for plain truth carried him further and further into treacherous realms of fantasy and, lately, of silence, he was more and more thickly hounded by homage, by flat-footed exegetes, by arrogantly worshipful undergraduates who had hitchhiked a thousand miles to touch his hand, by querulous translators, by elec-

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tion to honorary societies, by invitations to lecture, to "speak," to "read," to participate in symposia trumped up by ambitious girlie magazines in shameless conjunction with venerable universities. His very government, in airily unstamped envelopes from Washington, invited him to travel, as an ambassador of the arts, to the other half of the world, the hostile, mysterious half. Rather automatically, but with some faint hope of shaking himself loose from the burden of himself, he consented, and found himself floating, with a passport so stapled with visas it fluttered when pulled from his pocket, down into the dim airports of Communist cities.

He arrived in Sofia the day after a mixture of Bulgarian and African students had smashed the windows of the American Legation and ignited an overturned Chevrolet. The cultural officer, pale from a sleepless night of guard duty, tamping his pipe with trembling fingers, advised Bech to stay out of crowds and escorted him to his hotel. The lobby was swarming with Negroes in black wool fezzes and pointed European shoes. Insecurely disguised, he felt, by an astrakhan hat purchased in Moscow, Bech passed through to the elevator, whose operator addressed him in German. "*Ja, vier*," Bech answered, "*danke*," and telephoned, in his bad French, for dinner to be brought up to his room. He remained there all night, behind a locked door, reading Hawthorne. He had lifted a paperback collection of short stories from a Legation window sill littered with broken glass. A few curved bright crumbs fell from between the pages onto his blanket. The image of Roger Malvin lying alone, dying, in the forest—"Death would come like the slow approach of a corpse, stealing gradually towards him through the forest, and showing its ghastly and motionless features from behind a nearer and yet a nearer tree"—frightened him. Bech fell asleep early and suffered from swollen, homesick dreams. It had been Thanksgiving Day.

In the morning, venturing downstairs for breakfast, he was surprised to find the restaurant open, the waiters affable, the eggs actual, the coffee hot, though syrupy. Outside, Sofia was sunny and (except for a few dark glances at his big American shoes) amenable to his passage along the streets. Lozenge-patterns of pansies, looking flat and brittle as pressed flowers, had been set in the public beds. Women with a touch of Western chic walked hatless in the park behind the mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov. There was a mosque, and an assortment of trolley cars salvaged from the remotest corner of Bech's childhood in the nineteen-twenties, and a tree that talked—that is, it was so full of birds that it swayed under their weight and emitted volumes of chirping sound like a great leafy loudspeaker. It was the inverse of his hotel, whose silent walls presumably contained listening microphones. Electricity was somewhat enchanted in the Socialist world. Lights flickered off untouched and radios turned themselves on. Telephones rang in the dead of the night and breathed wordlessly in his ear. Six weeks ago, flying

from New York, Bech had expected Moscow to be a blazing counterpart and instead saw, through the plane window, a skein of hoarded lights no brighter, on that vast black plain, than a girl's body in a dark room.

Past the talking tree was the American Legation. The sidewalk, heaped with broken glass, was roped off, so pedestrians had to detour into the gutter. Bech detached himself from the stream, crossed the little barren of pavement, smiled at the Bulgarian militiamen who were sullenly guarding the greenish heaps of shards, and pulled open the bronze door. The cultural officer was crisper after a normal night's sleep. He clenched his pipe in his teeth and handed Bech a small list. "You're to meet with the Writer's Union at eleven. These are writers you might ask to see. As far as we can tell, they're among the more progressive."

Words like "progressive" and "liberal" had a somewhat reversed sense in this world. At times, indeed, Bech felt he had passed through a mirror, a dingy flecked mirror that reflected feebly the capitalist world; in its dim depths everything was similar but left-handed. One of the names ended in "-ova." Bech said, "A woman."

"A poetess," the cultural officer said, sucking and tamping in a fury of bogus efficiency. "Very popular, apparently. Her books are impossible to buy."

"Have you read anything by these people?"

"I'll be frank with you. I can just about make my way through a newspaper."

"But you always know what a newspaper will say anyway."

"I'm sorry. I don't get your meaning."

"There isn't any." Bech didn't quite know why the Americans he met irritated him, whether because they garishly refused to blend into this shadow-world or because they were always solemnly sending him on ridiculous errands.

At the Writer's Union, he handed the secretary the list as it had been handed to him, on U.S. Legation stationery. The secretary, a large stooped man with the hands of a stonemason, grimaced and shook his head but obligingly reached for the telephone. Bech's meeting was already waiting in another room. It was the usual one, the one that, with small differences, he had already attended in Moscow and Kiev, Yerevan and Alma-Ata, Bucharest and Prague: the polished oval table, the bowl of fruit, the morning light, the gleaming glasses of brandy and mineral water, the lurking portrait of Lenin, the six or eight patiently sitting men who would leap to their feet with quick blank smiles. These men would include a few literary officials, termed "critics," high in the Party, loquacious and witty and destined to propose a toast to international understanding; a few selected novelists and

poets, mustachioed, smoking, sulking at this invasion of their time; a university professor, the head of the Anglo-American Literature department, speaking in a beautiful withered English of Mark Twain and Sinclair Lewis; a young interpreter with a moist handshake; a shaggy old journalist obsequiously scribbling notes; and, on the rim of the group, in chairs placed to suggest that they had invited themselves, one or two gentlemen of ill-defined status, fidgety and tieless, maverick translators who would turn out to be the only ones present who had ever read a word by Henry Bech.

Here this type was represented by a stout man in a tweed coat leather-patched at the elbows in the British style. The whites of his eyes were distinctly red. He shook Bech's hand eagerly, made of it almost an embrace of reunion, bending his face so close Bech could distinguish the smells of tobacco, garlic, cheese, and alcohol. Even as they were seating themselves around the table, and the Writer's Union chairman, a man elegantly bald, with very pale eyelashes, was touching his brandy glass as if to lift it, this anxious red-eyed interloper blurted at Bech, "Your 'Travel Light' was so marvellous a book. The motels, the highways, the young girls with their lovers who were motorcyclists, so marvellous, so American, the youth, the adoration for space and speed, the barbarity of the advertisements in neon lighting, the very poetry. It takes us truly into another dimension."

"Travel Light" was the first novel, the famous one. Bech disliked discussing it. "At home," he said, "it was criticized as despairing."

The man's hands, stained orange with tobacco, lifted in amazement and plopped noisily to his knees. "No, no a thousand times. Truth, wonder, terror even, vulgarity, yes. But despair, no, not at all, not one iota. Your critics are dead wrong."

"Thank you."

The chairman softly cleared his throat and lifted his glass an inch from the table, so that it formed with its reflection a kind of playing card.

Bech's admirer excitedly persisted. "You are not a *wet* writer, no. You are a dry writer, yes? You have the expressions, am I wrong in English, dry, hard?"

"More or less."

"I want to translate you!"

It was the agonized cry of a condemned man, for the chairman coldly lifted his glass to the height of his eyes, and like a firing squad the others followed suit. Blinking his white lashes, the chairman gazed mistily in the direction of the sudden silence, and spoke in Bulgarian.

The young interpreter murmured in Bech's ear. "I wish to propose now, ah, a very brief toast. I know it will seem doubly brief to our honored American guest, who has so recently enjoyed the, ah, hospitality of our Soviet comrades." There must have been a joke here, for the rest of the

table laughed. "But in seriousness permit me to say that in our country we have seen in years past too few Americans, ah, of Mr. Bech's progressive and sympathetic stripe. We hope in the next hour to learn from him much that is interesting and, ah, socially useful about the literature of his large country, and perhaps we may in turn inform him of our own proud literature, of which perhaps he knows regrettably little. Ah, so let me finally, then, since there is a saying that too long a courtship spoils the marriage, offer to drink, in our native plum brandy *slivovica*, ah, firstly to the success of his visit and, in the second place, to the mutual increase of international understanding."

"Thank you," Bech said and, as a courtesy, drained his glass. It was wrong; the others, having merely sipped, stared. The purple burning revolved in Bech's stomach and a severe distaste for himself, for his role, for this entire artificial and futile process, focussed into a small brown spot on a pear in the bowl so shiningly posed before his eyes.

The red-eyed fool smelling of cheese was ornamenting the toast. "It is a personal honor for me to meet the man who, in 'Travel Light,' truly added a new dimension to American prose."

"The book was written," Bech said, "twelve years ago."

"And since?" A slumping, mustached man sat up and sprang into English. "Since, you have written what?"

Bech had been asked that question often in these weeks and his answer had grown curt. "A second novel called 'Brother Pig,' which is St. Bernard's expression for the body."

"Good. Yes, and?"

"A collection of essays and sketches called 'When the Saints.'"

"I like the title less well."

"It's the beginning of a famous Negro song."

"We know the song," another man said, a smaller man, with the tense, dented mouth of a hare. He lightly sang, "Lordy, I just want to be in that number."

"And the last book," Bech said, "was a long novel called 'The Chosen' that it took six years to write and that nobody liked."

"I have read reviews," the red-eyed man said. "I have not read the book. Copies are difficult here."

"I'll give you one," Bech said.

The promise seemed, somehow, to make the recipient unfortunately conspicuous; wringing his stained hands, he appeared to swell in size, to intrude grotesquely upon the inner ring, so that the interpreter took it upon himself to whisper, with the haste of an apology, into Bech's ear, "This gentleman is well known as the translator into our language of 'Erewhon.'"

"A marvellous book," the translator said, deflating in relief, pulling at

his pockets for a cigarette. "It truly takes us into another dimension. Something that must be done. We live in a new cosmos."

The chairman spoke in Bulgarian, musically, at length. There was polite laughter. Nobody translated for Bech. The professorial type, his hair like a flaxen toupee, jerked forward. "Tell me, is it true, as I have read"—his phrases whistled slightly, like rusty machinery—"that the stock of Sinclair Lewis has plummeted under the Salinger wave?"

And so it went, here as in Kiev, Prague, and Alma-Ata, the same questions, more or less predictable, and his own answers, terribly familiar to him by now, mechanical, stale, irrelevant, untrue, claustrophobic. The door opened. In came, with the rosy air of a woman fresh from a bath, a little breathless, having her read, hatless, a woman in a blond coat, her hair also blond. The secretary, entering behind her, seemed to make a cherishing space around her with his large curved hands. He introduced her to Bech as Vera Somethingova, the poetess he had asked to meet. None of the others on the list, he explained, answered their telephones.

"Aren't you kind to come?" As Bech asked it, it was a genuine question, to which he expected some sort of an answer.

She spoke to the interpreter in Bulgarian. "She says," the interpreter told Bech, "she is sorry she is so late."

"But she was just called!" In the warmth of his confusion and pleasure Bech turned to speak directly to her, forgetting he would not be understood. "I'm terribly sorry to have interrupted your morning."

"I am pleased," she said, "to meet you. I heard of you spoken in France."

"You speak English!"

"No. Very little amount."

"But you *do*."

A chair was brought for her from a corner of the room. She yielded her coat, revealing herself in a suit also blond, as if her clothes were an aspect of a total consistency. She sat down opposite Bech, crossing her legs. Her legs were very good; her face was perceptibly broad. Lowering her lids, she tugged her skirt to the curve of her knee. It was his sense of her having hurried, hurried to him, and of being, still, graciously flustered, that most touched him.

He spoke to her very clearly, across the fruit, fearful of abusing and breaking the fragile bridge of her English. "You are a poetess. When I was young, I also wrote poems."

She was silent so long he thought she would never answer; but then she smiled and pronounced, "You are not old now."

"Your poems. Are they difficult?"

"They are difficult—to write."

"But not to read?"

"I think—not so very."

"Good. Good."

Despite the decay of his career, Bech had retained an absolute faith in his instincts; he never doubted that somewhere an ideal course was open to him and that his intuitions were predealt clues to his destiny. He had loved, briefly or long, with or without consummation, perhaps a dozen women; yet all of them, he now saw, shared the trait of approximation, of narrowly missing an undisclosed prototype. The surprise he felt did not have to do with the appearance, at last, of this central woman; he had always expected her to appear. What he had not expected was her appearance here, in this remote and abused nation, in this room of morning light, where he discovered a small knife in his fingers and on the table before him, golden and moist, a precisely divided pear.

Men travelling alone develop a romantic vertigo. Bech had already fallen in love with a freckled Embassy wife in Prague, a buck-toothed chanteuse in Rumania, a stolid Mongolian sculptress in Kazakstan. In the Tretyakov Gallery he had fallen in love with a recumbent statue, and at the Moscow Ballet School with an entire roomful of girls. Entering the room, he had been struck by the aroma, tenderly acrid, of young female sweat. Sixteen and seventeen, wearing patchy practice suits, the girls were twirling so strenuously their slippers were unravelling. Demure student faces crowned the unconscious insolence of their bodies. The room was doubled in depth by a floor-to-ceiling mirror. Bech was seated on a bench at its base. Staring above his head, each girl watched herself with frowning eyes frozen, for an instant in the turn, by the imperious delay and snap of her head. Bech tried to remember the lines of Rilke that expressed it, this snap and delay: *did not the drawing remain/that the dark stroke of your eyebrow/swiftly wrote on the wall of its own turning?* At one point the teacher, a shapeless old Ukrainian lady with gold canines, a *prima* of the thirties, had arisen; cried something translated to Bech as "No, no, the arms free, *free;*" and in demonstration executed a rapid series of pirouettes with such proud effortlessness that all the girls, standing this way and that like deer along the wall, had applauded. Bech had loved them for that. In all his loves, there was an urge to rescue—to rescue the girls from the slavery of their exertions, the statue from the cold grip of its own marble, the Embassy wife from her boring and unctuous husband, the chanteuse from her nightly humiliation (she could not sing), the Mongolian from her stolid race. But the Bulgarian poetess presented herself to him as needing nothing, as being complete, poised, satisfied, achieved. He was aroused and curious and, the next day, inquired about her of the man with the vaguely contemptuous mouth of a hare—a novelist turned playwright and scenarist, who accompanied him to

the Rila Monastery. "She lives to write," the playwright said. "I do not think it is healthy."

Bech said, "But she seems so healthy." They stood beside a small church with whitewashed walls. From the outside it looked like a hovel, a shelter for pigs or chickens. For five centuries the Turks had ruled Bulgaria, and the Christian churches, however richly adorned within, had humble exteriors. A peasant woman with wildly snarled hair unlocked the door for them. Though the church could hardly ever have held more than thirty worshippers, it was divided into three parts, and every inch of wall was covered with eighteenth-century frescoes. Those in the narthex depicted a Hell where the devils wielded scimitars. Passing through the tiny nave, Bech peeked through the iconostas into the screened area that, in the symbolism of Orthodox architecture, represented the next, the hidden world—Paradise—and glimpsed a row of books, an easy chair, a pair of ancient oval spectacles. Outdoors again, he felt released from the unpleasantly tight atmosphere of a children's book. They were on the side of a hill. Above them was a stand of pines whose trunks glistened with ice. Below them sprawled the monastery, a citadel of Bulgarian national feeling during the years of the Turkish Yoke. The last monks had been moved out in 1961. An aimless soft rain was falling in these mountains, and there were not many German tourists today. Across the valley, whose little silver river still turned a water wheel, a motionless white horse stood silhouetted against a green meadow, pinned there like a brooch.

"I am an old friend of hers," the playwright said. "I worry about her."

"Are the poems good?"

"It is difficult for me to judge. They are very feminine. Perhaps shallow."

"Shallowness can be a kind of honesty."

"Yes. She is very honest in her work."

"And in her life?"

"As well."

"What does her husband do?"

The other man looked at him with parted lips and touched his arm, a strange Slavic gesture, communicating an underlying racial urgency, that Bech no longer shied from. "But she has no husband. As I say, she is too much for poetry to have married."

"But her name ends in '-ova.'"

"I see. You are mistaken. It is not a matter of marriage; I am Petrov, my unmarried sister is Petrova. All females."

"How stupid of me. But I think it's such a pity, she's so charming."

"In America, only the uncharming fail to marry?"

"Yes, you must be very uncharming not to marry."

"It is not so here. The government indeed is alarmed; our birth rate is one of the lowest in Europe. It is a problem for economists."

Bech gestured at the monastery. "Too many monks?"

"Not enough, perhaps. With too few of monks, something of the monk enters everybody."

The peasant woman, who seemed older to Bech than he was but who was probably under thirty, saw them to the edge of her domain. She huskily chattered in what Petrov said was very amusing rural slang. Behind her, now hiding in her skirts and now darting away, was her child, a boy not more than three. He was faithfully chased, back and forth, by a small white pig, who moved, as pigs do, on tiptoe, with remarkably abrupt changes of direction. Something in the scene, in the open glee of the woman's parting smile and the unself-conscious way her hair thrust out from her head, something in the mountain mist and spongy rutted turf into which frost had begun to break at night, evoked for Bech a nameless absence to which was attached, like a horse to a meadow, the image of the poetess, with her broad face, her good legs, her Parisian clothes, and her sleekly brushed hair. Petrov, in whom he was beginning to sense, through the wraps of foreignness, a clever and kindred mind, seemed to have overheard his thoughts, for he said, "If you would like, we could have dinner. It would be easy for me to arrange."

"With her?"

"Yes, she is my friend, she would be glad."

"But I have nothing to say to her. I'm just curious about such an intense conjunction of good looks and brains. I mean, what does a soul do with it all?"

"You may ask her. Tomorrow night?"

"I'm sorry, I can't. I'm scheduled to go to the ballet, and the next night the Legation is giving a cocktail party for me, and then I fly home."

"Home? So soon?"

"It does not feel soon to me. I must try to work again."

"A drink, then. Tomorrow evening before the ballet? It is possible? It is not possible."

Petrov looked puzzled, and Bech realized that it was his fault, for he was nodding to say Yes, but in Bulgaria nodding meant No, and a shake of the head meant Yes. "Yes," he said. "Gladly."

The ballet was entitled "Silver Slippers." As Bech watched it, the word "ethnic" kept coming to his mind. He had grown accustomed, during his trip, to this sort of artistic evasion, the retreat from the difficult and disappointing present into folk dance, folk tale, folk song, with always the impli-

cation that, beneath the embroidered peasant costume, the folk was really one's heart's own darling, the proletariat.

"Do you like fairy tales?" It was the moist-palmed interpreter who accompanied him to the theatre.

"I *love* them," Bech said, with a fervor and gaiety lingering from the previous hour. The interpreter looked at him anxiously, as when Bech had swallowed the brandy in one swig, and throughout the ballet kept murmuring explanations of self-evident events on the stage. Each night, a princess would put on silver slippers and dance through her mirror to tryst with a wizard, who possessed a magic stick that she coveted, for with it the world could be ruled. The wizard, as a dancer, was inept, and once almost dropped her, so that anger flashed from her eyes. She was, the princess, a little redhead with a high round bottom and a frozen pout and beautiful free arm motions, and Bech found it oddly ecstatic when, preparatory to her leap, she would dance toward the mirror, an empty oval, and another girl, identically dressed in pink, would emerge from the wings and perform as her reflection. And when the princess, haughtily adjusting her cape of invisibility, leaped through the oval of gold wire, Bech's heart leaped backward into the enchanted hour he had spent with the poetess.

Though the appointment had been established, she came into the restaurant as if, again, she had been suddenly summoned and had hurried. She sat down between Bech and Petrov slightly breathless and fussed, but exuding, again, that impalpable warmth of intelligence and virtue.

"Vera, Vera," Petrov said.

"You hurry too much," Bech told her.

"Not so very much," she said.

Petrov ordered her a cognac and continued with Bech their discussion of the newer French novelists. "It is tricks," Petrov said. "Good tricks, but tricks. It does not have enough to do with life, it is too much verbal nervousness. Is that sense?"

"It's an epigram," Bech said.

"There are just two of their number with whom I do not feel this: Claude Simon and Samuel Beckett. You have no relation, Bech, Beckett?"

"None."

Vera said, "Nathalie Sarraute is a very modest woman. She felt motherly to me."

"You have met her?"

"In Paris I hear her speak. Afterward there was the coffee. I liked her theories, of the, oh, *what?* Of the *little* movements within the heart." She delicately measured a pinch of space and smiled, through Bech, back at herself.

"Tricks," Petrov said. "I do not feel this with Beckett; there, in a low form, believe it or not, one has human content."

Bech felt duty-bound to pursue this, to ask about the theatre of the absurd in Bulgaria, about abstract painting (these were the touchstones of "progressiveness;" Russia had none, Rumania some, Czechoslovakia plenty), to subvert Petrov. Instead, he asked the poetess, "Motherly?"

Vera explained, her hands delicately modelling the air, rounding into nuance, as it were, the square corners of her words. "After her talk, we—talked."

"In French?"

"And in Russian."

"She knows Russian?"

"She was born Russian."

"How is her Russian?"

"Very pure but—old-fashioned. Like a book. As she talked, I felt in a book, safe."

"You do not always feel safe?"

"Not always."

"Do you find it difficult to be a woman poet?"

"We have a tradition of woman poets. We have Elisaveta Bagriana, who is very great."

Petrov leaned toward Bech as if to nibble him. "Your own works? Are they influenced by the *nouvelle vague?* Do you consider yourself to write anti-*romans?*"

Bech kept himself turned toward the woman. "Do you want to hear about how I write? You don't, do you?"

"Very much yes," she said.

He told them, told them shamelessly, in a voice that surprised him with its steadiness, its limpid urgency, how once he had written, how in "Travel Light" he had sought to show people skimming the surface of things with their lives, taking tints from things the way that objects in a still-life color one another, and how later he had attempted to place beneath the melody of plot a counter-melody of imagery, interlocking images which had risen to the top and drowned his story, and how in "The Chosen" he had sought to make of this confusion the theme itself, an epic theme, by showing a population of characters whose actions were all determined, at the deepest level, by nostalgia, by a desire to get back, to dive, each, into the springs of their private imagery. The book probably failed; at least, it was badly received. Bech apologized for telling all this. His voice tasted flat in his mouth; he felt a secret intoxication and a secret guilt, for he had contrived to give a grand air, as of an impossibly noble and quixotically complex experiment, to his

failure when at bottom, he suspected, a certain simple laziness was the cause.

Petrov said, "Fiction so formally sentimental could not be composed in Bulgaria. We do not have a happy history."

It was the first time Petrov had sounded like a Communist. If there was one thing that irked Bech about these people behind the mirror, it was their assumption that, however second-rate elsewhere, in suffering they were supreme. He said, "Believe it or not, neither do we."

Vera calmly intruded. "Your personae are not moved by love?"

"Yes, very much. But as a form of nostalgia. We fall in love, I tried to say in the book, with women who remind us of our first landscape. A silly idea. I used to be interested in love. I once wrote an essay on the orgasm—you know the word?—"

She shook her head. He remembered that it meant Yes.

"—on the orgasm as perfect memory. The one mystery is, what are we remembering?"

She shook her head again, and he noticed that her eyes were gray, and that in their depths his image (which he could not see) was searching for the thing remembered. She composed her fingertips around the brandy glass and said, "There is a French poet, a young one, who has written of this. He says that never else do we, do we so gather up, collect into ourselves, *oh*—" Vexed, she spoke to Petrov in rapid Bulgarian.

He shrugged and said, "Concentrate our attention."

"—concentrate our attention," she repeated to Bech, as if the words, to be believed, had to come from her. "I say it foolish—foolishly—but in French it is very well put and—*correct*."

Petrov smiled neatly and said, "This is an enjoyable subject for discussion, love."

"It remains," Bech said, picking his words as if the language were not native even to him, "one of the few things that still deserve meditation."

"I think it is good," she said.

"Love?" he asked, startled.

She shook her head and tapped the stem of her glass with a fingernail, so that Bech had an inaudible sense of ringing, and she bent as if to study the liquor, so that her entire body borrowed a rosiness from the brandy and burned itself into Bech's memory—the silver gloss of her nail, the sheen of her hair, the symmetry of her arms relaxed on the white tablecloth, everything except the expression on her face.

Petrov asked aloud Bech's opinion of Dürrenmatt.

Actuality is a running impoverishment of possibility. Though he had looked forward to seeing her again at the cocktail party and had made sure

that she was invited, when it occurred, though she came, he could not get to her. He saw her enter, with Petrov, but he was fenced in by an attaché of the Yugoslav Embassy and his burnished Tunisian wife; and, later, when he was worming his way toward her diagonally, a steely hand closed on his arm and a rasping American female told him that her fifteen-year-old nephew had decided to be a writer and desperately needed advice. Not the standard crap, but real brass-knuckles advice. Bech found himself balked. He was surrounded by America: the voices, the narrow suits, the watery drinks, the clatter, the glitter. The mirror had gone opaque and gave him back only himself. He managed, in the end, as the officials were thinning out, to break through and confront her in a corner. Her coat, blond, with a rabbit collar, was already on; from its side pocket she pulled a pale volume of poems in the Cyrillic alphabet. "Please," she said. On the flyleaf she had written, "to H. Beck, sincerelly, with bad spellings but much"—the last word looked like "leave" but must have been "love."

"Wait," he begged, and went back to where his ravaged pile of presentation books had been and, unable to find the one he wanted, stole the Legation library's jacketless copy of "The Chosen." Placing it in her expectant hands, he told her, "Don't look," for inside he had written, with a drunk's stylistic confidence,

Dear Vera Glavanakova—

It is a matter of earnest regret for me that you and I must live on opposite sides of the world.

England to America	1919	MARGARET PRESCOTT MONTAGUE
Each in His Generation	1920	MAXWELL STRUTHERS BURT
The Heart of Little Shikara	1921	EDISON MARSHALL
Snake Doctor	1922	IRVIN S. COBB
Prelude	1923	EDGAR VALENTINE SMITH
The Spring Flight	1924	INEZ HAYNES IRWIN
Mr. Bisbee's Princess	1925	JULIAN STREET
Bubbles	1926	WILBUR DANIEL STEELE
Child of God	1927	ROARK BRADFORD
The Parrot	1928	WALTER DURANTY
Big Blonde	1929	DOROTHY PARKER
Dressing-Up	1930	W. R. BURNETT
Can't Cross Jordan by Myself	1931	WILBUR DANIEL STEELE
An End to Dreams	1932	STEPHEN VINCENT BENÉT
Gal Young Un	1933	MARJORIE KINNAN RAWLINGS
No More Trouble for Jedwick	1934	LOUIS PAUL
The White Horses of Vienna	1935	KAY BOYLE
Total Stranger	1936	JAMES GOULD COZZENS
The Devil and Daniel Webster	1937	STEPHEN VINCENT BENÉT
The Happiest Man on Earth	1938	ALBERT MALTZ
Barn Burning	1939	WILLIAM FAULKNER
Freedom's a Hard-Bought Thing	1940	STEPHEN VINCENT BENÉT
Defeat	1941	KAY BOYLE
The Wide Net	1942	EUDORA WELTY
Livie Is Back	1943	EUDORA WELTY
Walking Wounded	1944	IRWIN SHAW
The Wind and the Snow of Winter	1945	WALTER VAN TILBURG CLARK
Bird Song	1946	JOHN MAYO GOSS
The White Circle	1947	JOHN BELL CLAYTON
Shut a Final Door	1948	TRUMAN CAPOTE
A Courtship	1949	WILLIAM FAULKNER
The Blue-Winged Teal	1950	WALLACE STEGNER
The Hunters	1951	HARRIS DOWNEY
The Indian Feather	1954	THOMAS MABRY
In the Zoo	1955	JEAN STAFFORD
The Country Husband	1956	JOHN CHEEVER
Greenleaf	1957	FLANNERY O'CONNOR
In Sickness as in Health	1958	MARTHA GELLHORN
Venus, Cupid, Folly and Time	1959	PETER TAYLOR
The Ledge	1960	LAWRENCE SARGENT HALL
Tell Me a Riddle	1961	TILLIE OLSEN
Holiday	1962	KATHERINE ANNE PORTER
Everything That Rises Must Converge	1963	FLANNERY O'CONNOR
The Embarkment for Cythera	1964	JOHN CHEEVER
Revelation	1965	FLANNERY O'CONNOR
The Bulgarian Poetess	1966	JOHN UPDIKE