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the strange and terrifying



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ALFRED HITCHCOCK

Alfred Hitchcock presents:

**A BAKER'S DOZEN
OF SUSPENSE STORIES**

A D E L L B O O K

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ALFRED J. HITCHCOCK

LONG LIVE SUSPENSE

The story of suspense continues to enjoy widespread favor (thank heaven)! We live in the heyday of the psychological thriller, the narrative of chase-and-pursuit, of lethal hide-and-seek, of the hidden menace and the waiting for the blow to fall. Readers can't seem to get their fill of this kind of tale—hence another Dell Book collection!

This time we begin—unless you happen to be one of those delightful people who take their anthologies from back to front—with “The Mask,” by F. Tennyson Jesse, the talented great-niece of Alfred Lord Tennyson. It shows that when a woman doesn't want her neighbors to know who is living with her a black mask cut from a length of dress silk can come in handy. Of course, she should be sure whose face is behind the mask—In Agatha Christie's “Accident,” Hercule Poirot's creator has an ex-Inspector spot a suspected murderess—but she's only *suspected*, mind you, and there remains the delicate and dangerous task of saving the prospective next victim from her unwelcome attentions.

In Robert Lewis's “Roman Holiday,” an American finds himself unexpectedly tossed to the Fascist lions, and what was to have been a test of skill becomes an agonizing fight for life. “Revenge,” by Samuel Blas, shows what may happen when the ancient adjuration, “*Vengeance is mine*,” is disregarded; he who claims that perquisite does so at his own peril. In “The Snake,” John Steinbeck's young doctor, who never kills for sport, finds that there are others who do. The girl in Mary Deasy's “Long Shadow on the Lawn” does her best to avoid thought of possible danger—does the escaped “lunatic” really hold a grudge against her?—but there is the suspicion, and the half-acknowledged fear, and the waiting. In “The Night,” Ray Bradbury paints an evocative word-picture of childhood fear—big brother is missing at bedtime: is he, can he be, lost in the dark ravine behind the old church?

The pitiful lad in D. H. Lawrence's strange tale, "The Rocking-Horse Winner," wants to be lucky, so he must ride like the wind, and listen, listen, for the answer. A city slicker lost in the woods is an object of scorn to the natives, but when George Carousso's "Warden" loses his own way in the marsh he discovers that all men are brothers (in fear) under the skin. In "Leviathan," Ellis St. Joseph's cuckolded fat man hardly knows why he invites his wife's lover to the beach with them, but once there it all becomes plain enough—to him first, then to the other. A man lies paralyzed, in a convincing replica of death, and he has one slender—oh, so slender!—chance of signaling those about him that he is still alive: that is "Breakdown," by Louis Pollock.

Lastly, a "Western"! Why not, when it carries as powerful a charge of suspense as "The Fool's Heart," by that master of cow-country fiction, Eugene Manlove Rhodes? It tells of as complete a frame-up as one man can possibly devise to trap another; there must be some way out for the innocent victim—there *must* be! But is there?

Here they are: thirteen tales of tension. If they keep you as engrossed as they did me this book's success will be a matter of course.

ALFRED HITCHCOCK

F. TENNYSON JESSE

THE MASK

When Vashti Bath was "LED OUT" by the two most eligible young men in the village, the other women spoke their minds pretty freely on the subject; and when she progressed to that further stage known as "arm-a-crook" and still refrained from making the fateful choice, comment waxed bitter. The privilege of proposal belongs in Cornwall to that sex commonly called "the weaker"—a girl goes through the various stages of courtship conducted out of doors, and if she decides to marry the young man, asks him to "step in" one evening when he has seen her home, after which the engagement is announced. Vashti, in the most brazen way, was sampling two suitors at a time, and those two the most coveted men in Perran-an-zenna, and therein lay the sting for the womenfolk.

"What is there to her, I should like to know?" the lay-reader's wife demanded of her friends at a somewhat informal prayer meeting. "She'm an ontidy kind o' maid who don't know one end of needle from t'other. When her stockin' heels go into holes she just pulls them further under her foot, till sometimes she do have to garter half way down her leg!"

"She'm ontidy sure 'nough," agreed a widow woman of years and experience, "but she'm a rare piece o' red and white, and menfolk are feeble vessels. If a maid's a fine armful they never think on whether she won't be a fine handful. And Vashti do have a way wi' her."

That was the whole secret—Vashti had a way with her. She was a splendid slattern—showing the ancient Celtic strain in her coarse, abundant black hair, level brows, and narrow, green-blue eyes, with a trace of Jew in the hawk-like line of nose and the prominent chin curved a little upward from her throat. A few years, and she would be lean and haggard, but now she was a fine, buoyant creature, swift and tumultuous, with a mouth like a flower. For all the slovenliness of her clothes, she had a trick of

putting them on which an Englishwoman never has as a birthright and rarely achieves. Vashti could tie a ribbon so that every man she passed turned to look after her.

Perran-an-zenna is a mining village, and some of the menfolk work in the tin mines close at hand, and some in the big silver mine four miles away. James Glasson, the elder and harsher-featured of Vashti's lovers, worked in the latter, and there was every prospect of his becoming a captain, as he had a passion for mechanics and for chemistry, and was supposed to be experimenting with a new process that would cheapen the cost of extracting the silver. Willie Strick, the younger, handsomer, more happy-go-lucky of the two men, went to "bal" in the tin mines, and was disinclined to save, but then his aged grandmother, with whom he lived, had been busy saving for 20 years. Strick was an eager lover, quick to jealousy—Glasson was uncommunicative even to Vashti, and careless of her opinions. Though the jealousy irked her it flattered her too, but on the other hand, Glasson's carelessness, even while it piqued her, made her covet him all the more.

This was how matters stood one evening in late March when Vashti had gone up to the moors to fetch in the cows—not her own, no Bath had been thrifty enough for that, but belonging to the farm where she worked. As she walked along in the glowing light, the white road winking up at her through a hole in her swinging skirt, and a heavy coil of hair jerking a little lower on the nape of her neck with each vigorous stride, Vashti faced the fact that matters could continue as they were no longer. At bottom Vashti was as hard as granite; she meant to have what she wanted. Her only trouble was she had not quite settled what it was she did want. Like all her race, she had a strain of fatalism in her, that prompted her to choose whichever of the two men she should next chance to meet—and the woman in her suggested that at least such a declaration on the part of fate would give her the necessary impetus toward deciding upon the other.

Lifting her eyes from the regular, pendulumlike swing of her skirt that had almost mesmerized her lulled vision, she saw, dark against the sunset, the figure of a man. She

knew it to be either James or Willie because of the peculiar square set of the shoulders and the small head—for the two men were, like most people in that intermarrying district, cousins, with a superficial trick of likeness, and an almost exact similiarity of voice. A prescience of impending fate weighed on Vashti; the gaunt shaft of the disused Wheal Zenna mine, that stood up between her and the approaching man, seemed like a menacing finger. The man reached it first and stood leaning up against it, one foot on the rubble of granite that was scattered around, his arm, with the miner's bag slung over it, resting across his raised knee. Vashti half thought of going back, even without the cows, but it was already time the poor beasts were milked, and curiosity lured her on. She went across the circle of greener grass surrounding the shaft, and found Glasson awaiting her.

To every woman comes a time in life when she is ripe for the decisive man; and it is often a barren hour when he fails to appear. For Vashti the hour and the man had come together, and she knew it as she met Glasson's look. Putting out his hands, ingrained with earth in the finest seams of them, he laid them heavily on her shoulders, like a yoke. His bag swung forward and hit her on the chest, but neither of them noticed it.

"Vashti, you'm got to make'n end," he said. "One way or t'other. Which es et to be?"

She shook under his gaze, her lids drooped, but she tried to pout out her full underlip with a pretense of petulance. Suddenly his grip tightened.

"So 'ee won't tell me? Then by God, I'll do the tellin'! You'm my woman, do 'ee hear? Mine, and neither Will Strick nor any other chap shall come between us two."

Wheeling her round, he held her against the rough side of the shaft and bent his face to hers; she felt his lips crush on her own till she could have cried out with pain if she had been able to draw breath. When he let her go her breast heaved, and she stood with lowered head holding her hand across her mouth.

"Now we'll get the cows, my lass," said Glasson quietly, "and take'n home, and then you shall ask me to step in."

During the short, fierce courtship that followed, Vashti saw very little of Willie Strick, though she heard he talked much of emigrating, vowing he would disappear in the night and not come home until he had made a fortune. All of Vashti's nature was in abeyance, save for one emotion—a stunned, yet pleasurable submission. It was not until several months after her marriage that she began to feel again the more ordinary and yet more complex sensations of everyday life. If she had to the full a primitive woman's joy in being possessed, she had also the instinctive need for possessing her man utterly, and James Glasson was only partly hers. It was borne in on her that by far the larger side of him was his own, never to be given to any woman. Ambition and an uncanny secretiveness made up the real man; he had set himself to winning his wife chiefly because the want of her distracted him from his work and fretted him.

He bent the whole of life to his purposes, without any parade of power, but with a laborious care that gradually settled on Vashti like a blight. When she realized that no matter how rightly she wore her little bits of finery, he no longer noticed them, realized that she was merely a necessity to him as his woman—something to be there when she was wanted—she began to harden. He still had a fascination for her when he chose to exert it—his very carelessness and sureness of her were what made the fascination, but gradually it wore thinner and slacker, and a sullen resentment began to burn through her seeming submission.

The Glassons' cottage was tucked away in a hollow of the moor, only the chimney of it visible from Perran-an-zenna, and Vashti began to chafe under the isolation, and to regret she had never been at more pains to make friends among her own sex.

As summer drew to its full, Vashti watched the splendid pageant of it in the sky and moor with unappreciative eyes. If anyone had told her that her soul had been formed by the country of her birth and upbringing, she would have thought it sheer lunacy, but her parents were not more responsible for Vashti than the land itself. The hardness and bleakness, the inexpressible charm of it, the soft,

indolent airs, scented with flowers, or pungent with salt; above all, that reticence that makes for lonely thoughts, these things had, generation by generation, molded her forebears, and their influence was in her blood. Even the indifference with which she saw arose from her oneness with her own country, and in this she was like all true Cornish folk before and since—they belong to Cornwall body and soul. The quality of reticence had become secretiveness in James Glasson—he took a childish pleasure in keeping any little happening from the world in general and Vashti in particular, and the consequence was that, in her, strength was hardening into relentlessness.

One market day she was returning from Penzance—a drive of some eight miles, accomplished in the cart of their nearest neighbor—with a paper parcel on her knee, which she kept fingering under the rug as though to make sure it was still there. At the neighbor's farm she got out, thanked him, and started to walk the remaining mile over the moor, with the precious parcel laid carefully on the top of the basket of household goods. It had been one of those days when the air seems to have a misty quality that makes it almost visible—a delicate effulgence that envelops every object far and near, blurring harsh outlines and giving an effect as though trees and plants stood up into an element too subtle for water and too insistent for ether. The cloud shadows gave a plumlike bloom to the miles of interfolding hills, and inset among the gray-green of the moor the patches of young bracken showed vivid as slabs of emerald. Lightly as balls of thistledown the larks hopped swiftly over the heather on their thin legs, the self-heal and bird's foot trefoil made a carpet of purple and yellow; from the heavy-scented gorse came the staccato notes of the crickets, while in a distant copse a cuckoo called faintly on her changed, June note. As Vashti rounded the corner of the rutted track and the cottage came into view, she paused. The deeply sloping slate roof was iridescent as a pigeon's breast, and the whitewashed walls were burnished with gold by the late sunlight, while against the faded peacock blue of the fence, the evening primroses seemed luminous.

Even to Vashti it all looked different, transmuted. Her fingers pressed the shiny paper of the parcel till it crackled, and a smile tugged at her lips. After all, it was not bad to be young and handsome on an evening in June, to be returning to a home of her own with, under her arm, a parcel that, to her, was an event. Vashti had bought that thing dear to the heart of the countrywoman, a length of rich black dress silk; she meant to make it up herself, and though her stitches were clumsy, she knew she could cut and drape a gown better than many a conscientious seamstress. And then—then she would take her place as wife to the most discussed man in all that part of Penwith and hold up her head at Meeting. Even James himself could not but treat her differently when she had black silk on her back.

She went through to the outhouse, which James used as a workshop, and tried the door. It was locked. "James!" she cried, rattling the latch. "James!"

She heard him swear softly, then came the sound of something hastily put down and a cupboard door being shut. Then Glasson opened the door a few inches, and stood looking down at her.

"Get into kitchen," he said briefly, "can't 'ee see I'm busy?"

Already Vashti's pleasure in her purchase was beginning to fade, but she stood her ground, though wrathfully.

"You needn' think you'm the only person with secrets," she flashed. "I'd a fine thing to show 'ee here, if you'd a mind to see it—now I shall keep'n to myself."

"Woman's gear!" gibed Glasson. "You'm been buying foolishness over to market. Get the supper or I shan't have time for a bite before I go to see t' captain."

"That's all you think on," she retorted, "you and your business."

"That's all you should think on, either," he said, pulling her toward him with a hand on the back of her neck, and kissing her on her unresponsive mouth. She stood sullenly; then, when he dropped his hand, went into the house. She heard him turn the key in the lock as she went. That night she cried hot tears of anger onto the new dress

length, and next day she went across the moor and met Willie Strick on his way home to Perran-an-zenna.

That was the first of many meetings, for Willie's resentment faded away before the old charm of Vashti's presence. In spite of his handsome face, he was oddly like James. The backs of their heads were similar enough to give Vashti a little shock whenever she passed behind her husband as he sat at table, or each time that Willie lay beside her on the moor, his head on her lap. She would pull the curly rings of his hair out over her fingers, and even while she admired the glint of it, some little memory of a time when James's hair had glinted in the sun or candle-light pricked at her—not with any feeling for him except resentment, but at first it rather spoiled her lover for her.

They had to meet by stealth, but that was easy enough, as James was now on an afternoon core, and Willie on a morning one. To do the latter justice, he had tried, at the beginning, a feeble resistance to the allure that Vashti had for him, not from any scruple of conscience, but because his pleasure-loving nature shrank from anything that might lead to unpleasantness. And, careless as he seemed of his wife, James Glasson would be an ugly man to deal with if he discovered the truth. So far there had been nothing except the love-making of a limited though expressive vocabulary, and Vashti curbed him and herself for three whole weeks. She was set on possessing Willie's very soul—here, at least, was a man whom she could so work upon that he would always be hers even to the most reluctant outpost of his being. By the end of those weeks her elusiveness, the hint of passion in her, and the steady force of her will, had enslaved Strick hopelessly; he was maddened, reckless, and timid all at once.

"Vashti, it's got to end," he said desperately, as he walked with her one evening as near to the cottage as he dared, and as he spoke, he slid an arm round her waist. To his surprise, she yielded and swayed toward him so that her shoulder touched his; in the sunset light her upturned face glimmered warm and bewilderingly full of color.

"Wait a bit, lad," she breathed. "James goes up to Lon-

don church town tomorrow to see one of the managers—happen he'll be gone a week or more—”

He felt her soft mouth on his cheek for a moment and his arms went round her—the next moment came a crash that seemed to split the sky, and from the outhouse leaped a whistling column of flame.

Stricken with a superstitious terror, Willie screamed—loudly and thinly, like a woman, Vashti recoiled, flung up her hands, then rushed toward the burning outhouse.

“James is in there!” she cried. “Oh, get 'en out, get 'en out!”

The flame had been caused by an explosion, but there was not much inflammatory stuff for it to feed on, and a thick smoke, reeking of chemicals, hung above the outhouse. As Vashti, followed by the shaking Strick, reached for the door, it swung open and a Thing stood swaying a moment on the step.

It seemed to the lovers' first horrified glimpse that all of Glasson's face had been blown away. The whole of one side of it was covered by an enormous blister, a nightmare thing, which, as the woman gazed at it, burst and fell into blackness. The same moment Glasson dropped his length across the threshold.

“The doctor, go for doctor,” whispered Vashti with dry lips, “as quick as you can. I—I dursn't turn 'en over.”

So Glasson lay with what had been his face against a patch of grass, while Willie ran, horror-ridden, to Perran-an-zenna for the doctor.

Dry-eyed, Vashti watched by her husband for three nights, and all praised her wifely devotion. She sat by the gleam of a flickering nightlight, her eyes on the bandaged face—the linen was only slit just as much as was necessary for breathing.

“Well, Mrs. Glasson,” said the doctor cheerily, as he finished his inspection on the third night, “I can give you good news. Your husband will live, and will keep the sight of one eye. But—though of course wonders can be done with modern surgery—we can't build up what's gone. He'll always have to wear a mask, Mrs. Glasson.”

When he had gone, Vashti went and stood by the bed,

looking down on the unconscious man, who lay breathing heavily—how easy it would be to lay a hand over that slit in the linen—a few minutes, and this nightmare would be over. She half put out her hand, then drew it back. She was not yet capable of cold-blooded crime.

Lighting a candle, she took from a drawer a paper parcel, which she unfolded on the little table. As the still untouched folds of the black dress length, with a few little hard-edged blots on it that meant tears, came into view, Vashti's self-control broke down. She wept stormily, her head along her arms. Release had flaunted so near to her, and was withdrawn, and her horror of the Thing on the bed was mingled with a pity for it that ate into her mind. She dried her burning eyes and, picking up the scissors, began to cut a mask out of the tear-stained breadths; her invincible habit of considering herself forbade her, even at that moment, to use the good yards for such a purpose.

The candle flame was showing wan in the gray of the dawning when Vashti put the last stitches to the mask—she had made it very deep, so that it would hang to just below the jawbone, and she had laboriously buttonhole-stitched round the one eye-hole, and sewn tape-strings firmly to the sides, top and bottom. The mask was finished.

James Glasson's figure, a trifle stooped and groping, with that sinister black curtain from cap to collar, soon ceased to be an object of fearful curiosity in Perran-an-zenna; even the children became so used to it that they left off calling out as he passed. He grew more silent and morose than ever, and his secretiveness showed itself in all sorts of ingenious petty ways.

Vashti had the imaginative streak of her race, and life in the lonely cottage with this masked personality took on the quality of nightmare. She felt his one eye watching her continually, and was tormented by the thought: *How much does he know?* Who could tell? Had he seen anything from the outhouse window when she had rashly let Willie come so near, or did he know who it was who had fetched the doctor? Sometimes a meaning word seemed to show that he knew everything, sometimes she argued that he could only guess.

The black mask filled the whole of her life. The thought of it was never out of her mind, not even when she was working on her old farm, for she had to be breadwinner now. She found herself dwelling on what lay behind the mask, wondering whether it could be as bad as that black expanse, and once she woke herself at night, screaming, "Tear 'en down, Willie! Tear the black mask down!" and then lay trembling, wondering whether her husband had heard. For days he said nothing and she felt herself safe: then one night he turned to her: "There's no air," he complained. "Can't 'ee take down t' curtains? If 'ee can't do anything else, why—tear 'en down, tear 'en down!"

He had mimicked her very voice, and silent with fear, she took down the curtain, her fingers shaking so that the rings jingled together along the rod. One day, when he was working in the garden, he turned to face the wind. She saw him sideways against the sky, and the black mask, held taut at brow and chin by the strings, was being blown inward. She never forgot the horror of that concave line against the sky.

She came to regard the mask with superstitious awe; it seemed James Glasson's character materialized—the outward expression of the inner man. Nervous and cowed to abjectness as she was, she felt near the end of her endurance. The perpetual scheming to meet Willie unknown to her husband—a difficulty now the latter was nearly always about the house-place—and the wearing uncertainty of *How much does he know?* were fraying her nerves. Some two months after the accident the crash came.

James had gone to Truro to see a surgeon there, and had announced his intention of spending the night with cousins. The utter bliss of being alone, and having the cottage free from the masked presence for even one day acted like a balm on Vashti. She forbade Willie to come near her till the evening, partly from motives of prudence, but chiefly because she craved for solitude. By the afternoon she was more her old, sufficient, well-poised self, and when evening drew on she busied herself about her little preparations in the kitchen with a color burning in her

cheeks and a softened light in her eyes.

That evening Vashti Glasson was touched with a grace of womanliness she had never worn for her husband. Every harmless and tender instinct of the lover was at work in her, making her choose her nicest tablecloth, arrange a cluster of chrysanthemums in an ornate glass vase, put a long-discarded ribbon of gaudy pink in her hair. Then she took off her working-frock of dirty, ill-mended serge, and shook out in triumph the folds of the black silk, now made up in all its glory, and hideous with cheap jet. It converted her from a goddess of the plow to a red-wristed, clumsy girl of the people; and when her hair was dressed in the fashionable lumps, with a fringe-net hardening the outlines, she looked like a shop girl, but she herself admired the effect intensely.

When three taps at the window told that Strick was outside, the color flew to her face, making her so beautiful that she triumphed even over her costume; she had become a high priestess of Love, and was not to be cheated of any of the ritual. She was decked out as for a bridal; no more rough-and-ready wooing and winning for her. But Strick's passion was somewhat daunted by all the preparations for his welcome; the kitchen looked unusual, and so did she, and he hung back for a moment on the threshold.

"What's come to 'ee?" he asked, foolishly agape.

"'Tes a weddin' gown made for you," said Vashti simply.

"But 'tes black!" he stammered. "'Tes ill luck on a black brīdal, Vassie."

"Ours is no white bridal, lad," she told him. "Come in and set down—yes, take that chair," and she pushed Glas-son's accustomed seat forward for her lover.

Conversation languished during the meal—Willie Strick was bewildered by the oddness of everything, Vashti included; his was no level head to plan any details or set a scene—Vashti won by stealth, anywhere and anyhow, was all he had thought of or wished for. Hers was the mastermind and he was helpless before it, and while she inflamed him she frightened him too.

A full moon swam up over the line of distant sea that showed in a dip of the moorland, and the lamp began to smell and burn low. They had finished supper, and Willie was drinking rather freely of the whisky she had set before him. Vashti turned out the lamp, and as she did so a sudden harsh noise sent the heart to her throat, while Willie sprang up fearfully. It was only the poker that, caught by the full skirt of the black silk frock, had been sent clattering to the ground, but it made them stare at each other in a stricken panic for a speechless minute. The white light of the moon shone clearly into the room, throwing a black pattern of window shadow over the disordered supper table, where the chrysanthemums, overturned by Willie's movement, lay across an empty dish, and in the silence the two startled people could hear the rhythmic sound of the water as it drip-drip-dripped onto the floor.

Vashti was the first to recover herself. "Us be plum foolish, Willie!" she said, with an attempt at a laugh. "Do believe us both thought it was James, and him safe to Truro."

"If 'tes," said Strick madly, "he shan't take 'ee from me now. I'll have 'ee, I swear it."

Vashti did not answer—with fascinated eyes she was watching the door slowly open—she could see the strip of moonlight brightness, barred by the darkness of an arm, grow wider and wider. She knew, before the form—so terribly like Willie's, now its masked face was against the light—appeared, that it was her husband.

Quite what happened next she could not have told. The little room seemed full and dark with fear—blind unreasoning fear, that beat even about her head. The long-drawn-out crash of the overturned table added to her confusion—then quite suddenly the sounds of struggling ceased and one man rose to his feet. In the dimness of the room, seeing only the shape of him, she could not tell whether it was James or Willie, until he turned his face to the moonlight, and she saw, with a throb of relief, Strick's face.

"Get a light, Vassie," he whispered. "I fear he's dead." She lit a candle and they knelt down by Glasson. In

falling his head had hit the fender, and blood was trickling onto the floor. She ripped open his shirt and felt for his heart as well as her trembling fingers would allow. She lifted his arm and let it fall—it dropped a dead weight onto the tiled floor. It seemed to her excited fancy that already he was turning cold.

"Willie, you've killed 'en!" she whispered. They both spoke low, as though they thought the dead man could overhear.

"I didn't hit 'en," babbled Willie. "He stumbled and fell and hit his head—they'll make me swing for this—what shall us do, what shall us do?"

"Wait—I must think," commanded the woman. She pressed her hands to her forehead, and sat very still.

"Have 'ee thought?" whispered Willie anxiously.

"Yes—I've thought. Willie, you'm rare and like—he—and that'll save us."

"What do 'ee mean?" asked Willie, thinking the shock had turned her brain.

"The mask!" replied Vashti. "The mask!"

Then, kneeling by the still body, they talked in whispers—she unfolding her plan—he recoiling from it, weakly protesting, and then giving way.

They were to take the dead man between them to the disused mine shaft and throw him down, then Willie was to wear the black mask, and take Glasson's place, until they could sail for America together. Like all simple plans, it had a touch of genius. Willie's constant talk of emigrating, his oft-heard boasts of slipping away in the night and not coming back till he had made a fortune, would all help to cover up his disappearance. And who was to connect it with Vashti and her silent, eccentric, black-masked husband—who would speak to him or her on the subject? And if they did—she could always invent a plausible answer, while he was safeguarded by the fact that the strongest point of likeness between the two men was their voices. The most dissimilar thing about them had been their faces.

"I won't wear his mask," said Willie, shuddering; "I couldn't put 'en against me. You must make me another."

"I'll make 'en now," said Vashti. She rose to her feet, and setting the candle on the seat of a chair, looked about her.

"You must put the room to rights," she commanded. "Make 'en look as though James and I had just had our bit of supper. Mop up the water and sweep all the broken cloam together—and—and take him to the passageway."

"You'm not going to lave me alone wi' he?" cried Willie, aghast.

"Edn room for me to work here. I'll be up over-stairs making t' mask. Keep t' curtain over the window."

Upstairs, she seized scissors, and hacked a square out of the front of her gown. Then she sat and sewed as she had sewed once before, when her husband had lain motionless on the bed. Every now and then came small sounds of things being moved from down below, then a heavy fall and the sound of something being dragged.

"How's et goin' Willie?" she called out.

"'Tes all right," he called back. "I've put 'en in passage."

The moon was near setting when the mask was finished, and she went to the top of the stairs with it in her hands.

"There 'tes," she whispered. "I'll drop it down. Put it in your pocket, and I'll change my gown. 'Tes time we were stirrin'."

The mask fluttered down in the darkness, and she went back to her room and changed swiftly into the old serge.

It was a ghastly journey to the old mine shaft, the heavy form of the dead man sagging between them. They dared have no light, and went stumbling over tussocks and ruts; but as both would have known the way blindfold, they found the shaft without difficulty. They scrambled up the sloping rubble of stones and tipped the body over the jagged hole in the side of the shaft, and after what seemed an interminable silence, there came a thud from several hundred feet below them, then another, as though the body had rebounded, then all was stillness.

Vashti leaned up against the side of the shaft, as she had leaned when James kissed her there, and shut her eyes; the sweat running down her brow had matted her

lashes together into thick points, and the drops tickled her neck so that she put up her hand to it. Both she and the man were drawing the deep, hoarse breaths of exhaustion, and for a few minutes they rested in silence—then he spoke. "You must be comin' back along o' me now," he told her, "the dawn'll be showin' soon."

"Yes, yes," cried Vashti, starting up, "us may meet someone going to bal, sure 'nough."

"'Tes all right—I've got t' mask on. Come."

He closed his fingers over her arm so harshly that she winced, and together they made their way back in the cold, bleak hush that preceded the autumnal dawn. Gradually, as they went, some glimmerings of what her life would be henceforth appeared to the woman. The fear of neighbors, the efforts to appear natural, the memory of that slowly opening door, and the still thing by the fender, the consciousness of what lay at the bottom of the disused shaft; and, above all, the terrible reminder of her husband in the masked Willie—it would be like living with a ghost. . . .

Once back at the cottage, he drew her within and let the door swing to behind him. She moved away to find a light, but he caught her.

"Won't 'ee give me so much as a kiss, and me with red hands because of you?" he asked.

She felt the mask brush her cheek, and broke away with a cry. She heard him laugh as she lit a candle, and turned toward him.

"A black bridal!" he cried wildly. "Did you think 'twas a black bridal? 'Tes a red one, do 'ee hear?"

"Willie," she begged him, "take off t' mask now we'm alone."

"Aren't 'ee afeared?" he asked.

"'Tes safe enough till mornin', and I do hate that mask more'n the devil. Take 'en off."

"I'll take 'en off—to please you, lass."

He seized the mask violently by the hem and ripped it away—and she saw it was her husband.

"You fool!" he said slowly, following her as she backed

away from him, her mouth slack with fear, her eyes staring, her whole being showing her as almost bereft of her senses. "You fool to think to fool me! You was quick enough to say I was dead; I'm not so easy killed, Vassie. Not so easy killed as your lover was—just the carven'-knife between his shoulders when he was stoopin' down, that's all. He was fearful of lookin' at the dead man; he never knew the dead man was lookin' at he. You heard him fall, Vassie, and thought it was him movin' me—"

"Put t' mask on," wailed Vashti, pressing her fingers against her eyes, "put t' mask on again, for the love o' God!"

"There's been enough o' masks," he retorted grimly. "You've got to bear to see me now; me, not your lover that you've helped to tip over Wheal Zenna shaft. Eh, you fool, did 'ee think I didn' know? I've knawed all these months; I've seen 'ee meet 'en. I told 'ee I was going to stop the night over to Truro so as to catch 'ee together. I listened outside the house. I let 'ee think I was dead, and heard t' plan you thought to make. Only half a man am I, wi' no mouth left to kiss with? I've an eye left to see with, and an ear to hear with, and a hand to strike with, and a tongue to teach 'ee with."

"I'll tell on 'ee," said Vashti. "I'll tell the police on 'ee. Murderer, that's what you are."

"I doan't think 'ee will, my dear. 'Tedn' a tale as'll do you any good—a woman who cheats her husband and tries to kill 'en, and helps to carry a body two miles over moor and tip 'en down shaft. And what have 'ee to complain on, I should like to know? When I wear t' mask you can pretend I'm Willie—handsome Willie. Willie who can kiss a maid and make a fine upstandin' husband. Willie was goin' to be me, why shudn' you think I was Willie? Do 'ee, my dear, if 'tes any comfort to 'ee."

He slipped on the mask as he spoke and knotted the strings. The door had swung open, and the candle flame shook in the draft as though trying, in fear, to strain away from the wick. The steel-cold light of dawn grew in the sky and filtered into the room, showing all the sordid litter

of it; the frightened woman, with a pink ribbon awry in her disordered hair and the ominous figure of the masked man. He came toward her round the table.

"'Tis our bridal night, lass!" he said. "Why do 'ee shrink away? Mind you that 'tes Willie speakin'! Don't let us think on James Glasson dead to the bottom o' the shaft. I'm Willie—brave Willie who loves 'ee—"

As his arms came out to catch her, she saw his purpose in his eye, and remembered his words, *A red bridal, lass, a red bridal.*

At the last moment she woke out of her stupor, turned, and ran, he after her. Across the little garden, down the moorland road, over heather and slippery boulders and clinging bracken, startling the larks from their nests, scattering the globes of dew. Once she tried to make for a side track that led to Perran-an-zenna, but he headed her off, and once again she was running, heavily now, toward Wheal Zenna mine shaft. He was gaining on her, and her breath was nearly spent. Both were going slowly, hardly above a stumbling walk, as the shaft came into sight; the drawing of their breath sounded harsh as the rasping of a file through the still air. As she neared the shaft, she turned her head and saw him almost on her, and saw the gleam of something in his lifted hand. She gathered together all her will, concentrated in those few moments all the strength of her nature, determined to cheat him at the last. Up the rubble of stones she scrambled. One gave beneath her foot and sent her down and, abandoning the effort, she lay prone, awaiting the end.

But Vashti's luck held—it was the man who was to lose. A couple of miners who had been coming up the path from Perran-an-zenna had seen the chase and followed hotfoot, unnoticed by the two straining, frantic creatures, who heard nothing but the roaring in their own ears. They caught Glasson as he ran across the patch of grass to the shaft, and he doubled up without a struggle in their arms. Physical and mental powers had failed together, and from that day James Glasson was a hopeless idiot—harmless and silent. Vashti had won indeed.

Admirable woman of affairs that she was, she took a

good sleep before confronting the situation; then she made up her story and stuck to it. Willie's name was never mentioned, and his disappearance, so long threatened, passed as a minor event, swamped in the greater stir of Glasson's attempt to murder his wife. His madness had taken the one form that made Vashti safe—he had gone mad on secretiveness. How much he remembered not even she knew, but not a word could anyone drag from him. He would lay his finger where his nose should have been against the mask, and wag his head slyly. "Naw, naw, I was never one for tellin'," he would say. "James Glasson's no such fool that he can't keep 'enself to 'enself."

He lived on for several years in the asylum, and Vashti, after the free and easy fashion of the remote West, took to herself another husband. She went much to chapel, and there was no one more religious than she, and no one harder on the sins and vanities of young women. One thing in particular she held in what seemed an unreasoning abhorrence—and that was a black silk gown.

AGATHA CHRISTIE

ACCIDENT

"And I tell you this—it's the same woman—not a doubt of it!"

Captain Haydock looked into the eager, vehement face of his friend and sighed. He wished Evans would not be so positive and so jubilant. In the course of a career spent at sea, the old sea captain had learned to leave things that did not concern him well alone. His friend Evans, late C.I.D. Inspector, had a different philosophy of life. "Acting on information received—" had been his motto in early days, and he had improved upon it to the extent of finding out his own information. Inspector Evans had been a very smart, wide-awake officer, and had justly earned the promotion which had been his. Even now, when he had retired from the force, and had settled down in the country cottage of his dreams, his professional instinct was still active.

"Don't often forget a face," he reiterated complacently. "Mrs. Anthony—yes, it's Mrs. Anthony right enough. When you said Mrs. Merrowdene—I knew her at once."

Captain Haydock stirred uneasily. The Merrowdenes were his nearest neighbors, barring Evans himself, and this identifying of Mrs. Merrowdene with a former heroine of a *cause célèbre* distressed him.

"It's a long time," he said rather weakly.

"Nine years," said Evans, accurate as ever. "Nine years and three months. You remember the case?"

"In a vague sort of way."

"Anthony turned out to be an arsenic eater," said Evans, "so they acquitted her."

"Well, why shouldn't they?"

"No reason in the world. Only verdict they could give on the evidence. Absolutely correct."

"Then, that's all right," said Haydock. "And I don't see what we're bothering about."

"Who's bothering?"

"I thought you were."

"Not at all."

"The thing's over and done with," summed up the captain. "If Mrs. Merrowdene at one time of her life was unfortunate enough to be tried and acquitted of murder—"

"It's not usually considered unfortunate to be acquitted," put in Evans.

"You know what I mean," said Captain Haydock irritably. "If the poor lady has been through that harrowing experience, it's no business of ours to rake it up, is it?"

Evans did not answer.

"Come now, Evans. The lady was innocent—you've just said so."

"I didn't say she was innocent. I said she was acquitted."

"It's the same thing."

"Not always."

Captain Haydock, who had commenced to tap his pipe out against the side of his chair, stopped, and sat up with a very alert expression:

"Hullo-ullo-ullo," he said. "The wind's in that quarter, is it? You think she wasn't innocent?"

"I wouldn't say that. I just—don't know. Anthony was in the habit of taking arsenic. His wife got it for him. One day, by mistake, he takes far too much. Was the mistake his or his wife's? Nobody could tell, and the jury very properly gave her the benefit of the doubt. That's all quite right and I'm not finding fault with it. All the same—I'd like to *know*."

Captain Haydock transferred his attention to his pipe once more. "Well," he said comfortably, "it's none of our business."

"I'm not so sure."

"But, surely—"

"Listen to me a minute. This man, Merrowdene—in his laboratory this evening, fiddling round with tests—you remember—"

"Yes. He mentioned Marsh's test for arsenic. Said *you* would know all about it—it was in *your* line—and chuckled. He wouldn't have said that if he'd thought for one moment—"

Evans interrupted him. "You mean he wouldn't have said that if he *knew*. They've been married how long—six years, you told me? I bet you anything he has no idea his wife is the once notorious Mrs. Anthony."

"And he will certainly not know it from me," said Captain Haydock stiffly.

Evans paid no attention, but went on. "You interrupted me just now. After Marsh's test, Merrowdene heated a substance in a test tube, the metallic residue he dissolved in water and then precipitated it by adding silver nitrate. That was a test for chlorates. A neat, unassuming little test. But I chanced to read these words in a book that stood open on the table. *H₂SO₄ decomposes chlorates with evolution of CL₂₀₄. If heated, violent explosions occur; the mixture ought therefore to be kept cool and only very small quantities used.*"

Haydock stared at his friend. "Well, what about it?"

"Just this. In my profession we've got tests, too—tests for murder. There's adding up the facts—weighing them, dissecting the residue when you've allowed for prejudice and the general inaccuracy of witnesses. But there's another test for murder—one that is fairly accurate, but rather—dangerous! *A murderer is seldom content with one crime.* Give him time and a lack of suspicion and he'll commit another. You catch a man—has he murdered his wife or hasn't he?—perhaps the case isn't very black against him. Look into his past—if you find that he's had several wives—and that they've all died, shall we say—rather curiously?—then you *know*! I'm not speaking legally, you understand. I'm speaking of moral certainty. Once you *know*, you can go ahead looking for evidence."

"Well?"

"I'm coming to the point. That's all right if there is a past to look into. But suppose you catch your murderer at his or her first crime? Then that test will be one from which you get no reaction. But the prisoner acquitted—starting life under another name. Will or will not the murderer repeat the crime?"

"That's a horrible idea."

"Do you still say it's none of our business?"

"Yes, I do. You've no reason to think that Mrs. Merrowdene is anything but a perfectly innocent woman."

The ex-Inspector was silent for a moment. Then he said slowly, "I told you that we looked into her past and found nothing. That's not quite true. There was a stepfather. As a girl of eighteen she had a fancy for some young man—and her stepfather exerted his authority to keep them apart. She and her stepfather went for a walk along a rather dangerous part of the cliff. There was an accident—the stepfather went too near the edge—it gave way and he went over and was killed."

"You don't think—"

"It was an accident. *Accident!* Anthony's overdose of arsenic was an accident. She'd never have been tried if it hadn't turned up that there was another man—he sheered off, by the way. Looked as though he weren't satisfied even if the jury were. I tell you, Haydock, where that woman is concerned I'm afraid of another—*accident!*"

The old captain shrugged his shoulders. "Well, I don't know how you're going to guard against that."

"Neither do I," said Evans ruefully.

"I should leave well enough alone," said Captain Haydock. "No good ever came of butting into other people's affairs."

But that advice was not palatable to the ex-Inspector. He was a man of patience but determination. Taking leave of his friend, he sauntered down to the village, revolving in his mind the possibilities of some kind of successful action.

Turning into the post office to buy some stamps, he ran into the object of his solicitude, George Merrowdene. The ex-chemistry professor was a small, dreamy-looking man, gentle and kindly in manner, and usually completely absent-minded. He recognized the other and greeted him amicably, stooping to recover the letters that the impact had caused him to drop on the ground. Evans stooped also and, more rapid in his movements than the other, secured them first, handing them back to their owner with an apology.

He glanced down at them in doing so, and the address

on the topmost suddenly awakened all his suspicions anew. It bore the name of a well-known insurance firm.

Instantly his mind was made up. The guileless George Merrowdene hardly realized how it came about that he and the ex-Inspector were strolling down the village together, and still less could he have said how it came about that the conversation should come round to the subject of life insurance.

Evans had no difficulty in attaining his object. Merrowdene of his own accord volunteered the information that he had just insured his life for his wife's benefit, and asked Evans's opinion of the company in question.

"I made some rather unwise investments," he explained. "As a result, my income has diminished. If anything were to happen to me, my wife would be left very badly off. This insurance will put things right."

"She didn't object to the idea?" inquired Evans casually. "Some ladies do, you know. Feel it's unlucky—that sort of thing."

"Oh! Margaret is very practical," said Merrowdene, smiling. "Not at all superstitious. In fact, I believe it was her idea originally. She didn't like my being so worried."

Evans had got the information he wanted. He left the other shortly afterward, and his lips were set in a grim line. The late Mr. Anthony had insured his life in his wife's favor a few weeks before *his* death.

Accustomed to rely on his instincts, he was perfectly sure in his own mind. But how to act was another matter. He wanted, not to arrest a criminal red-handed, but to prevent a crime being committed and that was a very different and a very much more difficult thing.

All day he was very thoughtful. There was a Primrose League Fête that afternoon held in the grounds of the local squire, and he went to it, indulging in the penny dip, guessing the weight of a pig, and shying at coconuts all with the same look of abstracted concentration on his face. He even indulged in half a crown's worth of Zara the Crystal Gazer, smiling a little to himself as he did so, remembering his own activities against fortune tellers in his official days.

He did not pay very much heed to her singsong, droning voice till the end of a sentence held his attention.

"—and you will very shortly—very shortly indeed—be engaged on a matter of life or death—life or death to one person."

"Eh—what's that?" he asked abruptly.

"A decision—you have a decision to make. You must be very careful—very, very careful. If you were to make a mistake—the smallest mistake—"

"Yes?"

The fortune teller shivered. Inspector Evans knew it was all nonsense, but he was nevertheless impressed.

"I warn you—you *must not make a mistake*. If you do, I see the result clearly, a death—"

Odd, damned odd! A death. Fancy her lighting upon that!

"If I make a mistake a death will result? Is that it?"

"Yes."

"In that case," said Evans, rising to his feet and handing over half a crown, "I mustn't make a mistake, eh?"

He spoke lightly enough, but, as he went out of the tent, his jaw set determinedly. Easy to say—not so easy to be sure of doing. He mustn't make a slip. A life, a valuable human life, depended on it.

And there was no one to help him. He looked across at the figure of his friend Haydock in the distance. No help there. *Leave things alone*, was Haydock's motto. And that wouldn't do here.

Haydock was talking to a woman. She moved away from him and came toward Evans, and the Inspector recognized her. It was Mrs. Merrowdene. On an impulse he put himself deliberately in her path.

Mrs. Merrowdene was rather a fine-looking woman. She had a broad serene brow, very beautiful brown eyes, and a placid expression. She had the look of an Italian Madonna which she heightened by parting her hair in the middle and looping it over her ears. She had a deep, rather sleepy voice.

She smiled up at Evans, a contented, welcoming smile.

"I thought it was you, Mrs. Anthony—I mean Mrs. Merrowdene," he said glibly.

He made the slip deliberately, watching her without seeming to do so. He saw her eyes widen, heard the quick intake of her breath. But her eyes did not falter. She gazed at him steadily and proudly.

"I was looking for my husband," she said quietly. "Have you seen him anywhere about?"

"He was over in that direction when I last saw him."

They went side by side in the direction indicated, chatting quietly and pleasantly. The Inspector felt his admiration mounting. What a woman! What self-command. What wonderful poise. A remarkable woman—and a very dangerous one. He felt sure—a very dangerous one.

He still felt very uneasy, though he was satisfied with his initial step. He had let her know that he recognized her. That would put her on her guard. She would not dare attempt anything rash. There was the question of Merrowdene. If he could be warned—

They found the little man absently contemplating a china doll which had fallen to his share in the penny dip. His wife suggested home and he agreed eagerly. Mrs. Merrowdene turned to the Inspector.

"Won't you come back with us and have a quiet cup of tea, Mr. Evans?"

Was there a faint note of challenge in her voice? He thought there was.

"Thank you, Mrs. Merrowdene. I should like to very much."

They walked there, talking together of pleasant ordinary things. The sun shone, a breeze blew gently, everything around them was pleasant and ordinary.

Their maid was out at the Fête, Mrs. Merrowdene explained, when they arrived at the charming old-world cottage. She went into her room to remove her hat, returning to set out tea and boil the kettle on a little silver lamp. From a shelf near the fireplace she took three small bowls and saucers.

"We have some very special Chinese tea," she explained.

"And we always drink it in the Chinese manner—out of bowls, not cups."

She broke off, peered into a cup, and exchanged it for another, with an exclamation of annoyance.

"George—it's too bad of you. You've been taking these bowls again."

"I'm sorry, dear," said the professor apologetically. "They're such a convenient size. The ones I ordered haven't come."

"One of these days you'll poison us all," said his wife with a half laugh. "Mary finds them in the laboratory and brings them back here and never troubles to wash them out unless they've something very noticeable in them. Why, you were using one of them for potassium cyanide the other day. Really, George, it's frightfully dangerous."

Merrowdene looked a little irritated. "Mary's no business to remove things from the laboratory. She's not to touch anything there."

"But we often leave our teacups there after tea. How is she to know? Be reasonable, dear."

The professor went into his laboratory, murmuring to himself, and with a smile Mrs. Merrowdene poured boiling water on the tea and blew out the flame of the little silver lamp.

Evans was puzzled. Yet a glimmering of light penetrated to him. For some reason or other, Mrs. Merrowdene was showing her hand. Was this to be the "accident"? Was she speaking of all this so as deliberately to prepare her *alibi* beforehand? So that when, one day, the "accident" happened, he would be forced to give evidence in her favor? Stupid of her, if so, because before that—

Suddenly he drew in his breath. She had poured the tea into the three bowls. One she set before him, one before herself, the other she placed on a little table by the fire near the chair her husband usually sat in, and it was as she placed this last one on the table that a little strange smile curved round her lips. It was the smile that did it.

He *knew!*

A remarkable woman—a dangerous woman. No waiting

—no preparation. This afternoon—this very afternoon—with him here as witness. The boldness of it took his breath away.

It was clever—it was damnably clever. He would be able to prove nothing. She counted on his not suspecting—simply because it was “so soon.” A woman of lightning rapidity of thought and action.

He drew a deep breath and leaned forward. “Mrs. Merrowdene, I’m a man of queer whims. Will you be very kind and indulge me in one of them?”

She looked inquiring but unsuspicious.

He rose, took the bowl from in front of her and crossed to the little table where he substituted it for the other. This other he brought back and placed in front of her.

“I want to see you drink this.”

Her eyes met his. They were steady, unfathomable. The color slowly drained from her face.

She stretched out her hand, raised the cup. He held his breath.

Supposing all along he had made a mistake—

She raised it to her lips—at the last moment, with a shudder she leaned forward and quickly poured it into a pot containing a fern. Then she sat back and gazed at him defiantly.

He drew a long sigh of relief, and sat down again.

“Well?” she said. Her voice had altered. It was slightly mocking—defiant.

He answered her soberly and quietly. “You are a very clever woman, Mrs. Merrowdene. I think you understand me. There must be no—repetition. You know what I mean?”

“I know what you mean.”

Her voice was even, devoid of expression. He nodded his head, satisfied. She was a clever woman, and she didn’t want to be hanged.

“To your long life and to that of your husband,” he said significantly and raised his tea to his lips.

Then his face changed. It contorted horribly—he tried to rise—to cry out. His body stiffened—his face went pur-

ple. He fell back sprawling over the chair—his limbs convulsed.

Mrs. Merrowdene leaned forward, watching him. A little smile crossed her lips. She spoke to him—very softly and gently.

“You made a mistake, Mr. Evans. You thought I wanted to kill George. How stupid of you—how very stupid.”

She sat there a minute longer looking at the dead man, the third man who had threatened to cross her path and separate her from the man she loved. . . .

Her smiled broadened. She looked more than ever like a Madonna. Then she raised her voice and called.

“George—George—oh do come here! I’m afraid there’s been the most dreadful accident— Poor Mr. Evans—”

GRAHAM GREENE

A DAY SAVED

I HAD STUCK CLOSELY TO HIM, as people say like a shadow. But that's absurd. I'm no shadow. You can feel me, touch me, hear me, smell me. I'm Robinson. But I had sat at the next table, followed twenty yards behind down every street, when he went upstairs I waited at the bottom, and when he came down I passed out before him and paused at the first corner. In that way I was really like a shadow, for sometimes I was in front of him and sometimes I was behind him.

Who was he? I never knew his name. He was short and ordinary in appearance and he carried an umbrella; his hat was a bowler; and he wore brown gloves. But this was his importance to me: he carried something I dearly, despairingly, wanted. It was beneath his clothes, perhaps in a pouch, a purse, perhaps dangling next his skin. Who knows how cunning the most ordinary man can be? Surgeons can make clever insertions. He may have carried it even closer to his heart than the outer skin.

What was it? I never knew. I can only guess, as I might guess at his name, calling him Jones or Douglas, Wales, Canby, Fotheringay. Once in a restaurant I said "Fotheringay" softly to my soup and I thought he looked up and round about him. I don't know. This is the horror I cannot escape: knowing nothing, his name, what it was he carried, why I wanted it so, why I followed him.

Presently we came to a railway bridge and underneath it he met a friend. I am using words again very inexactly. Bear with me. I try to be exact. I pray to be exact. All I want in the world is to know. So when I say he met a friend, I do not know that it was a friend, I know only that it was someone he greeted with apparent affection. The friend said to him, "When do you leave?" He said, "At two from Dover." You may be sure I felt my pocket to make sure the ticket was there.

Then his friend said, "If you fly you will save a day."

He nodded, he agreed, he would sacrifice his ticket, he would save a day.

I ask you, what does a day saved matter to him or to you? A day saved from what? for what? Instead of spending the day travelling, you will see your friend a day earlier, but you cannot stay indefinitely, you will travel home twenty-four hours sooner, that is all. But you will fly home and again save a day? Save it from what, for what? You will begin work a day earlier, but you cannot work on indefinitely. It only means that you will cease work a day earlier. And then what? You cannot die a day earlier. So you will realize perhaps how rash it was of you to save a day, when you discover how you cannot escape those twenty-four hours you have so carefully preserved; you may push them forward and push them forward, but sometime they must be spent, and then you may wish you had spent them as innocently as in the train from Ostend.

But this thought never occurred to him. He said, "Yes, that's true. It would save a day. I'll fly." I nearly spoke to him then. The selfishness of the man. For that day which he thought he was saving might be his despair years later, but it was my despair at the instant. For I had been looking forward to the long train journey in the same compartment. It was winter, and the train would be nearly empty, and with the least luck we should be alone together. I had planned everything. I was going to talk to him. Because I knew nothing about him, I should begin in the usual way by asking whether he minded the window being raised a little or a little lowered. That would show him that we spoke the same language and he would probably be only too ready to talk, feeling himself in a foreign country; he would be grateful for any help I might be able to give him, translating this or that word.

Of course I never believed that talk would be enough. I should learn a great deal about him, but I believed that I should have to kill him before I knew all. I should have killed him, I think, at night, between the two stations which are the farthest parted, after the customs had examined our luggage and our passports had been stamped at the frontier, and we had pulled down the blinds and

turned out the light. I had even planned what to do with his body, with the bowler hat and the umbrella and the brown gloves, but only if it became necessary, only if in no other way he would yield what I wanted. I am a gentle creature, not easily roused.

But now he had chosen to go by aeroplane and there was nothing that I could do. I followed him, of course, sat in the seat behind, watched his tremulousness at his first flight, how he avoided for a long while the sight of the sea below, how he kept his bowler hat upon his knees, how he gasped a little when the grey wing tilted up like the arm of a windmill to the sky and the houses were set on edge. There were times, I believe, when he regretted having saved a day.

We got out of the aeroplane together and he had a small trouble with the customs. I translated for him. He looked at me curiously and said, "Thank you"; he was—again I suggest that I know when all I mean is I assume by his manner and his conversation—stupid and good-natured, but I believe for a moment he suspected me, thought he had seen me somewhere, in a tube, in a bus, in a public bath, below the railway bridge, on how many stairways. I asked him the time. He said, "We put our clocks back an hour here," and beamed with an absurd pleasure because he had saved an hour as well as a day.

I had a drink with him, several drinks with him. He was absurdly grateful for my help. I had beer with him at one place, gin at another, and at a third he insisted on my sharing a bottle of wine. We became for the time being friends. I felt more warmly towards him than towards any other man I have known, for, like love between a man and a woman, my affection was partly curiosity. I told him that I was Robinson; he meant to give me a card, but while he was looking for one he drank another glass of wine and forgot about it. We were both a little drunk. Presently I began to call him Fotheringay. He never contradicted me and it may have been his name, but I seem to remember also calling him Douglas, Wales and Canby without correction. He was very generous and I found it easy to talk with him; the stupid are often

companionable. I told him that I was desperate and he offered me money. He could not understand what I wanted.

I said, "You've saved a day. You can afford to come with me tonight to a place I know."

He said, "I have to take a train tonight." He told me the name of the town and he was not surprised when I told him that I was coming too.

We drank together all that evening and went to the station together. I was planning, if it became necessary, to kill him. I thought in all friendliness that perhaps after all I might save him from having saved a day. But it was a small local train; it crept from station to station, and at every station people got out of the train and other people got into the train. He insisted on travelling third class and the carriage was never empty. He could not speak a word of the language and he simply curled up in his corner and slept; it was I who remained awake and had to listen to the weary painful gossip, a servant speaking of her mistress, a peasant woman of the day's market, a soldier of the Church, and a man who, I believe, was a tailor of adultery, wireworms and the harvest of three years ago.

It was two o'clock in the morning when we reached the end of our journey. I walked with him to the house where his friends lived. It was quite close to the station and I had no time to plan or carry out any plan. The garden gate was open and he asked me in. I said no, I would go to the hotel. He said his friends would be pleased to put me up for the remainder of the night, but I said no. The lights were on in a downstairs room and the curtains were not drawn. A man was asleep in a chair by a great stove and there were glasses on a tray, a decanter of whisky, two bottles of beer and a long thin bottle of Rhine wine. I stepped back and he went in and almost immediately the room was full of people. I could see his welcome in their eyes and in their gestures. There was a woman in a dressing-gown and a girl who sat with thin knees drawn up to her chin and three men, two of them old. They did not draw the curtains, though he must surely

have guessed that I was watching them. The garden was cold; the winter beds were furred with weeds. I laid my hand on some prickly bush. It was as if they gave a deliberate display of their unity and companionship. My friend—I call him my friend, but he was really no more than an acquaintance and was my friend only for so long as we both were drunk—sat in the middle of them all and I could tell from the way his lips were moving that he was telling them many things which he had never told me. Once I thought I could detect from his lip movements, "I have saved a day." He looked stupid and good-natured and happy. I could not bear the sight for long. It was an impertinence to display himself like that to me. I have never ceased to pray from that moment that the day he saved may be retarded and retarded until eventually he suffers its eighty-six thousand four hundred seconds when he has the most desperate need, when he is following another as I followed him, closely as people say like a shadow, so that he has to stop, as I have had to stop, to reassure himself: You can smell me, you can touch me, you can hear me, I am not a shadow: I am Fotheringay, Wales, Canby, I am Robinson.

1935

ROBERT LEWIS

ROMAN HOLIDAY

THE AMERICAN SAID, "You wanted to see me, Maestro?" Maestro Arista, seated behind his desk, lifted his head.

There was no expression on his long, ugly, leathery face. "Yes," he said at length. "Sit down."

The two regarded each other. "How do you feel?" the Maestro asked.

"All right," the American said.

"You're early," the Maestro said.

"I thought perhaps you might want to see me."

Maestro Arista, fencing-master, sighed and looked around his office. It was a large room, with a high ceiling. Photographs of various champion swordsmen, in positions of attack or defense, covered the painted brick walls. There were several action shots, most of them blurred, which had evidently been taken many years before, during the infancy of photography. One of them showed the Maestro as a young man scoring a point against an opponent, who stood frozen in an awkward position of surprise, looking down at his chest, where the Maestro's saber was bent upward in a high arch. The bronze plate beneath the picture read, *Genoa, 1910. Professional Championships of Italy. Saber. Professor Alcide Arista. First Place.* On the opposite wall was an oil painting of a large man with heavy black mustaches ending in sharp points. Underneath was the inscription, *Professor Rodolpho Arista, 1852-1913. The Greatest of Them All.* This was the Maestro's father.

"Have you seen the paper?" the Maestro asked. The American nodded. Opening his drawer, Maestro Arista took out the *Corriere*, folded to the sports page. The date-line read, *Bologna, October 10, 1941.*

Pointing to the lead article with his gnarled forefinger, the Maestro read, "*American confident of victory in Bologna-Ferrara meet.*" He stopped, and put on a large pair of horn-rimmed glasses, which perched precariously half-

way down his nose. "Look at the picture," he said. To the right of the article was a photograph showing the American leaning back comfortably on a chair at a table of a sidewalk café, regarding the camera with an air of confidence. The Maestro pointed under the photograph and read again, "*Who's afraid of Ponti?* asks American."

"I know," said the American. "I saw it."

Pushing his spectacles higher on his nose, Maestro Arista leaned forward and read slowly, emphasizing his words with gestures of his paw:

"The Bologna-Ferrara fencing-meet, which will take place at 1700 today in the salle d'armes of Maestro Alcide Arista, former three-weapon national champion, has aroused considerable interest among sports fans, who are aware that the winning team will proceed to Rome to participate in the all-sectional championships, Category 2, for the Mussolini Cup. In preparation for this important contest, Maestro Donati of Ferrara has re-organized his foil team. This unexpected move places Tommaso Ponti, hitherto considered the most powerful foilsman of the province, with all due respect to Bologna's Del Vecchio, in the No. 3 position instead of his usual No. 1. Curious to discover the reason for this surprise demotion, our reporter yesterday interviewed Maestro Donati and Ponti at Ferrara, and learned that Ponti is being primed to meet Maestro Arista's new secret weapon, an unknown swordsman whom, it is rumored in the cafés, the Bolognese fencing-master has imported from America for his No. 3 spot, in a desperate effort to account for one additional point against the redoubtable Ferrara."

The American lit a cigarette. Maestro Arista said to him, "Up to here, of course, this is nonsense. You have been with us for months, and we have never made a secret of you. This talk of importing is too idiotic even for the cafés, where almost anything is possible. As if I would import a fencer from America! Would you come to Italy to find a baseball player? No, the reporter made that up. Who was he?"

"A man named Bianchi," said the American. "A heavy-set man, with a dark complexion and a little beard the

size of a postage stamp under his lip."

Arista shook his head. "I know the *Corriere*. There's no such reporter on their staff. They must have brought him in from outside."

"He was from Naples." At the Maestro's raised eyebrows, the American explained, "His accent."

Lowering his head again, the Maestro read on: "*In the realization that our fencing public would be interested to know more about this mysterious American swordsman, our reporter today made private investigations in Bologna and unearthed his whereabouts. Of course,*" the Maestro interpolated dryly, "he could come to me. *We found him at a café, where he had been drinking heavily.*"

"I had one vermouth," said the American, "and a cup of coffee."

"*In answer to our question, he asked, 'Ponti? Ponti? Who's Ponti?' We explained that Tommaso Ponti had been for years the undisputed champion of Ferrara and of the—Infantry Division, of which he is a reserve officer, and that it would be his good fortune to cross blades with Ponti during the meet today. The American, who refused to give his name, did not appear to be impressed by Ponti's formidable record; dismissing airily the possibility that Ponti might defeat him in the contest, he expressed curiosity as to why Ponti was not at—with his division. We hastened to beg him not to discuss military matters in public and expressed surprise that he should pretend to know the location of any of our troops, in view of the splendid solidarity of the Italian people behind the holy war against our perfidious northern neighbor and her even more perfidious ally, Great Britain. At this he smiled mysteriously and changed the subject. The only other statement we could elicit from him in regard to the meet today was that he intends to teach us Italians a few things about the sword, and that he is going to write his name, whatever it is, on Ponti's overinflated chest.*"

The Maestro drew back his lips over his teeth and said, "I know you did not say that."

"No," said the American.

"The last paragraph," said the Maestro. He read: "*This*

formidable swordsman from the other hemisphere is somewhat above middle height and slender. Although he appears to be wiry and quick, the effect of his dissolute life shows on his face, which might otherwise be called handsome. He is on the rash side of thirty. It is our impression that in every respect he compares unfavorably with Ponti, who towers over him physically and morally. We are sure that a large audience will be present at the contest today to witness the attempt of this bragging American to autograph and deflate the hitherto unbeatable Ponti."

The Maestro tossed the paper aside and deliberately removed his spectacles. He looked tired. For the first time the American noticed how many lines he had in his face.

"Listen to me, my son," Maestro Arista said. "I must ask you some questions, in order to protect myself. This is perhaps more serious than you think. How much of this report is true?"

The American said, "Yesterday a reporter who called himself Bianchi introduced himself to me while I was sitting at the café. He asked me if I was the American fencer on Maestro Arista's team. When I said yes, a photographer snapped a picture, without asking my permission. In answer to the reporter's questions, I said that I was Bologna's No. 3, that I expected to do my best today, and that I hoped to win. He did not ask my name, he did not mention Ponti, and there was no military discussion of any kind. The whole thing took three minutes and left me wondering why anyone had thought it worth while to interview me in the first place."

"I believe you," the Maestro said. He got up and began to pace slowly up and down. "I believe you," he repeated. He made a helpless gesture. "That only makes it worse, of course."

"Yes," the American said. "What's behind all this? Why did he make up that fantastic story?"

"That's not too hard to figure out. Italy is at war and America is selling war materiel to our enemies. Americans are not too popular here at the moment. Most of them have returned home. Your consulate refuses any further responsibility for you. There have been incidents. You

yourself last week—”

“I know,” said the American.

“Excuse me,” said the Maestro, stopping before the American’s chair and putting his hand to his chest in his characteristic gesture, “it’s none of my business, but why don’t you go home? They must have made it very uncomfortable for you. Why do you stay?”

The American thought, *Perhaps I can explain it to him. He would understand. Or would he? Do I understand why myself? How can I tell anybody that in the five years I have been here Italy has become a sort of second home for me, that I love everything but the politics, that I will not be pushed out until I am ready to go? Can I tell him that I want to be here when Mussolini is destroyed by the substratum he has never reached and that I want to be around to watch the real Italy come into its own again?*

At the American’s long silence, Maestro Arista said, “Forgive me. It doesn’t really matter. You doubtless have your reasons. I’m sure they are not political.”

“No, I can assure you they’re not.”

“Well, then.” The Maestro resumed his pacing. “You are a fencer. You practice in my *salle*. You take part in our tournaments. You become good. Because of your victories you deserve a place on our team, and professionally I am obligated to place you No. 3, regardless of politics. One day a black-shirted jackal from the mayor’s office comes to pay me a visit. He has come to talk to me about you. Oh, yes, they take that much interest in you. The authorities are concerned. Why does Maestro Arista place a foreigner on his team, when there are many Italian swordsmen for the place? Is Marino no longer with us? I answer that for twenty-eight years I have trained and selected the team without any outside interference, and my father did it before me. Let a Bolognese fencer defeat you before judges and I will give him your place.”

The American said, “Maestro, you will get into trouble over me. Why not replace Marino in No. 3? His record is excellent.”

“You beat Marino. You are the best man for the spot.”

“Maestro—”

"Listen to me. I am an old man. For years I have watched the encroachments of these Fascist animals. I say nothing, I am not concerned with politics, I teach the sword. But this is too much. I will not let them pick my team. What of my integrity? What of my honor?" The Maestro paced up and down, his hand at his chest. He burst out, "To hell with their politics! I am still a man. I rub myself of them."

"Your blood pressure," the American said.

"I spit on my blood pressure." But he walked to his desk and sat down. In a quieter voice he said, "I do not know these tricks. You will stay at No. 3. If Ponti defeats you after this lying report, you will be held up to public ridicule, which may make you leave Italy. I don't know. That's up to you. I'm doing what I have to do."

When the American walked into the locker room, most of the Bologna team were already there, putting on their fencing-suits. Marino and Del Vecchio were talking, sitting side by side on one of the benches. A sudden hush came over the room. The white-jacketed attendant Attilio bent over the épée held between his knees and examined the tape with great care.

"Listen to me, all of you," the American said at once. "I will not stand for this nonsense. That newspaper article was a tissue of lies from beginning to end. Anyone who does not believe me is calling me a liar."

The men looked at each other for a moment. Then Marino arose and said to the room at large, "Idiots! What did I tell you?" A murmur arose and several of the men came over sheepishly and patted the American on the back. Silvestri, the No. 2, said, "I never believed it." Someone else said, "But why—" The American shrugged, and the questioner, falling silent, walked back to his locker.

Marino said, "You had better get dressed."

The American opened his locker and took out his heavy linen uniform. It had been freshly laundered. He nodded gratefully to Attilio, who winked back.

Del Vecchio, who was already dressed, put his hand on the American's shoulder and said, "How do you feel?"

"Fine. And you, champion?" Everybody called Del Vecchio champion, because for years no one had been able to replace him in the coveted No. 1 position on the foil team.

"Don't let Ponti impress you," said Del Vecchio. "He can be beaten."

Grinning, Marino said, "Of course. Otherwise he would be champion of the world."

One of the other men called out, "The Ferrara team has arrived."

Achille Ubaldini, an enormous man with the head of an overindulgent Nero, crowned with sparse, curly brown hair, came in and said, "The Ferrara team is here." Ubaldini was a nationally ranking saberman, in spite of his weight. He was generally treated with great respect, because he had a bad temper and was reputed to have fought and won six duels. He was in addition a very able director and had been selected to act in that capacity for the meet.

"Will you not fence saber for us today?" called one of the men.

"Idiot," said Ubaldini indulgently. "You know I am in another category."

There was a bustle at the doorway, and Maestro Arista ushered in a group of men carrying long bags over their shoulders. The American picked out Ponti at once. He was wearing a light topcoat, but was hatless, his black hair slicked back smoothly over his head. He was as tall and broad as Ubaldini, without the fat.

"He is a panther," whispered Marino.

Ponti set his bag down on the floor and took possession of the room with his eyes. He said easily, "Greetings, Bologna." Several of the men answered, "Welcome, Ferrara."

The newcomers found empty lockers and began to take their coats off. Ponti nodded at Ubaldini. "Achille," he said. Ubaldini nodded. "Ah, Del Vecchio, the champion," said Ponti. Del Vecchio, who had never been able to beat Ponti, flushed and turned to his locker.

Ponti sat down, still wearing his coat, and said, "We meet again." He looked around the room, smiling. His glance rested for a moment on the American, then flickered past him to Marino, who waved his hand airily. "A

terrible thing has happened, my friends," said Ponti. "I who have been No. 1 for years have been beaten. I have been demoted. I am now No. 3." He was smiling. Several of the men looked at the American with curiosity.

"That is too bad," said Marino maliciously. "I am desolate to hear it, for I too have been beaten and so will not have the pleasure of meeting you today."

"Ah?" said Ponti, raising his eyebrows. "And who—"

"You would never guess. Our Maestro has imported a killer from America, a gangster who has never been beaten. His record—"

Ubalдини said, "Be quiet, fool."

The American rose and said, "I am No. 3."

Ponti got to his feet and came forward. They stood about two feet apart looking at each other. Ponti was almost a head taller. He seemed to dwarf the American. The other men fell silent, watching them.

"An American," said Ponti, at length. His smile was unpleasant. "And do Americans fence as well as fight with their fists?"

"A few of us."

"I thought Americans fought only with their fists."

"You are mistaken, I am afraid."

Ubalдини said sourly, "Did you come here to talk, Ferrara?"

Ponti said, "I shall look forward to meeting you."

"You are very kind," the American said politely. At the same time, he thought, *He must not have seen the article.*

Maestro Arista came in, talking to Donati, the fencing master from Ferrara. The two stood just inside the doorway, talking and looking at the men in the room. Arista's face was calm, while Donati, a short stocky man with a military bearing, was defiant and sullen. In a little while they walked out into the fencing-room, where the buzz of the audience began to make itself heard.

The fencing-room was an enormous oblong. The building had been an armory, which Arista's father had bought from the government and converted to his use. The locker room, the Maestro's office and living-quarters had housed military offices, while the fencing-room itself had been the

battalion's indoor parade ground. It was at least 80 feet wide, and almost twice that in length. The first Maestro Arista had laid down a dozen cork fencing-strips across the width, side by side; these were used for practice, while the main strip, twice as wide as the others, ran for the regulation 40 feet lengthwise down the center of the room, cutting across the others. This was the strip used for tournaments and team meets. Parallel with the main strip and facing it were the bleachers, now full of spectators. The first row had been reserved for the military; and was somber with black shirts, livened only by bright campaign ribbons.

Across the fencing-room, facing the bleachers, were two benches set against the wall. These were for the two teams. They were some 30 feet apart, and between them, also against the wall, were four armchairs, reserved for any of the Fascist great who might attend.

The American and Marino came out facing the audience. A murmur arose, followed by silence as heads turned toward them. Looking straight ahead the American said softly, "I am poison for you. You had better find a seat."

"Not with those pigs," said Marino. "I sit on the bench." He walked to the Bologna bench, the nearer of the two, and sat down. The American set down his bag and kneeled to open it.

A shout echoed through the building, and a roar burst from the crowd. Looking up, startled, the American saw that the entire crowd was on its feet, arm extended in the Fascist salute, craning toward the entrance. Someone cried, "*Il podestà!*" The mayor, wearing the black uniform with decorations, walked across the center of the room, acknowledging the acclamation with waves of his hand. At his side walked a little man in a brown overcoat. His lower lip was protruded in an expression of distaste. When they reached the chairs between the two benches he sat down first, without ceremony, while the mayor stood long enough to wave at the crowd again. *A German*, thought the American.

Del Vecchio came over. "Warm-up?" he asked. The American assented with a feeling of relief. He was about

to pick up his mask when a heavy hand fell on his shoulder and spun him around. He found himself staring into Ponti's black eyes.

"So!" cried Ponti, brandishing a newspaper in his hand. "So! You are going to write your name on my chest!"

"Keep your hands off me. I never said that."

"On my overinflated chest," Ponti repeated in rage. "You bragging fool! Who do you think you're dealing with? Do you think I'm going to swallow that?"

Knowing it was useless, the American still said, "Listen to me. I will say it only once more. I did not make the statements attributed to me in the newspaper article."

Ponti, thrusting his sleek head forward insultingly, said, "And I say that you did. You were foolish enough to say it then, and you're cowardly enough to try to back out of it now."

So that's the way it is, the American thought. *This gambit has only one ending*. Many things were clear to him at that moment. He caught a glimpse of Maestro Arista hurrying toward them. Almost regretfully, but unable to help himself, he said, "The whole thing was a deliberate lie, and you know it."

Ponti's slap across the face was too fast for him and sent him sprawling back against the bench, into the laps of his teammates. A roar arose from the crowd. Some of the Ferrara team came running up and seized Ponti, while the American struggled to tear away from Marino and Del Vecchio. The water in his eyes from the slap blinded him, but he continued to struggle until they lifted him up bodily and carried him into the Maestro's office. There he became calm enough to wash his face with cold water. When he turned around, Ponti was seated quietly beside Donati. Maestro Arista, Marino, and Del Vecchio stood near by, ready to prevent further violence. The American said sarcastically, "What happened to your anger, Ponti?" Ponti sneered and said something to his fencing-master, who rose and took Arista's arm.

"Come into the inner room," said Marino. The American let himself be led into the Maestro's darkened private room behind his office, where he lay down on the couch.

After a while Marino said, "They are talking in there. I'd better go see what's up."

"No," said the American. "You'd better wait here. Do you think he went through that play-acting for a laugh?"

Marino said, "I wondered if you knew."

They fell silent. The American thought, *If only I had got one in before they grabbed me.* He felt curiously calm, even a little weary. He closed his eyes and dozed a little.

Maestro Arista entered and jerked his head at Marino, who got up and walked out. "*Americano*," said Arista. The American did not move. "*Americano*," Arista repeated. The American awoke and said, "Yes, Maestro."

"I have something to tell you. Ponti considers himself insulted. I pointed out on your behalf that it was he who struck the blow, but he says that you called him a liar. He wants satisfaction."

The American raised himself up on one elbow. He said incredulously, "But this is a joke!"

Maestro Arista regarded him steadily in the half-light. "No, son," he answered. "This is not a joke. This was very carefully planned in the mayor's office. Do you think the mayor and his German boss came here today because they are interested in sports?"

The American sank back and stared at the ceiling. "What do they want?" he asked finally.

"Ponti gives you two alternatives and a choice. Either to apologize to him before the audience over the loud-speaker, admitting first that you made the statements in the newspaper and then retracting them, or—"

"Or?" prompted the American.

"Or to fight a duel, here and now."

"And the choice?"

"The weapon."

The American laughed. The Maestro put his hand on his shoulder. "That is my message," he said with something like pain in his voice. "I told Ponti not to be a fool, that I would not permit my fencing-room to be used for such an illegal encounter, but they had thought of that too. The mayor came in, pretended to listen to both sides of the case, and decided that Ponti was in the right. He

told me that he would take the responsibility before the law and ordered me to bear Ponti's message to you." Maestro Arista paused for a moment. When he resumed, his voice was choked with bitterness. "He would not dare do so unless he had advance authority from Rome, even from Berlin. This is a sign. Those criminals are prepared for anything, even war with America. You are to be a sacrifice, an additional provocation, and that little German hyena out there has come to enjoy your death. But you can fool them yet. The two alternatives are not absolute. There is a third. You can get dressed and walk out. I do not think they will stop you."

The American turned his head to Arista. "And what would happen to you?" he asked. The Maestro made a gesture with his hand. "Thank you, but no," said the American, sitting up and putting his feet on the floor.

The Maestro clutched his arm. "Then you'll apologize?"

"No," said the American. "I won't do that either. They know I can't, and so do you. Gently, Maestro, you are stronger than you think."

Maestro Arista released his arm. He said, almost wistfully, "If they would let me I would take your place. For all my years I could still—" He broke off and awkwardly stroked the American's hair in a curious paternal gesture. He said, "At least I can make sure that you get fair play. I will make them let Ubaldini direct. With your permission I will be your second."

"Thank you," the American said gratefully.

"He is too strong for you with the saber. He would force through your parries. Shall say épée?"

"As you wish, Maestro."

Arista walked into the other room.

The parley in the Maestro's office seemed interminable to the American, but when they called him out he saw by his watch that only ten minutes had elapsed. Ponti and Donati were seated side by side on a bench, while Maestro Arista sat behind his desk, his hand at his chest. Ubaldini, in the center of the room, said, "Here are the conditions. The weapon will be épée, with the button removed, and

sharpened. The bout will be fought on the center strip in full view of the audience, which witnessed the provocation and should witness the satisfaction.

"The duelists will fight without masks, stripped to the waist. The bout will end at first blood, if more than a scratch; in such a case, the decision to continue will rest with me. If at the end of fifteen minutes of combat neither man has been injured, there will be a five-minute rest, after which the bout will continue for another period of fifteen minutes.

"A man who retreats off the end of the strip three times will be considered as having lost that period. If both periods are lost in the same way, it will be construed as a full apology by the loser, plus the implication of cowardice. At the end of the second period the bout will be over, unless terminated otherwise, and the men will shake hands." Ubaldini looked at Donati. "Have I spoken your mind, Maestro?"

"Precisely," said Donati.

"And yours, Maestro?" Ubaldini said to Arista.

Arista grunted, "My mind is unspeakable."

"Now I speak my mind," Ubaldini said decisively. "I have fought six duels and am here to brag about them. If either of you fights in a way that is not in accordance with accepted fencing-room practice, he will have to answer to me. As God is my witness, I will make him number seven. This is a civilized country."

Between set teeth Ponti said, "You smile, *Americano?* You do not think we are civilized?"

"I am not answerable to you for my thoughts," said the American, still smiling. At the same time he thought, *Good. I must make him angry.*

Ponti shouted, "I will make you smile in another way on the strip!"

"Very well. Save it until then."

"Enough!" cried Ubaldini angrily.

Donati put his hand on Ponti's arm and said to Ubaldini, "Tell them about the team."

"Yes," said Ubaldini. "The team meet will proceed as scheduled. No. 1 will meet No. 1. No. 2 will meet No. 2.

The duel will constitute the third match, and a victory will count toward the team score."

The American burst out laughing. It seemed especially rich to him that his life should be narrowed down to the circumference of a zero on a scoresheet. He was still laughing when Ubaldini asked if there were any questions. He shook his head. Ponti snarled.

The crowd had been growing restless. When Ubaldini appeared and walked to the microphone, they let out a shout, which doubled in intensity when the American and Ponti came out and walked to their respective benches. Ubaldini held up his hand. "The meet will proceed," he announced.

Del Vecchio, foil in hand, stopped by the American in curiosity. "What's up?" he asked. The American shook his head, and said, "Go in there and win."

Donati had sent in his No. 2 man in place of Ponti, a slender, left-handed redhead. Both started cautiously, Del Vecchio taking small steps forward with light taps on the blade. The redhead gave ground, trying to deceive the beats. *He will stop-thrust from the outside*, the American thought. *If he relies on that with Del Vecchio, he will lose*. Del Vecchio became aggressive, and the redhead broke time with a sudden extension in sixte. The champion swept his blade down with a cross to the low line and scored easily. The judge called it, and Ubaldini, directing, announced one touch for Bologna.

The redhead tried to break time again, but Del Vecchio's attack was given the preference. Marino said to the American, "He will change his game now." The American nodded. Now the redhead took up the attack. He was fast, and his lunge was long and forceful. Del Vecchio parried twice, without scoring on the riposte; on the third, the redhead made a 1-2-3 and arrived just above the hip. Del Vecchio nodded and went to the center of the strip. The score was two to one for Del Vecchio.

"Bravo!" shouted Marino, and pounded the American on the back. The redhead had tried the same thing, and Del Vecchio, with an ease that was almost contemptuous, had straightened his arm and arrived to the neck on the

march. "He is shaken now," said Marino gleefully. "It is over."

Del Vecchio made the final two points by patiently tracking the baffled redhead to the end of the strip, provoking a desperate stop-thrust by a false attack, and then going in with opposition. The score was five to one, and one bout was chalked up for Bologna.

The team welcomed Del Vecchio to the bench with slaps on the back. Maestro Arista arose from where he had been sitting at the other end of the bench, and nodded to the American. They walked into the Maestro's office, followed by Ponti and Donati, as Ubaldini announced the next bout. The crowd, seeing the men leaving the room and sensing that something was up, interrupted the announcement with cries and catcalls. Someone cried, "Come back!" Ubaldini tried several times to make himself heard, and began to get angry. Suddenly a hush fell on the room; at a word from the little man at his side, the mayor had risen and raised his hand. The black shirts in the front row stopped smiling and turned in indignation to the crowd behind them.

In the Maestro's office, Ponti and the American hurriedly pulled off their fencing-jackets. The second bout had started. The click of the blades and the scuff of soft shoes on cork were audible through the door, which had been left partially open. Maestro Arista called the two men to his desk, where four épées lay side by side. They were the regulation épées, with large round aluminum bells and grooved blades; two of them had the Italian crossbar at the handle, while the other two had aluminum pistol-grips. All the *pointes d'arrêt* had been removed, and the tips filed smoothly into sharp points.

"First choice to Ferrara," said Arista. In explanation he said to the American, "You selected the weapon."

Ponti picked up both Italian swords, whipped each of them experimentally in turn, and set one down immediately. The American picked up one of the pistol-grips and hefted it. The point seemed to him to pull a trifle to the right. The other was better, and he nodded.

At the door Maestro Donati said, "Ferrara's No. 2 is leading, 4-2."

Maestro Arista lit a candle and propped it firmly on his desk. As they watched he held each point in the flame for a few moments. Ponti, smiling sardonically, said, "It will not be from infection that he will die."

Donati said, "Ferrara, 5-3." He opened the door a little wider. They saw Ubaldini at the microphone, holding up his hand for silence. His face was serious. The room became quiet. Ubaldini talked for fully five minutes. He explained the incident between Ponti and the American, the debate between the seconds, the decision to have the duel, and the various conditions by which the participants had agreed to abide. He warned that there would be no demonstration from the audience that might interfere with the contest. As if in support of his statement, a detachment of armed *carabinieri* filed into the entrance and stood against the wall. The audience followed his statement with attention. When he had finished the announcement the silence remained.

At the command, the crowd, Ubaldini's stern face, the little man in the brown overcoat, the newly arrived *carabinieri* at the entrance, the Maestro's hand at his chest, Marino's clenched fists, all faded into an indistinguishable background. The world narrowed down to an expanse of cork strip, and a lithe catlike figure extending a murderous point at him. All his being rushed to a point immediately behind his eyes. His thoughts became actions.

He is stronger, he is quicker, he is more experienced. I must be smarter.

Ponti's broad chest had become a narrow line. His arm was almost fully extended. All the American could see of it behind the protecting bell was the round muscle curving up from his biceps to the shoulder. His point hung motionless and black with candle smoke between them, at waist level. *He is out to kill me. This is incredible.*

An electric charge rushed up his arm and wrenched at his shoulder. Ponti had made a slight movement of his fingers and met his blade. *He is strong, he has the strongest hand I ever crossed. I must not give him my blade.*

He had no plan, he was trying to find one. He retreated slowly, tense and watchful. Suddenly, as though a door had been opened, a roar penetrated to his ears and Ubaldini beat up their blades with a cane. The American had retreated off the end of the strip. Ubaldini said, "That's once. Do you understand?" The American nodded. He thought, *He is eager. He is showing off. Can I use that?*

In the center they fell on guard again at a safe distance. He thought, *I must find out what he wants. Does he want to kill me or will he be satisfied with—* Ponti's blade slithered down the inside of his, and snapped to the outside in a feint to the forearm. In automatic reaction the American followed the blade in a half-circle down and out, exposing the upper surface of his forearm for a fraction of a second. Ponti beat his blade contemptuously and stepped back. *He could have come in, the American thought. What does he want? I must risk it again, but not so obviously. Perhaps I—* He stepped forward, tightening his fingers on the grip to give a beat in septime. Ponti deceived over the blade, threatening the wrist, and the American, reversing his direction smoothly, attempted to envelop his blade with counter-septime. Ponti's blade deceived again. This time the American stepped back. *That's twice he could have—I never even met his blade. He has brains in his fingers.*

He is not playing with me or he would have made the opportunities more obvious to the audience he will not be satisfied with the arm he wants the body he could have hit the arm he wants to kill me I will be satisfied with his arm. But his only conscious thought was, I have the distance.

He had a plan now. He could not have expressed it in words. His consciousness, crowded to that point behind his eyes, transmitted it to his body in terms of reactions. He was not even aware of his body.

Come on, you. You are not eager enough yet. Let me refuse your arm.

Ponti came in fast as though he meant to follow through, but checked himself just out of reach. The American's blade was extended rigidly at his chest. The two

froze still for a moment, then Ponti stepped back. The crowd thought the American had expected to hit and shouted in glee at his discomfiture. *It convinced them, he thought. What about Ponti? Can he believe that I am stupid enough to stop-thrust to the body against a direct attack? I must make him believe it.*

Not too close. Not too close. Get eager enough to come in from out of distance. Try it again. Believe it. But keep that margin of distance.

Ponti's naked torso was glistening under the powerful overhead lights. *He is sweating. I suppose I am too. But he is not tired. Let me show you again.*

Ponti came in again, his hand not quite so high. *I can see the upper surface of his forearm. Oh, no. I won't bite for that.* The American pulled his arm back as Ponti's point slid under his bell, parried it, and made an ineffectual riposte toward the body. It was two feet short. *Another half-inch and I could have stopped to the arm. But that half-inch. He's testing me. Do you believe it now?*

Yes.

I will stake everything on the distance. There is no other way. But not this period. You are not eager enough yet.

Ponti's magnificent body crouched still lower. His nostrils flared like a stallion's. *That's it. Come on, you.* Taking tiny steps to match those of his adversary, the American went back. The margin was always there but it grew narrower. *That's too close.* Deliberately, the American stepped off the end of the strip, and Ubaldini came between them. Ponti looked at the crowd and shrugged. A shout of laughter; someone cried, "Coward!"

They are enjoying it. All we need now is lions. So much the better. Egg him on. It all helps.

Ubaldini, frowning, said to him, "That's twice."

This time Ponti opened with more confidence. *Perhaps I have misjudged,* the American thought. A momentary doubt rose in him. The violence of the attack startled him, set him back on his heels, almost made him release the precious stop that could be used only once. But Ponti's crowding gave him no time to pivot, and some vestige of

control let the American hold it back. He weathered the storm, which left him shaken. *One more like that and I—* He backed away, puzzled. But Ponti's increased eagerness reassured him, convinced him his plan was right. If only Ponti would risk everything on one long attack to the body! *What's holding him back? He comes in too close. He wants no risk at all. I won't let you do it. Very well, then.* For the third time the American stepped off the end of the strip, and Ubaldini stopped Ponti's gliding advance with his cane, and said shortly, "That's all. Five minutes' rest." In fury Ponti cried, "Stay on the strip, *vigliaccol!*"

Ignoring him, the American looked at Ubaldini's set face. *He doesn't see it. Good. Perhaps Ponti won't either.*

They tossed a towel to the American as he walked to the bench. He draped it around his neck, letting his breath out with a rush and relaxing his taut stomach muscles. Marino and Del Vecchio were regarding the floor between their legs. They were ashamed. Only Maestro Arista regarded him steadily. Mopping his face, the American said, "Will it work, Maestro?"

You should have done it there at the end," Arista answered. "They will tell him." The American followed the Maestro's eyes to the Ferrara bench, and shook his head. "Even Ubaldini didn't see it," he said.

"He is a saberman. But Donati—"

The American said, "I had to risk it. He wasn't ready."

Sometime during the first period an additional group of *carabinieri* had come in. They clustered around the entrance. Their hobnailed shoes sounded ominously on the wooden floor. The American thought, *If he kills me they will give him a medal. But if I kill him—* He looked at the little thick-lipped German, who was smiling and nodding at something the mayor was saying. *This is a civilized country, Ubaldini said. I wonder what the mayor said. Or what the Duce will say when the news of my death reaches his desk in the form of a neatly typed memorandum, which will distort the facts very glibly and end with a pious reflection on the superiority of the Italian gladiator over the American.*

The crowd had applauded Ponti as he went to his

bench. Now they whispered and watched Ubaldini, who stood with a stop-watch in his hand.

"Time," he said finally.

They have told him. The American's heart sank. In stead of boring in with pressure and changes of engagement, Ponti began a series of beats and counterbeats. His blade moved only a few inches, but at each beat a shock ran up the American's arm. He could not get his blade out of the way. In desperation he answered the beats with beats of his own, but it was like beating a taut wire. His forearm began to ache.

This is dangerous. I am playing his game. If only—

Perhaps they didn't tell him. Perhaps they told him only to tire my arm. Break time once and see. But to the body. Wait for a counterbeat. Now. At Ponti's beat to the outside, he used the force to carry his blade under and around and extended with a vicious grunt. It was short, as he knew it would be, but Ponti pulled up. *He might have got my arm again that time. He still wants the body. But with or without a beat? Everything depends—*

Without a beat. They didn't tell him. They didn't tell him. Back to the old game. Once off the strip and he'll be ready. Backing away with extreme caution, the American fended off the threatening point. *It's almost close enough for him to risk it.* He stepped off the end of the strip, and the crowd groaned. Ponti's face was furious.

All right, damn you. All right. You're ripe. Over the bell as he comes in. And don't miss. For God's sake, don't miss. He straightened up a trifle and fixed his eyes on Ponti's arm just above his elbow joint. *It will straighten out as he come in. Over the bell as he—*

At Ponti's rush, the American pulled his feet together, rising to the balls of his feet and pivoting his body like a bullfighter to the right. At the same time his blade flicked out over Ponti's bell and caught him full on the shoulder. Ponti's blade was flat and cold against his chest. The force of the rush and the unexpected check carried Ponti to one knee before he toppled over. At the last minutes the American, feeling the grating of the point against the bone, released his grip and watched the épée go over like a pendu-

lum with Ponti, still fixed in his shoulder. He thought, *It's too high. But it's just as well.*

Before he walked off the strip, he looked up at the crowd. For the first time he was aware of the extent of their hostility. After the first stunned silence a growl arose. Several of the black shirts in the first row leaped to their feet. The little German, his face contorted with disgust, got up and walked across the floor toward the exit. The American turned on his heel and walked calmly toward the locker room. He thought, *They will do nothing. It will be painful, but he will recover.* But, walking the long distance down the floor to the door, with the crowd shouting behind him and the mayor staring anxiously toward the exit and the Maestro holding his hand at his chest and Marino pounding Del Vecchio on the back, he knew finally that he would have to leave, that the Italy he knew was no more.

SAMUEL BLAS

REVENGE

TWILIGHT IS SETTLING IN THE VALLEY. Far below us pale lights are beginning to flicker and the spreading pattern of the city slowly comes alive. As the winding road narrows to the mountaintop the motor sound grows louder in the thin air, within the enclosing silence through which we move.

In the pale blue haze on my left the deepening dusk mingles with the vast silence that seems to suspend the day. A square yellow sign ahead blazes in our headlights: DANGER! SHARP CURVE AHEAD. The mountain wall leans close to the road. On Elsa's side the low branches of a solitary tree rush by, scraping the top of the car.

Elsa, too, is part of the surrounding silence. Beside me she stares straight ahead at the highway. For a long time now she has not spoken; she neither smiles nor is sorrowful. Her expression is grave, almost serene, as if there were no such things as tears or laughter.

But this morning she smiled. A half day's journey away, in the cool morning of a quiet glade she stepped from our trailer door and smiled softly as she waved me off to town. She blushed when I turned back a step to kiss her again. And when I finally drove off, the sweet touch of her hand still tingled in my palm.

Life was wonderful. I drove happily to the small town near by to buy provisions. We had decided to stay a few days more in this pleasant spot we had found. There could be no better place to finish out our honeymoon. As I neared the town I thought it would be fun to add a gift for Elsa to the stuff that I would carry back to the camp.

It was nearing lunchtime when I started back. I had piled groceries enough in the car to last us a week. While I waited for a traffic light to change, a newsboy came by. I bought a paper. It carried a headline reporting the capture of an escaped convict near by. The subcaption said

that his companion was still at large. *Presumed Hiding in the Woods Near Campbelltown.*

I ran quickly through the rest of the item. When the light turned I moved out fast and put on speed. Campbelltown was a place that lay beyond our camp, but too near to suit me, in the circumstances. I felt uneasy, with Elsa alone in the trailer. It was possible, of course, that the fugitive convict might be in our vicinity; but what disturbed me more was the thought that Elsa might have picked up the news on our radio. If she had, she would be frightened. I stepped on the accelerator.

The road twisted and turned around thinly wooded ridges and hills, and as I swung each curve I chided myself for leaving Elsa alone. I reminded myself that she had insisted I shop without her. "I have a surprise for dinner," she had said with the only artfulness she knew—a shy, secret smile. My attention returned to the road.

The winding turns ended and the last stretch was a long, straight drive sheltered by a canopy of tall trees that somehow eased my anxiety. Not much farther now. I imagined the way she would welcome me. She would stanchly deny that she had been afraid but she would hold my arm tightly. And then all of a sudden she would forget the whole thing. She would smile happily and tell me to close my eyes. How I loved that smile!

In the short while that I had known her and in the single month of our marriage I had grown to cherish that smile and the soft, rich laughter that sometimes accompanied it. So strange, that warm directness with which she shared my life, for in the presence of other men there was only shyness. I think that she was afraid of men. Something in her slender glowing warmth made their blood stir. She knew that, faintly, innocently. When the bold ones stared at her she would ask me to hold her close and never tell me why.

The sun was near high noon when the road broke out of the trees into the clearing. I rolled onto the grass and parked, feeling relieved because I had come so quickly. I pulled up the hand brake and looked to the trailer, expecting to see Elsa's welcoming figure there. My compla-

cency ended. There in the clear fall sunlight, I saw wisps of smoke about our home, thin plumes slipping through the unlatched door.

Wild red leaves fluttered across the grass. And a wavering silence to which I listened stupidly. Then I ran to the door and swung it open violently.

An acrid fog swirled about me, making me choke and cough. A curling heavy mist clung to the ceiling. I swung the door wider and flailed my arms to clear the air. And as the fog lifted and shifted I saw with some relief that there was no fire. Our dinner was smoking and burning upon the stove. Three chops—I can see them yet—shriveled and black in a blackened frying-pan; string beans in a burning pot, brown where the water had been; and in the oven, where I later found it, a crumbling burned blob that must once have been Elsa's first cake—the surprise she had promised me.

Panic got hold of me.

"Elsa!" I called.

There was no reply.

"Elsa!" I repeated. "Elsa!"

But only the crackle of the burning pot answered me, and outside a thin echo wandered in the woods. I shut off the burners. The crackling persisted as if in defiance, then it ceased. I turned uneasily toward the door that led to our dining-alcove in the rear, stopping short at sight of the waiting table with its knives and forks and plates in neat array. But no Elsa. But of course. She wouldn't, she couldn't have been there or the dinner would not have burned.

Trying to understand what had happened, I rejected a dozen answers at once. She would never have left the dinner, to burn, for any sort of errand. Nor were there neighbors about with whom to fall into forgetful conversation. We were alone. Then as I stood there in the silence I suddenly heard that faint sound, a rising and falling as of someone weakly breathing. Behind the curtain that secluded our bed—Elsa!

I faced about and tore aside the curtain—

There she lay. Pale, still. I kneeled beside her. She was barely breathing.

"Elsa," I whispered.

She seemed neither to move nor to make any sound, yet I knew she was breathing, for I had heard her. I rubbed her wrists and temples. I shook her gently, then fearfully. She stirred a little.

I wanted to get a doctor, yet I was afraid to leave. Then I remembered the brandy. I fumbled in the cupboard and my hand trembled as I poured a glassful and spooned a little between her lips.

At last it took effect. Her lips moved. Her expression altered, she sputtered, she coughed, and her eyes opened weakly.

At first they were blank. A long second passed while I held her hands tightly. Then, as if awareness had just touched her, horror filled her eyes and she moaned.

Then as I gathered her into my arms and let the sheet that covered her fall away, I saw that she was naked—completely.

There were bruises on her body, as if someone had beaten her: cruel bruises on her shoulders where callous fingers had pressed; angry marks where heavy fists had struck her.

Those numb moments besides my wife are not easily recalled, filled as they are with shame and a fierce anger. When at last she stirred again in my arms I held her tight and looked beyond her so that she would not see the anguish in my eyes. For long minutes she shivered; then she sobbed pitifully. Finally the tears and trembling stopped.

In a flat voice that frightened me she said, "*He killed me—he killed me.*"

How I gathered the tangled threads of those dreadful hours I cannot entirely remember. For a long time I cradled and comforted her, as though she were a child. After a while she seemed to respond. But then, when she shuddered again, my indignation mounted; I lost control and stormed at her with furious questions: "Who?" I de-

manded. "Who?" and "When?" and "How?" Until haltingly the brutal story came out. How a salesman knocked—

"A salesman?"

"Yes."

"Are you sure? Did he carry a suitcase, a display?"

"Yes."

A salesman. Then it was not the convict. Nothing reasonable. It was an ordinary man, ordinary.

How he knocked, interrupting her cooking; how he smiled patly and edged inside, eying her boldly while he chattered about kitchenware. How he touched her arm and seized her and how when she resisted he beat her and—and how she finally fainted away.

As she talked she seemed to fall under a spell of horror that produced in her a curious calm. She repeated, "He killed me, he killed me—" until I had to shake her to make her stop. Her eyes, I saw, stared straight ahead as she said over those dreadful words and it seemed as though she saw that man, that menacing figure, in the hopeless distance.

I never thought once of the police. Only one impulse was in me, a dreadful agonizing craving for revenge. "I'll find him!" I swore. "I'll kill him—"

Her hand clutched mine as if to restrain me, but when she felt the anger in my grip her mood abruptly changed and she said quietly, "Yes—yes." And when I hesitantly asked whether she would come with me, help me find him, she nodded, almost eagerly I thought.

We drove to the outskirts of the town, where she listened carefully to my instructions, nodding with a sort of unearthly calm.

"We'll drive slowly," I told her. And this we did for perhaps a half-hour, examining every passer-by as we moved back and forth through the unhurried streets. The sun still hung heavy above us as we turned a third time down the town's main artery.

In the wide street were a few parked cars, and a thin afternoon crowd was lazily inspecting the shop windows. A man lounging near the hotel disinterestedly picked his teeth. It seemed to me he observed our slow progress curi-

ously. I directed my wife's attention to him but she gravely shook her head. Then suddenly she gripped my arm. Her lips fell open and her face paled. She pointed at a shabby car parked near the hotel. A man was locking the car door.

"That's him!" she whispered.

My blood quickened.

"Are you sure?" I asked finally. Her eyes followed him as he put the keys in his pocket and turned toward the hotel.

"That's him," she insisted, *"that's him—"*

I pulled to the curb in front of his car and stepped out quickly. "Wait here," I said. "Don't move—" I looked about me with assumed carelessness. The lounge, I saw, was facing the other way. No one else seemed to notice me. I sauntered into the lobby, a few steps behind my man. I decided to wait for him near the elevator, and sure enough he was soon standing beside me absently fingering his room key.

Luck was with me, for as the car went up I glimpsed his room number on the key in his hand. I had planned to get out with him and openly follow him to his room. Instead I rode to the floor above his, made my way to the stairway, down one level, through the hallways to his room and knocked softly, an unexpected and unknown visitor.

I was calm then as he answered my knock. I spoke to him through the door and represented myself as the buyer for a local store. He opened the door wide.

"Why, come in," he said; he wore a welcoming grin that infuriated me.

I went in; took the hammer from the waistband of my trousers and, as he turned to walk ahead of me, I smashed him mightily on the back of his head.

A great cry escaped him; then a dismal sigh that collapsed with him to the floor. He lay still.

I stared at the crumpled figure and my fury subsided, spent by that single avenging blow. A clock ticked into my consciousness. My eyes wandered absently to the simple dresser, the bed, the silent telephone. In my hand the hammer was edged with blood. I tucked it back in my

trousers and dropped the skirt of my coat over it. With my handkerchief I turned the knob of the door. Curiosity prompted me to glance again at the still figure on the floor, but I no longer cared. It might be hours before anything happened. I might be suspected or I might not. None of these conjectures bothered me. I was reasonably safe from suspicion—that I knew—except perhaps from this—this ordinary individual. I turned and went out quickly, closing the door behind me. And with that closed door behind me, in that quiet carpeted hallway, I at last felt clean, free of obsessing shame.

I went back upstairs, rang for the elevator, and rode down quietly. The very sleepiness of this town made my ambling exit from the hotel unnoticeable.

Elsa was still in the car, patient, gazing straight ahead, just as I had left her.

"It's done," I said.

Her head barely turned in my direction and she nodded slowly. She said one word: "Good."

Poor Elsa. So altered with shame with shock that she had grown a shell which I could not pierce. She sat silently in the car while, back at our camp, I hooked up the trailer and made ready for a journey. Even the lunch I fixed for her she barely touched, nibbling once or twice, then staring into space. Perhaps when we were away from this terrible place—

It was evening when he stopped again. I drove furiously past a dozen small villages, hurrying toward the city that lies, now, below and behind us at the foot of the mountain. I hoped to find in its busy streets some distraction from our lonely secret, to lose some of this horror there, perhaps in some lively bar or in a theater; perhaps in a good night's rest. Then the strain of the dreadful day took charge. A good night's sleep was all I craved. But not in the trailer; not yet.

Elsa agreed indifferently. We rolled ahead and merged with the traffic in the city. We would park the trailer and stop at the best hotel. We would have a hot bath, then dinner in our room and perhaps a bottle of wine. And a

good sleep, a good sleep— "Would you like that?" I asked her.

I thought her expression softened; certainly a tear glistened in her eye. I wanted right then to hold her in my arms, to caress her and comfort her. I pointed to a hotel we were approaching.

"Would you like that one?" I asked.

Her glance followed my pointing finger. She paled. She gripped my arm tightly and her lips parted. She stared straight ahead. Oh, God! She stared straight ahead and pointed at a man in the street—

"That's him," she whispered. *"That's him—"*

JOHN STEINBECK

THE SNAKE

IT WAS ALMOST DARK when young Dr. Phillips swung his sack to his shoulder and left the tide pool. He climbed up over the rocks and squashed along the street in his rubber boots. The street lights were on by the time he arrived at his little commercial laboratory on the cannery street of Monterey. It was a tight little building, standing partly on piers over the bay water and partly on the land. On both sides the big corrugated-iron sardine canneries crowded in on it.

Dr. Phillips climbed the wooden steps and opened the door. The white rats in their cages scampered up and down the wire, and the captive cats in their pens mewed for milk. Dr. Phillips turned on the glaring light over the dissection table and dumped his clammy sack on the floor. He walked to the glass cages by the window where the rattlesnakes lived, leaned over and looked in.

The snakes were bunched and resting in the corners of the cage, but every head was clear; the dusty eyes seemed to look at nothing, but as the young man leaned over the cage the forked tongues, black on the ends and pink behind, twittered out and waved slowly up and down. Then the snakes recognized the man and pulled in their tongues.

Dr. Phillips threw off his leather coat and built a fire in the tin stove; he set a kettle of water on the stove and dropped a can of beans into the water. Then he stood staring down at the sack on the floor. He was a slight young man with the mild, preoccupied eyes of one who looks through a microscope a great deal. He wore a short blond beard.

The draft ran breathily up the chimney and a glow of warmth came from the stove. The little waves washed quietly about the piles under the building. Arranged on shelves about the room were tier above tier of museum jars containing the mounted marine specimens the laboratory dealt in.

Dr. Phillips opened a side door and went into his bedroom, a book-lined cell containing an army cot, a reading-light, and an uncomfortable wooden chair. He pulled off his rubber boots and put on a pair of sheepskin slippers. When he went back to the other room the water in the kettle was already beginning to hum.

He lifted his sack to the table under the white light and emptied out two dozen common starfish. These he laid out side by side on the table. His preoccupied eyes turned to the busy rats in the wire cages. Taking grain from a paper sack, he poured it into the feeding-troughs. Instantly the rats scrambled down from the wire and fell upon the food. A bottle of milk stood on a glass shelf between a small mounted octopus and a jellyfish. Dr. Phillips lifted down the milk and walked to the cat cage, but before he filled the containers he reached in the cage and gently picked out a big rangy alley tabby. He stroked her for a moment and then dropped her in a small black painted box, closed the lid and bolted it, and then turned on a petcock which admitted gas into the killing-chamber. While the short soft struggle went on in the black box he filled the saucers with milk. One of the cats arched against his hand and he smiled and petted her neck.

The box was quiet now. He turned off the petcock, for the airtight box would be full of gas.

On the stove the pan of water was bubbling furiously about the can of beans. Dr. Phillips lifted out the can with a big pair of forceps, opened it, and emptied the beans into a glass dish. While he ate he watched the starfish on the table. From between the rays little drops of milky fluid were exuding. He bolted his beans and when they were gone he put the dish in the sink and stepped to the equipment cupboard. From this he took a microscope and a pile of little glass dishes. He filled the dishes one by one with sea water from a tap and arranged them in a line beside the starfish. He took out his watch and laid it on the table under the pouring white light. The waves washed with little sighs against the piles under the floor. He took an eyedropper from a drawer and bent over the starfish.

At that moment there were quick soft steps on the

wooden stairs and strong knocking at the door. A slight grimace of annoyance crossed the young man's face as he went to open. A tall, lean woman stood in the doorway. She was dressed in a severe dark suit—her straight black hair, growing low on a flat forehead, was mussed as though the wind had been blowing it. Her black eyes glittered in the strong light.

She spoke in a soft throaty voice, "May I come in? I want to talk to you."

"I'm very busy just now," he said half-heartedly. "I have to do things at times." But he stood away from the door. The tall woman slipped in.

"I'll be quiet until you can talk to me."

He closed the door and brought the uncomfortable chair from the bedroom. "You see," he apologized, "the process is started and I must get to it." So many people wandered in and asked questions. He had little routines of explanations for the commoner processes. He could say them without thinking. "Sit here. In a few minutes I'll be able to listen to you."

The tall woman leaned over the table. With the eyedropper the young man gathered fluid from between the rays of the starfish and squirted it into a bowl of water, and then he drew some milky fluid and squirted it in the same bowl and stirred the water gently with the eyedropper. He began his little patter of explanation.

"When starfish are sexually mature they release sperm and ova when they are exposed at low tide. By choosing mature specimens and taking them out of the water, I give them a condition of low tide. Now I've mixed the sperm and eggs. Now I put some of the mixture in each one of these ten watch-glasses. In ten minutes I will kill those in the first glass with menthol, twenty minutes later I will kill the second group and then a new group every twenty minutes. Then I will have arrested the process in stages, and I will mount the series on microscope slides for biologic study." He paused. "Would you like to look at this first group under the microscope?"

"No, thank you."

He turned quickly to her. People always wanted to look through the glass. She was not looking at the table at all, but at him. Her black eyes were on him, but they did not seem to see him. He realized why—the irises were as dark as the pupils, there was no color line between the two. Dr. Phillips was piqued at her answer. Although answering questions bored him, a lack of interest in what he was doing irritated him. A desire to arouse her grew in him.

"While I'm waiting the first ten minutes I have something to do. Some people don't like to see it. Maybe you'd better step into that room until I finish."

"No," she said in her soft flat tone. "Do what you wish. I will wait until you can talk to me." Her hands rested side by side on her lap. She was completely at rest. Her eyes were bright but the rest of her was almost in a state of suspended animation. He thought, *Low metabolic rate, almost as low as a frog's, from the looks.* The desire to shock her out of her inanition possessed him again.

He brought a little wooden cradle to the table, laid out scalpels and scissors, and rigged a big hollow needle to a pressure tube. Then from the killing chamber he brought the limp dead cat and laid it in the cradle and tied its legs to hooks in the sides. He glanced sidewise at the woman. She had not moved. She was still at rest.

The cat grinned up into the light, its pink tongue stuck out between its needle teeth. Dr. Phillips deftly snipped open the skin at the throat; with a scalpel he slit through and found an artery. With flawless technique he put the needle in the vessel and tied it in with gut. "Embalming fluid," he explained. "Later I'll inject yellow mass into the venous system and red mass into the arterial system—for bloodstream dissection—biology classes."

He looked around at her again. Her dark eyes seemed veiled with dust. She looked without expression at the cat's open throat. Not a drop of blood had escaped. The incision was clean. Dr. Phillips looked at his watch. "Time for the first group." He shook a few crystals of menthol into the first watch-glass.

The woman was making him nervous. The rats climbed

about on the wire of their cage again and squeaked softly. The waves under the building beat with little shocks on the piles.

The young man shivered. He put a few lumps of coal in the stove and sat down. "Now," he said. "I haven't anything to do for twenty minutes." He noticed how short her chin was between lower lip and point. She seemed to awaken slowly, to come up out of some deep pool of consciousness. Her head raised and her dark dusty eyes moved about the room and then came back to him.

"I was waiting," she said. Her hands remained side by side on her lap. "You have snakes?"

"Why, yes," he said rather loudly. "I have about two dozen rattlesnakes. I milk out the venom and send it to the anti-venom laboratories."

She continued to look at him but her eyes did not center on him, rather they covered him and seemed to see in a big circle all around him. "Have you a male snake, a male rattlesnake?"

"Well, it just happens I know I have. I came in one morning and found a big snake in—in coition with a smaller one. That's very rare in captivity. You see, I do know I have a male snake."

"Where is he?"

"Why, right in the glass cage by the window there."

Her head swung slowly around but her two quiet hands did not move. She turned back toward him. "May I see?"

He got up and walked to the case by the window. On the sand bottom the knot of rattlesnakes lay entwined, but their heads were clear. The tongues came out and flickered a moment and then waved up and down feeling the air for vibrations. Dr. Phillips nervously turned his head. The woman was standing beside him. He had not heard her get up from the chair. He had heard only the splash of water among the piles and the scampering of the rats on the wire screen.

She said softly, "Which is the male you spoke of?"

He pointed to a thick, dusty gray snake lying by itself in one corner of the cage. "That one. He's nearly five feet long. He comes from Texas. Our Pacific coast snakes are

usually smaller. He's been taking all the rats, too. When I want the others to eat I have to take him out."

The woman stared down at the blunt dry head. The forked tongue slipped out and hung quivering for a long moment. "And you're sure he's a male."

"Rattlesnakes are funny," he said glibly. "Nearly every generalization proves wrong. I don't like to say anything definite about rattlesnakes, but—yes—I can assure you he's a male."

Her eyes did not move from the flat head. "Will you sell him to me?"

"Sell him?" he cried. "Sell him to you?"

"You do sell specimens, don't you?"

"Oh—yes. Of course I do. Of course I do."

"How much? Five dollars? Ten?"

"Oh! Not more than five. But—do you know anything about rattlesnakes? You might be bitten."

She looked at him for a moment. "I don't intend to take him. I want to leave him here, but—I want him to be mine. I want to come here and look at him and feed him and to know he's mine." She opened a little purse and took out a five-dollar bill. "Here! Now he is mine."

Dr. Phillips began to be afraid. "You could come to look at him without owning him."

"I want him to be mine."

"Oh, Lord!" he cried. "I've forgotten the time." He ran to the table. "Three minutes over. It won't matter much." He shook menthol crystals into the second watch-glass. And then he was drawn back to the cage where the woman still stared at the snake.

She asked, "What does he eat?"

"I feed them white rats, rats from the cage over there."

"Will you put him in the other cage? I want to feed him."

"But he doesn't need food. He's had a rat already this week. Sometimes they don't eat for three or four months. I had one that didn't eat for over a year."

In her low monotone she asked, "Will you sell me a rat?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I see. You want to watch

how rattlesnakes eat. All right. I'll show you. The rat will cost twenty-five cents. It's better than a bullfight if you look at it one way, and it's simply a snake eating his dinner if you look at it another." His tone had become acid. He hated people who made sport of natural processes. He was not a sportsman but a biologist. He could kill a thousand animals for knowledge, but not an insect for pleasure. He'd been over this in his mind before.

She turned her head slowly toward him and the beginning of a smile formed on her thin lips. "I want to feed my snake," she said. "I'll put him in the other cage." She had opened the top of the cage and dipped her hand in before he knew what she was doing. He leaped forward and pulled her back. The lid banged shut.

"Haven't you any sense?" he asked fiercely. "Maybe he wouldn't kill you, but he'd make you damned sick in spite of what I could do for you."

"You put him in the other cage then," she said quietly.

Dr. Phillips was shaken. He found that he was avoiding the dark eyes that didn't seem to look at anything. He felt that it was profoundly wrong to put a rat into the cage, deeply sinful; and he didn't know why. Often he had put rats in the cage when someone or other had wanted to see it, but this desire tonight sickened him. He tried to explain himself out of it.

"It's a good thing to see," he said. "It shows you how a snake can work. It makes you have a respect for a rattlesnake. Then, too, lots of people have dreams about the terror of snakes making the kill. I think because it is a subjective rat. The person is the rat. Once you see it the whole matter is objective. The rat is only a rat and the terror is removed."

He took a long stick equipped with a leather noose from the wall. Opening the trap, he dropped the noose over the big snake's head and tightened the thong. A piercing dry rattle filled the room. The thick body writhed and slashed about the handle of the stick as he lifted the snake out and dropped it in the feeding-cage. It stood ready to strike for a time, but the buzzing gradually ceased. The snake

crawled into a corner, made a big figure eight with its body, and lay still.

"You see," the young man explained, "these snakes are quite tame. I've had them a long time. I suppose I could handle them if I wanted to, but everyone who does handle rattlesnakes gets bitten sooner or later. I just don't want to take the chance." He glanced at the woman. He hated to put in the rat. She had moved over in front of the new cage; her black eyes were on the stony head of the snake again.

She said, "Put in a rat."

Reluctantly he went to the rat cage. For some reason he was sorry for the rat, and such a feeling had never come to him before. His eyes went over the mass of swarming white bodies climbing up the screen toward him. *Which one?* he thought. *Which one shall it be?* Suddenly he turned angrily to the woman. "Wouldn't you rather I put in a cat? Then you'd see a real fight. The cat might even win, but if it did it might kill the snake. I'll sell you a cat if you like."

She didn't look at him. "Put in a rat," she said. "I want him to eat."

He opened the rat cage and thrust his hand in. His fingers found a tail and he lifted a plump, red-eyed rat out of the cage. It struggled up to try to bite his fingers and, failing, hung spread out and motionless from its tail. He walked quickly across the room, opened the feeding-cage, and dropped the rat in on the sand floor. "Now, watch it," he cried.

The woman did not answer him. Her eyes were on the snake where it lay still. Its tongue, flicking in and out rapidly, tasted the air of the cage.

The rat landed on its feet, turned around and sniffed at its pink naked tail, and then unconcernedly trotted across the sand, smelling as it went. The room was silent. Dr. Phillips did not know whether the water sighed among the piles or whether the woman sighed. Out of the corner of his eye he saw her body crouch and stiffen.

The snake moved out smoothly, slowly. The tongue

flicked in and out. The motion was so gradual, so smooth that it didn't seem to be motion at all. In the other end of the cage the rat perked up in a sitting position and began to lick down the fine white hair on its chest. The snake moved on, keeping always a deep S curve in its neck.

The silence beat on the young man. He felt the blood drifting up in his body. He said loudly, "See! He keeps the striking curve ready. Rattlesnakes are cautious, almost cowardly animals. The mechanism is so delicate. The snake's dinner is to be got by an operation as deft as a surgeon's job. He takes no chances with his instruments."

The snake had flowed to the middle of the cage by now. The rat looked up, saw the snake, and then unconcernedly went back to licking its chest.

"It's the most beautiful thing in the world," the young man said. His veins were throbbing. "It's the most terrible thing in the world."

The snake was close now. Its head lifted a few inches from the sand. The head weaved slowly back and forth, aiming, getting distance, aiming. Dr. Phillips glanced again at the woman. He turned sick. She was weaving too, not much, just a suggestion.

The rat looked up and saw the snake. It dropped to four feet and back up, and then—the stroke. It was impossible to see, simply a flash. The rat jarred as though under an invisible blow. The snake backed hurriedly into the corner from which it had come, and settled down, its tongue working constantly.

"Perfect!" Dr. Phillips cried. "Right between the shoulder blades. The fangs must almost have reached the heart."

The rat stood still, breathing like a little white bellows. Suddenly it leaped in the air and landed on its side. Its legs kicked spasmodically for a second and it was dead.

The woman relaxed, relaxed sleepily.

"Well," the young man demanded, "it was an emotional bath, wasn't it?"

She turned her misty eyes to him. "Will he eat it now?" she asked.

"Of course he'll eat it. He didn't kill it for a thrill. He killed it because he was hungry."

The corners of the woman's mouth turned up a trifle again. She looked back at the snake. "I want to see him eat it."

Now the snake came out of its corner again. There was no striking curve in its neck, but it approached the rat gingerly, ready to jump back in case it attacked. It nudged the body gently with its blunt nose, and drew away. Satisfied that it was dead, the snake touched the body all over with its chin, from head to tail. It seemed to measure the body and to kiss it. Finally it opened its mouth and unhinged its jaws at the corners.

Dr. Phillips put his will against his head to keep it from turning toward the woman. He thought, *If she's opening her mouth, I'll be sick. I'll be afraid.* He succeeded in keeping his eyes away.

The snake fitted its jaws over the rat's head and then with a slow peristaltic pulsing, began to engulf the rat. The jaws gripped and the whole throat crawled up, and the jaws gripped again.

Dr. Phillips turned away and went to his work table. "You've made me miss one of the series," he said bitterly. "The set won't be complete." He put one of the watch-glasses under a low-power microscope and looked at it, and then angrily he poured the contents of all the dishes into the sink. The waves had fallen so that only a wet whisper came up through the floor. The young man lifted a trapdoor at his feet and dropped the starfish down into the black water. He paused at the cat, crucified in the cradle and grinning comically into the light. Its body was puffed with embalming fluid. He shut off the pressure, withdrew the needle and tied the vein.

"Would you like some coffee?" he asked.

"No, thank you. I shall be going pretty soon."

He walked to her where she stood in front of the snake cage. The rat was swallowed, all except an inch of pink tail that stuck out of the snake's mouth like a sardonic tongue. The throat heaved again and the tail disappeared.

The jaws snapped back into their sockets, and the big snake crawled heavily to the corner, made a big eight, and dropped its head on the sand.

"He's asleep now," the woman said. "I'm going now. But I'll come back and feed my snake every little while. I'll pay for the rats. I want him to have plenty. And sometime—I'll take him away with me." Her eyes came out of their dusty dream for a moment. "Remember, he's mine. Don't take his poison. I want him to have it. Good night." She walked swiftly to the door and went out. He heard her footsteps on the stairs, but he could not hear her walk away on the pavement.

Dr. Phillips turned a chair around and sat down in front of the snake cage. He tried to comb out his thought as he looked at the torpid snake. *I've read so much about psychological sex symbols*, he thought. *It doesn't seem to explain. Maybe I'm too much alone. Maybe I should kill the snake. If I knew—no, I can't pray to anything.*

For weeks he expected her to return. *I will go out and leave her alone here when she comes*, he decided. *I won't see the damned thing again.*

She never came again. For months he looked for her when he walked about in the town. Several times he ran after some tall woman thinking it might be she. But he never saw her again—ever.

MARY DEASY

LONG SHADOW ON THE LAWN

*Presentiment is that long shadow on the lawn
Indicative that suns go down.*

—EMILY DICKINSON

ABOUT NOONTIME she washed her hair, then came downstairs with it falling wet about her neck and shoulders, and walked straight through the house and out the back door. As she passed through the kitchen she saw Frankie and Heman and William sitting around the table on the screened porch, eating lunch, but they did not look up or hear her as she went by. Frankie and Heman were sitting so close to each other that their shoulders touched, and Frankie was laughing with her head thrown suddenly back and the perspiration glistening freshly on her broad black face.

She let the screen door fall silently to behind her and stood on the doorstep, looking right and left. The yard was empty except for half a dozen geese wandering in a loose group toward the house from the stable door. She came down the steps and walked toward them, swinging her damp towel lightly from one hand.

"Geese, get out of my way," she said.

They scattered, uttering harsh alarms. She stood in the middle of the yard, feeling the noonday sun blazing down on her wet hair; shaking it before her face, she saw round shining drops slide gently the length of the light brown strands and hang translucent at the ends.

One of the gray cat's half-grown kittens, tiger-striped, woke up from a nap under the lilacs, stretched, and came slowly across the yard toward her.

"Tiger," she said.

She squatted on her heels, running her hand swiftly from the kitten's ears to the tip of the long tail it arched high in appreciation. She looked into the tawny eyes.

"Come along, cat," she said, scooping it up, rising, and cradling it in her arms. "You come along with me."

She walked across the yard to the open gate leading to the track and kept straight on walking, staying on the track and feeling the soft dust rising about her bare ankles. When she came to the gate on the other side of the track she set the kitten down on the far side of the fence and opened the gate and came inside herself. Two mares and their colts were in the field, standing motionless in the shade of a group of trees at the farther end.

She sat down on the grass, shaking her hair out for the sun to shine on.

"Nobody can come here without our seeing them coming," she said. She picked up the kitten and set it down in her lap. "If he comes we'll run," she said. "I'll run faster than you can run."

The sun blazed straight down and the branches of the trees across the field lifted and fell a little, peacefully, in the hot noon breeze. The grass was warm, and the half-grown kitten, heavy in her lap, fell asleep. She touched its long whiskers lightly with the tips of her fingers and it shook its head suddenly without opening its eyes.

When her hair was dry she got up and walked back across the track toward the yard. The kitten followed her, running a pace or two behind. Halfway across the track she stopped and took off her sneakers, tied the laces together, and hung them over her shoulder. The thick dust was like plush underneath her feet.

Heman was in the yard as she came by. "Miss Marcy, you better get out of that sun," he said. "Your face looks red as a beet to me."

She lifted her hair that was damp with perspiration behind where it had rested upon her neck and stood holding it with both hands on top of her head, her feet spread wide, her body lightly defined beneath her limp brown-and-white checked gingham dress.

"Has Father come home yet?" she said to Heman.

"No," said Heman, "he ain't come home. It ain't that easy to find a man who don't want to be found. You look and you look, and wherever you look he been there before and already gone. Likely your daddy won't be home before dark."

She let her arms fall and after a minute turned around and walked slowly into the house. Frankie was in the kitchen making chili sauce; she was standing at the sink peeling a pan of tomatoes, and on the stove a big kettle was already boiling. It smelled good: a spicy, rich, warm odor floating through the house and out the open windows.

Marcy came into the kitchen, walking soundlessly on her bare feet, but letting the screen door slam behind her. Frankie turned around when she heard the screen door slam.

"Where you been all day, for heb'ms sakes?" she said. "Here it's past two o'clock and you ain't had no lunch yet."

Marcy came over and looked into the kettle that was boiling on the stove, and then she went up to the sink and looked at the tomatoes that Frankie was peeling.

"I washed my hair," she said to Frankie.

"Anybody can see that," Frankie said. "You'd ought to do something with it now—curl it up pretty instead of lettin' it hang around like an old switch of hay."

Marcy pushed her hair back absently over her shoulders. She looked at the red juice running over Frankie's hands. "It looks like blood, doesn't it?" she said.

"Blood?" said Frankie. "It don't look like nothin' of the sort."

"Yes, it does," said Marcy. "It looks like blood."

She went over to the refrigerator and opened it and took out a pitcher of buttermilk and poured herself a glass.

"There's some corn bread left from lunch settin' in the oven," said Frankie. She kept looking at Marcy over her shoulder. "You're gittin' too big to be runnin' around here without any shoes," she said. "You're almost seb'm-teen years old; you're a young lady now."

Marcy sat down at the table and took a long drink of the buttermilk. "When do you think Father will come home, Frankie?" she said.

"He'll come home when he finds your Uncle Fonse,"

said Frankie. "That's when he said he was comin' home and not before."

"What if he doesn't find him?" Marcy said.

"He'll find him all right," reiterated Frankie. She began chopping up the tomatoes with her knife.

Marcy sat watching her while she drank her buttermilk. "No, he won't," she said after a little while.

Frankie stopped chopping suddenly and turned around. "How do you know?" she demanded, with a wary expression on her face.

"I've got a feeling," Marcy said. She sat gazing reflectively at the thick white buttermilk in her glass. "They won't find him this time," she said after she had been quiet for another little while. "You heard how he acted yesterday down at Clint's. He knows better this time; he won't let them catch him again."

Frankie's face wore a mistrustful look; she stood leaning against the sink, looking at Marcy and holding her knife loosely in her hand. "I wouldn't like nothin' to happen around here like happened down at Mr. Clint's yesterday," she said emphatically. "Tearin' telephone wires right out'n the wall—no sir, I don't want nothin' like that happenin' around here."

"Uncle Fonse is as strong as anything," said Marcy. "He about half killed somebody up at that hospital the first time they came and put him away. They're all afraid of him up there; that's why they always watch him so close."

She looked at Frankie over the edge of her glass. She saw that Frankie was getting scared.

"How come they let him git away again then?" Frankie said. "It ain't six months ago since the last time yet."

Marcy finished her buttermilk. "Uncle Fonse is as smart as anything too," she said. "It isn't easy to keep a man like Uncle Fonse locked up. Father says Uncle Fonse is the smartest man in Ohio who's never been inside a college or a jail."

She got up and walked over to the screen door and stood looking out at the afternoon sunlight blazing down on the empty yard.

"Heman and William are right out there," she said. "If we give a screech they'll come a-running."

"I wouldn't wait for no screechin'," Frankie said dramatically. "I got me this knife—" She brandished it significantly.

Marcy smiled, stretching herself as she stood on tiptoe and raised her arms. "Uncle Fonse wouldn't hurt you, Frankie," she said. "He wouldn't want any more out of you than coffee and corn bread."

Frankie debated, relaxed, and went back to her chopping. "No, honey, I guess he wouldn't," she said. "Your Uncle Fonse ain't got no call to be mad at me." She relaxed and debated further, fitting her puzzlement to the rhythmical swinging strokes of her knife. "He was the good-humoreddest man I ever seen before that black crazy fit came on him," she said. "What for a thing like that had to happen to a fine man like your Uncle Fonse I'd like to know."

"Maybe it's in the family," said Marcy. "Did you ever know anybody who had it in the family, Frankie?"

"Why, honey, I sure did," Frankie said. She finished cutting up the tomatoes, put them into a kettle, and began to peel a large white onion. "When I was a youngster down around Maysville they was a man who killed his wife and whole famb'ly with an ax, all but one boy that got away, and that boy grew up and got himself a wife and children and killed *his* whole famb'ly with an ax. It's a curse a famb'ly gits on it. Maybe somebody put a curse on your Uncle Fonse."

"Maybe," said Marcy. She came across the kitchen on soundless bare feet and stood beside Frankie, watching the dry white skin fall from the onion, smelling the crisp, sharp odor in the hot, still air. "I wonder when he'll come around here," she said. "I wonder if he's around here now. Maybe he's just waiting till it gets dark enough."

"Till it gits dark enough for what?" said Frankie sharply. "Miss Marcy, you want to quit talkin' like that now. There ain't nobody comin' round here today."

"Uncle Fonse is coming," said Marcy.

She went over to the stove and picked up the big wooden spoon and meditatively stirred the chili sauce that was boiling in the kettle.

Frankie turned around, putting her hands on her hips. "Now what gits into you to say a thing like that?" she said. "Your Uncle Fonse, he knows good and well they'll catch him if he comes anywheres around here. He ain't goin' to take no chance like that."

"That's why he's waiting till it gets dark," said Marcy.

Frankie turned back to the sink, pushed the cold water faucet on till the water ran hard, and began to wash some green peppers under it. "I ain't goin' to listen to talk like that," she said with an air of finality.

"You don't have to listen if you don't want to," Marcy said. "You don't have to listen to anything. Only I'm warning you, because I know it's true. He's coming here to get me, as sure as you're born."

She turned her back on Frankie, walked across the kitchen, and stood with her feet wide apart, looking at the colored picture on the calendar that hung upon the wall. Frankie maintained a stubborn silence.

"He's coming to get me," Marcy explained to the long pink-clad lady upon the calendar, "because I called up and told Clint and Father he was here the last time. He said, 'Marcy, don't you tell,' and I called up anyway, and now he's coming to get me for that. He's coming with a knife or maybe an ax—"

"Miss Marcy, if you don't stop talkin' that way this minute, I'm goin' straight out of this kitchen," Frankie said suddenly in a determined tone. Her face looked blanched beneath its dark shining color. "Whyn't you go upstairs and git yourself cleaned up?" she said. "Your daddy'll maybe be home in a little while, and you ain't studyin' to be no help to me here."

"I'll help you if you want me to," Marcy offered. "Do you want me to get you some jars from the cellar?"

"All right, go along, bring me up a dozen pints," said Frankie.

"Maybe he's down there, waiting," Marcy said.

She opened the cellar door and went slowly down the

steps, feeling the wood cool beneath her feet and the air growing damp and cool as she descended. The dark earthy odor of the cellar rose about her. She peered over the wooden rail beside the steps, but all she could see was empty space and shelves and the squat black furnace stretching its crooked pipes above it like an octopus's arms.

She sat down, clasping her hands about her knees, on the fourth lowest step, where she could look out the small window into the yard. When she sat there her eyes were on a level with the ground outside, and the green bushy stalks of the four-o'clocks growing there looked tall and unfamiliar and near, like strange trees in a thick humid jungle. As she watched, the tiger-striped kitten prowled softly past; she saw its tawny eyes and cruel stripes.

She sat daydreaming till she heard Frankie's perturbed voice calling to her from the kitchen, then jumped up, hastily piled half a dozen empty jars into her skirt, which she held up apronwise with both hands, and ran upstairs again into the kitchen.

"Child, for heb'ms sakes, what was you doin' down there?" said Frankie crossly. "You're jest tryin' to give me the fidgets today." She took the jars out of Marcy's skirt, rattling them down emphatically upon the table. "That dress was clean this mornin'; now it's all over cellar dirt and grass stains," she said. "You go on upstairs and tidy yourself up."

"All right," said Marcy. She walked over to the door leading to the dining-room. At the doorway she stopped for a moment and turned around. "Suppose he was down there watching me all the time," she said. "Suppose he was standing right there behind the furnace, looking at me."

She went on through the dining-room and into the hall and up the stairs to the second floor. It was quiet up there, and hotter than it was downstairs; the air was heavy and yellow and thick with sunshine. She washed herself, and then went into her own room and put on a clean blue-and-white dress and combed her hair. She went to the window and looked out through the trees at the road in front of

the house. Every now and then a car went by, rounded the curve in the road, and passed out of sight. The solid shadow of the house and the long quivering shadows of the trees were beginning to stretch across the road toward the opposite side. For the first time a cool shiver of apprehension touched her gently and silently withdrew.

When she came downstairs again the hot chili sauce was standing in jars on the kitchen table and Frankie was beginning to prepare the evening meal. She stayed in the kitchen with Frankie till Heman and William came in for their supper. Her father had not returned, and she ate out on the screened porch with the others. At the close of the long hot summer day Heman and Frankie spoke to each other in slurred lazy voices and William sat silent, his red-burned embarrassed face bent conscientiously to his plate. Marcy too was silent; she sat listening for the sound of her father's car in the drive. A faint mature anxiety stirred within her.

When the meal was over Heman and William got up and went back to the stable again. They would bring rickety wooden chairs outside and sit smoking their pipes, leaning the backs of their chairs against the stable wall. Frankie and Marcy cleared the table, and Marcy dried the dishes while Frankie washed them. Frankie's talk was slow and surly as she plunged her hands into the steamy water.

"Hottest day of the year and I have to stand in this here kitchen over a boilin' stove all afternoon," she said. She was cross because Marcy's father had not come home in time for supper and because she would have to fix something for him later in the evening. She said to Marcy in sulky criticism, "Child, I ain't never seen anything look worse'n that hair of yours. Whyn't you curl it up like I told you to? You been up to no good the whole day long."

After the dishes had been put away Frankie washed her face and slicked back her hair and got her pack of cigarettes off the cupboard shelf. She always went back to the stable summer evenings after the dishes had been washed, and smoked a couple of cigarettes with Heman.

"You scared to stay in this house alone?" she said to

Marcy, at the door. "Heman and me, we'll be right out in the yard. We'll keep an eye up here all the time."

"No, I'm not scared," Marcy said. It was light still. "I was only pretending this afternoon," she said.

Frankie went outside. Marcy watched her from the kitchen window as she crossed the yard and sat down beside Heman in one of the rickety chairs. She could hear their voices as Heman spoke to Frankie and Frankie, bursting into high laughter in return, reached over and slapped him on the leg.

She turned away from the window and walked aimlessly out of the kitchen, through the dining-room, and into the living-room. The house was perfectly still, and shadows were beginning to invade the quiet corners, though outside the sun still lay on the grass in long golden rays. Marcy sat down in one of the deep, comfortable, shabby chairs, feeling her bare, moist arms adhesive to the upholstering leather.

In the quiet house a clock's ticking was persuasive of passing time and deepening gloom. The afternoon's fears had been a perilous pretense of alarm, but now, as time ripened and silence deepened, a cool secret prickling of apprehension flowed cautiously over her body and then through her mind. A fancy took her that there was someone in the room with her. Someone was standing behind her chair, standing silent, watchful, waiting silently and patiently for her to turn. Deliberately she closed her eyes, simulating a relaxation which she did not feel. The steady approach, smooth thrum, and lonely receding sing of a passing car on the road outside lacked comfort, emphasizing isolation.

The conviction of the presence behind her persisted through the clock's monotonous tick. She jumped up suddenly, turning, with a moment's rash courage.

"Nobody there." She laughed in immense and valorous relief. "Scared yourself worse than you ever scared Frankie," she said.

She stood there a moment indecisive, then went over to the telephone, picked up the receiver, and called a num-

ber. Her brother Clint's wife Ruth spoke to her over the wire in a space of seconds.

"This is Marcy," she told her. "I'm coming over to your house right away."

"No," said Ruth. "Clint's not here. And Heman and William are over at your house."

"I'm coming anyway," said Marcy. "Maybe I'll even stay all night."

She went back into the kitchen and opened the screen door to call back to Frankie where she was going.

"You want me to walk over with you, Miss Marcy?" Heman said.

"No," she said. "That little way? I'm not afraid."

She closed the screen door again and walked through the silent house and out the front way. Under the trees before the house darkness was already beginning to gather, but on the road the golden light was still thick and reassuring. She walked along quickly, looking sideways as she passed at a clump of dark trees or a tall growth of weeds beside a fence. Automobiles went by two or three times. The air was cooler and began to smell of evening.

She crossed the road when she came to Clint's place and walked along in the high grass beside the fence. The cool grass whipped her bare legs and she smelled the lush green evening scent of weeds. When she came into the yard she looked up and saw Ruth waving to her from the front window upstairs. She was putting Cynthia to bed.

"I'll be right down," she said. "The screen door's locked."

Marcy stood at the door looking through the screen into the hall inside, and in a few moments she saw Ruth coming down the stairs with Allan, who was six, beside her.

"You shouldn't have come here, Marcy," Ruth said to her as she let her in. "I told you over the phone, you should have stayed at home."

Her face looked calm, but somewhere behind her eyes fear was hidden. She reached down and took Allan by the hand. "Latch the screen door behind you," she said to Marcy. "I wanted to shut the house up, but on a day like

this, at this time of evening, you have to open the doors and let the air in."

She spoke in a quiet normal voice, but the fear in her eyes communicated itself to Marcy without words and without inflections, a silent animal contagion. Marcy fought against it.

"What are you afraid of?" she said to Ruth. "Uncle Fonse isn't going to come here again."

"He came here yesterday," said Ruth.

She went into the living-room with Allan, and Marcy followed her. They sat down, facing each other; Allan sat beside Marcy on the couch.

"I was in the dining-room with Allan when he came," said Ruth. "He asked me for some eggs and a cup of coffee. I'm afraid of him, Marcy. I don't know what I'll do if he comes here again."

"I wasn't afraid of him," Allan said.

"He wouldn't hurt you," Marcy said. "He didn't offer to hurt you, did he, Ruth?"

Ruth shook her head. "No," she said. "He was just the way he always was. Only he didn't want me to tell anybody that he was here. That was why he tore the telephone wires out of the wall. He said he didn't trust me not to tell. When he picked up the telephone his eyes were such a queer bright blue. He didn't look as if there was anything wrong with him except just then."

The florid face, tangible paunch, and blue blazing eyes of her Uncle Fonse rose before Marcy with an insistent and embodied reality in Ruth's quiet speech. She slipped her hand down and took Allan's hand in hers.

"I was sorry for him," Ruth went on in the same flat clear voice. "His clothes were all dusty and he'd been walking out in the sun without any hat. I got him the eggs and some coffee and a big piece of the gingerbread that I'd made in the morning. I was sorry for him but I was afraid of him too. I thought if I could only keep him from getting angry—"

"I wasn't afraid of him," Allan said. He climbed over and sat down in Marcy's lap.

"Did he say anything about me?" Marcy asked.

Ruth bent her head. "He doesn't like you, Marcy," she said. "That's the reason I wanted you to stay home with Heman and William. He still remembers about last time. His eyes looked funny when he talked about you."

"He won't come looking for me here," said Marcy. She smiled with bravado and bounced Allan up and down on her knees.

"Tell me a story, Marcy," Allan said.

"I don't know any stories," Marcy said, "except the one Frankie told me today about a man down around Maysville who killed his wife and whole famb'ly with an ax, all but one boy that got away, and that boy grew up and got himself a wife and children and killed *his* whole famb'ly with an ax."

"You oughtn't to tell him things like that, Marcy," Ruth said to her. She looked at Allan. "I think it's time you went to bed," she said.

"Tell me a *long* story, Marcy," Allan said. He put his arms tightly around her neck and hung back, looking up into her face.

"You have to go to bed now," Marcy said. "I'll tell you a long story the next time I come."

"Tomorrow?" said Allan.

"Maybe tomorrow," said Marcy. She got up, lifting him as she rose; he held his arms tightly about her neck.

"He's too heavy for you, Marcy," said Ruth.

"No, he isn't," Marcy said.

She carried him out into the hall and up the stairs to the second floor. He laughed when he felt himself slipping down.

"I'm too heavy for you, Marcy," he said.

Marcy laughed too, but the laughter sounded strange in the hot quiet house. It was dusk upstairs.

Ruth came upstairs behind them and put Allan to bed. When the light was on in the bathroom and there were the noises of splashing water and Allan's rich squeal of protest or enjoyment, it was almost cheerful for a while; but presently Allan was in bed with the lights turned out and Marcy and Ruth were standing in the hall.

"Let's not go downstairs," Marcy said. She went into Ruth's and Clint's room and sat down there.

"It's so hot up here," Ruth said; but she too came in slowly and sat down.

They did not tell each other about the fear that made them feel safer here, upstairs in the dusk, than in the accessible rooms below.

They sat beside the open windows and they could see the sky growing dark outside, and the stars coming out, and the fireflies beginning to rise silently from the grass.

"I wonder where Uncle Fonce is," Marcy said. "By this time maybe he's a long way off."

"Maybe," said Ruth.

"He won't come back here again," Marcy said. Her voice without confidence asked a question, which Ruth answered also without confidence.

"He might," said Ruth. "He might not even remember he's been here. Sometimes he remembers things now and sometimes he doesn't."

They looked at each other through the dark. Then the telephone shrilled suddenly in the hall downstairs.

Ruth jumped up.

"I'll go with you," Marcy said.

They went out into the hall and turned on the light. It looked bright and strange when they gazed down the stairwell. Ruth ran downstairs, but Marcy stayed at the head of the steps. She listened and heard Ruth talking over the telephone to Clint.

In a few minutes Ruth came upstairs again. Her face looked different, relieved and almost gay. "That was Clint," she said. "He'll be home in an hour."

"Did they find him?" asked Marcy.

"No," said Ruth. She spoke with sudden reckless faith. "He's probably miles and miles from here by now."

They went back into the bedroom and sat down again.

"Your father's coming home with Clint," said Ruth. "He's going to stop off for you here on his way."

"All right," said Marcy.

They sat in silence for a while.

The little flutter of gaiety and security subsided quickly,

and a tense impatience took its place. They heard the loud steady stroke of crickets in the grass outside.

"Ruth," said Marcy after a little, "isn't it almost time?"

Ruth got up and looked at the faintly shining hands of a little clock which stood on the night table beside the bed.

"It's just fifteen minutes since Clint called," she said.

She came back again and sat down beside Marcy before the window. They talked in low voices. Suddenly Marcy said, "Hush!"

They listened. A sound defined itself, was repeated, again repeated, a long, patient, tentative, rattling sound, as if someone were trying the screen door downstairs.

"Clint?" Marcy whispered.

Ruth shook her head.

Through the steady thudding of their hearts the sound came again, now more prolonged and forceful; they heard the dry rasp of wood against wood.

"We ought to call someone," said Ruth. She stood up with sudden frightened resolution. "Heman and William, or the police."

"No," said Marcy. She got up too. "If we go downstairs he'll see us." She whispered, "We'll be quiet and he'll think there's nobody here."

They stood silent again, listening, imagining the man standing there below: the heavy bulk of his figure in the darkness, the tangible paunch, the bright blue, queerly blazing eyes. His clothes were covered with dust and he wore no hat.

"Maybe he only came back for something to eat," said Marcy. "Maybe if we gave him something to eat he'd go away." She stood close to Ruth. She could see Ruth's strained white face.

"I'm afraid of him," Ruth said. "I'm terribly afraid. You never know what he might do, Marcy. Especially if he found you here—"

The rattling patiently persisted below. It would stop for a moment and then begin again. They imagined the big freckled hands shaking the door to and fro with a strong, puzzled, infantile insistence. Ruth shuddered slightly.

"The poor old man," she said with sudden nervous pity. "Why doesn't he die? Why doesn't God let him die?"

"Uncle FONSE won't die," said Marcy, standing straight and listening. "Uncle FONSE is as strong as anything."

She felt very still inside, every inch of her concentrated on the sound below; and this stillness seemed to reach outside her as well, to spread through the gray quiet room and through the broad, silent, early night outside, so that even the harsh monotonous pulsation of the crickets seemed remote and unreal to her ears. She felt how it felt to be afraid. It was a strange feeling: as if every fiber of her body had suddenly come intensely alive, and wary, and desperate for its existence.

Ruth whispered, "Marcy, that latch isn't very strong." She put out her hand and Marcy took it.

"Maybe he'll go away," Marcy said.

They stood silent again, listening intently. The rattling stopped.

Suddenly a sharp bright sound cut through the darkness: a long full peal of the doorbell below. Its bright warning plaint rang through the waiting house.

"Ruth," said Marcy, "Ruth—"

The bell rang again, and again, and again.

"Why doesn't he go away?" Ruth said to Marcy. She was shaking all over. "Why doesn't he go away? Why doesn't he go away?"

The long, patient, solemn peal of the doorbell sounded again, and again, and again, and again.

RAY BRADBURY

THE NIGHT

YOU ARE A CHILD IN A SMALL TOWN. You are, to be exact, eight years old, and it is growing late at night. Late for you, accustomed to bedding in at nine or nine-thirty; once in a while perhaps begging Mom or Dad to let you stay up later to hear Sam and Henry on that strange radio that is popular in this year of 1927. But most of the time you are in bed and snug at this time of night.

It is a warm summer evening. You are in a small house on a small street in the outer part of town where there are few street lights. There is only one store open, about a block away—Mrs. Singer's. In the hot evening Mother has been ironing the Monday wash and you have intermittently been begging for ice cream and staring into the dark.

You and your mother are all alone at home in the warm darkness of summer. Finally, just before it is time for Mrs. Singer to close her store, Mother relents and tells you, "Run get a pint of ice cream and be sure she packs it tight."

You ask if you can get a scoop of chocolate on top, because you don't like vanilla, and Mother agrees. You clutch the money and run barefooted over the warm evening cement sidewalk, under the apple trees and oak trees, toward the store. The town is so quiet and far off you can only hear the crickets sounding in the spaces beyond the hot indigo trees that hold back the stars.

Your bare feet slap the pavement, you cross the street and find Mrs. Singer moving ponderously about her store, singing Yiddish melodies.

"Pint ice cream?" she says. "Chocolate on top? Yes!"

You watch her fumble the metal top off the ice-cream freezer and manipulate the scoop, packing the cardboard pint chock full with "chocolate on top, yes!" You give the money, receive the chill, icy pack, and rubbing it across your brow and cheek, laughing, you thump barefootedly homeward. Behind you, the lights of the lonely little store

blink out and there is only a street light shimmering on the corner, and the whole city seems to be going to sleep.

Opening the screen door, you find Mom still ironing. She looks hot and irritated, but she smiles just the same.

"When will Dad be home from lodge meeting?" you ask.

"About eleven-thirty or twelve," Mother replies. She takes the ice cream to the kitchen, divides it. Giving you your special portion of chocolate, she dishes out some for herself and the rest is put away, "for Skipper and your father when they come."

Skipper is your brother. He is your older brother. He's twelve and healthy, red-faced, hawk-nosed, tawny-haired, broad-shouldered for his years, and always running. He is allowed to stay up later than you. Not much later, but enough to make him feel it is worth while having been born first. He is over on the other side of town this evening at a game of kick-the-can, and will be home soon.

You sit enjoying the ice cream. You are at the core of the deep quiet summer night. Your mother and yourself and the night all around this small house on this small street. You lick each spoon of ice cream thoroughly before digging for another, and Mom puts her ironing-board away and the hot iron in its case, and she sits in the arm-chair by the phonograph, eating her dessert and saying, "My lands, it was a hot day today. It's still hot. Earth soaks up all the heat and lets it out at night. It'll be soggy sleeping."

You both sit there listening to the summer silence. The dark is pressed down by every window and door, and there is no sound because the radio needs a new battery, and you have played all the Knickerbocker Quartet records and Al Jolson and Two Black Crows records to exhaustion; so you just sit on the hardwood floor and look out into the dark dark dark, pressing your nose against the screen until the flesh of its tip is molded into small dark squares.

"I wonder where your brother is?" Mother says after a while. Her spoon scrapes on the dish. "He should be home by now. It's almost nine-thirty."

"He'll be here," you say, knowing very well that he will be.

You follow Mom out to wash the dishes. Each sound, each rattle of spoon or dish is amplified in the baked evening. Silently you go to the living-room, remove the couch cushions and, together, yank it open and extend it down into the double bed that it secretly is. Mother makes the bed, punching pillows neatly to flump them up for your head. Then, as you are unbuttoning your shirt, she says, "Wait awhile, Doug."

"Why?"

"Because I say so."

"You look funny, Mom."

Mom sits down a moment, then stands up, goes to the door and calls. You listen to her calling and calling Skipper, Skipper, ~~Skipper~~ ~~Skipper~~ ~~Skipper~~ over and over. Her calling goes out into the summer warm dark and never comes back. The echoes pay no attention.

Skipper. Skipper. Skipper.

Skipper!

And as you sit on the floor a coldness that is not ice cream and not winter, and not part of summer's heat, goes through you. You notice Mom's eyes sliding, blinking; the way she stands undecided and is nervous. All of these things.

She opens the screen door. Stepping out into the night, she walks down the steps and down the front sidewalk under the lilac bush. You listen to her moving feet.

She calls again. Silence.

She calls twice more. You sit in the room. Any moment now, Skipper will reply, from down the long long narrow street, "All right, Mom! All right, Mother! Hey!"

But he doesn't answer. And for two minutes you sit looking at the made-up bed, the silent radio, the silent phonograph, at the chandelier with its crystal bobbins gleaming quietly, at the rug with the scarlet and purple curlicues on it. You stub your toe on the bed purposely to see if it hurts. It does.

Whining, the screen door opens, and Mother says, "Come on, Shorts. We'll take a walk."

"Where to?"

"Just down the block. Come on. Better put your shoes on, though. You'll catch cold."

"No, I won't. I'll be all right."

You take her hand. Together you walk down St. James Street. You smell lilacs in blossom, fallen apples lying crushed and odorous in the deep grass. Underfoot, the concrete is still warm, and the crickets are sounding louder against the darkening dark. You reach a corner, turn, and walk toward the ravine.

Off somewhere a car goes by, flashing its lights in the distance. There is such a complete lack of life, light, and activity. Here and there, back off from where you are walking toward the ravine you see faint squares of light where people are still up. But most of the houses, darkened, are sleeping already, and there are a few lightless places where the occupants of a dwelling sit talking low dark talk on their front porches. You hear a porch swing squeaking as you walk near.

"I wish your father was home," says Mother. Her large hand tightens around your small one. "Just wait'll I get that boy. I'll spank him within an inch of his life."

A razor strop hangs in the kitchen for this. You think of it, remembering when Dad has doubled and flourished it with muscled control over your frantic limbs. You doubt Mother will carry out her promise.

Now you have walked another block and are standing by the holy black silhouette of the German Baptist Church at the corner of Chapel Street and Glen Rock. In back of the church, a hundred yards away, the ravine begins. You can smell it. It has a dark-sewer, rotten-foliage, thick-green odor. It is a wide ravine that cuts and twists across the town, a jungle by day, a place to let alone at night, Mother has often declared.

You should feel encouraged by the nearness of the German Baptist Church, but you are not—because the building is not illumined, is cold and useless as a pile of ruins on the ravine edge.

You are only eight years old, you know little of death, fear, or dread. Death is the waxen effigy in the coffin when

you were six and Grandfather passed away—looking like a great fallen vulture in his casket, silent, withdrawn, no more to tell you how to be a good boy, no more to comment succinctly on politics. Death is your little sister one morning when you awoke at the age of seven, looked into her crib, and saw her staring up at you with a blind blue, fixed and frozen stare until the men came with a small wicker basket to take her away. Death is when you stand by her high-chair four weeks later and suddenly realize she'll never be in it again, laughing and crying and making you jealous of her because she was born. That is death.

But this is more than death. This summer night wading deep in time and stars and warm eternity. It is an essence of all the things you will ever feel or see or hear in your life again, being brought steadily home to you all at once.

Leaving the sidewalk, you walk along a trodden, pebbled, weed-fringed path to the ravine's edge. Crickets, in loud full drumming chorus now, are shouting to quiver the dead. You follow obediently behind brave, fine, tall Mother who is defender of all the universe. You feel bravery because she goes before, and you hang back a trifle for a moment, and then hurry on, too. Together, then, you approach, reach, and pause at the very end of civilization.

The ravine.

Here and now, down there in that pit of jungled blackness is suddenly all the evil you will ever know. Evil you will never understand. All of the nameless things are there. Later, when you have grown, you'll be given names to label them with. Meaningless syllables to describe the waiting nothingness. Down there in the huddled shadow, among thick trees and trailed vines, lives the odor of decay. Here, at this spot, civilization ends, reason ends, and a universal evil takes over.

You realize you are alone. You and your mother. Her hand trembles.

Her hand *trembles*.

Your belief in your private world is shattered. You feel Mother tremble. Why? Is she, too, doubtful? But she is bigger, stronger, more intelligent than yourself, isn't she? Does she, too, feel that intangible menace, that groping

out of darkness, that crouching malignancy down below? Is there, then, no strength in growing up? no solace in being adult? no sanctuary in life? no fleshly citadel strong enough to withstand the scrabbling assault of midnights? Doubts flush you. Ice cream lives again in your throat, stomach, spine, and limbs; you are instantly cold as a wind out of December-gone.

You realize that all men are like this. That each person is to himself one alone. One oneness, a unit in a society, but always afraid. Like here, standing. If you should scream, if you should holler for help, would it matter?

Blackness could come swiftly, swallowing; and in one titanicly freezing moment all would be concluded. Long before dawn, long before police with flashlights might probe the dark disturbed pathway, long before men with trembling brains could rustle down the pebbles to your help. Even if they were within 500 yards of you now, and help *certainly* is, in three seconds a dark tide could rise to take all eight years from you and—

The essential impact of life's loneliness crushes your beginning-to-tremble body. Mother is alone, too. She cannot look to the sanctity of marriage, the protection of her family's love, she cannot look to the United States Constitution or the City Police, she cannot look anywhere, in this very instant, save into her heart, and there she'll find nothing but uncontrollable repugnance and a will to fear. In this instant it is an individual problem seeking an individual solution. You must accept being alone and work on from there.

You swallow hard, cling to her. *Oh, Lord, don't let her die, please, you think. Don't do anything to us. Father will be coming home from lodge meeting in an hour and if the house is empty—*

Mother advances down the path into the primeval jungle. Your voice trembles. "Mom. Skip's all right. Skip's all right. He's all right. Skip's all right."

Mother's voice is strained, high. "He always comes through here. I tell him not to, but those darned kids, they come through here anyway. Some night he'll come through and never come out again—"

Never come out again. That could mean anything. Tramps. Criminals. Darkness. Accident. Most of all—death.

Alone in the universe.

There are a million small towns like this all over the world. Each as dark, as lonely, each as removed, as full of shuddering and wonder. The reedy playing of minor-key violins is the small towns' music, with no lights but many shadows. Oh, the vast swelling loneliness of them. The secret damp ravines of them. Life is a horror lived in them at night, when at all sides sanity, marriage, children, happiness, are threatened by an ogre called Death.

Mother raises her voice into the dark. "Skip! Skipper!"

Suddenly, both of you realize there is something wrong.

The crickets have stopped chirping.

Silence is complete.

Never in your life a silence like this one. One so utterly complete. Why should the crickets cease? Why? What reason? They have never stopped ever before. Not ever.

Unless. Unless—

Something is going to happen.

It is as if the whole ravine is tensing, bunching together its black fibers, drawing in power from sleeping countryside all about, for miles and miles. From dew-sodden forest and dells and rolling hills where dogs tilt heads to moons, from all around the great silence is sucked into one center, and you are at the core of it. In ten seconds now, something will happen, something will happen. The crickets keep their truce, the stars are so low you can almost brush the tinsel. There are swarms of them, hot and sharp.

Growing, growing, the silence. Growing, growing, the tenseness. Oh, it's so dark, so far away from everything. Oh, God!

And then, way way off across the ravine:

"Okay, Mom! Coming, Mother!"

And again: "Hi, Mom! Coming, Mom!"

And then the quick scuttering of tennis shoes padding down through the pit of the ravine as three kids come

dashing, giggling. Your brother Skipper, Chuck Redman, and Augie Bartz. Running, giggling.

The stars suck up like the stung antennae of ten million snails.

The crickets sing!

The darkness pulls back, startled, shocked, angry. Pulls back, losing its appetite at being so rudely interrupted as it prepared to feed. As the dark retreats like a wave on the shore, three kids pile out of it, laughing.

"Hi, Mom! Hi, Shorts! Hey!"

It smells like Skipper, all right. Sweat and grass and his oiled leather baseball glove.

"Young man, you're going to get a licking," declares Mother. She puts away her fear instantly. You know she will never tell anybody of it, ever. It will be in her heart, though, for all time, as it is in your heart, for all time.

You walk home to bed in the late summer night. You are glad Skipper is alive. Very glad. For a moment there you thought—

Far off in the dim moonlit country, over a viaduct and down a valley, a train goes rushing along and it whistles like a lost metal thing, nameless and running. You go to bed, shivering, beside your brother, listening to that train whistle, and thinking of a cousin who lived way out in the country where that train is now; a cousin who died of pneumonia late at night years and years ago—

You smell the sweat of Skip beside you. It is magic. You stop trembling. You hear footsteps outside the house on the sidewalk, as Mother is turning out the lights. A man clears his throat in a way you recognize.

Mom says, "That's your father."

It is.

D. H. LAWRENCE

THE ROCKING-HORSE WINNER

THERE WAS A WOMAN WHO WAS BEAUTIFUL, who started with all the advantages, yet she had no luck. She married for love, and the love turned to dust. She had bonny children, yet she felt they had been thrust upon her, and she could not love them. They looked at her coldly, as if they were finding fault with her. And hurriedly she felt she must cover up some fault in herself. Yet what it was that she must cover up she never knew. Nevertheless, when her children were present, she always felt the center of her heart go hard. This troubled her, and in her manner she was all the more gentle and anxious for her children, as if she loved them very much. Only she herself knew that at the center of her heart was a hard little place that could not feel love, no, not for anybody. Everybody else said of her, "She is such a good mother. She adores her children." Only she herself, and her children themselves, knew it was not so. They read it in each other's eyes.

There were a boy and two little girls. They lived in a pleasant house, with a garden, and they had discreet servants, and felt themselves superior to anyone in the neighborhood.

Although they lived in style, they felt always an anxiety in the house. There was never enough money. The mother had a small income, and the father had a small income, but not nearly enough for the social position which they had to keep up. The father went in to town to some office. But though he had good prospects, these prospects never materialized. There was always the grinding sense of the shortage of money, though the style was always kept up.

At last the mother said, "I will see if *I* can't make something." But she did not know where to begin. She racked her brains, and tried this thing and the other, but could not find anything successful. The failure made deep lines come into her face. Her children were growing up, they would have to go to school. There must be more money,

there must be more money. The father, who was always very handsome and expensive in his tastes, seemed as if he never *would* be able to do anything worth doing. And the mother, who had a great belief in herself, did not succeed any better, and her tastes were just as expensive.

And so the house came to be haunted by the unspoken phrase: *There must be more money! There must be more money!* The children could hear it all the time, though nobody said it aloud. They heard it at Christmas, when the expensive and splendid toys filled the nursery. Behind the shining modern rocking-horse, behind the small doll's house, a voice would start whispering: "There *must* be more money! There *must* be more money!" And the children would stop playing, to listen for a moment. They would look into each other's eyes, to see if they had all heard. And each one saw in the eyes of the other two that they too had heard. "There *must* be more money! There *must* be more money!"

It came whispering from the springs of the still-swaying rocking-horse, and even the horse, bending his wooden, champing head, heard it. The big doll, sitting so pink and smirking in her new pram, could hear it quite plainly, and seemed to be smirking all the more self-consciously because of it. The foolish puppy, too, that took the place of the teddy-bear, he was looking so extraordinarily foolish for no other reason but that he heard the secret whisper all over the house: "There *must* be more money."

Yet nobody ever said it aloud. The whisper was everywhere, and therefore no one spoke it. Just as no one ever says, "We are breathing!" in spite of the fact that breath is coming and going all the time.

"Mother!" said the boy Paul one day, "why don't we keep a car of our own? Why do we always use uncle's, or else a taxi?"

"Because we're the poor members of the family," said the mother.

"But why *are* we, Mother?"

"Well—I suppose," she said slowly and bitterly, "it's because your father has no luck."

The boy was silent for some time. "Is luck money,

Mother?" he asked, rather timidly.

"No, Paul! Not quite. It's what causes you to have money."

"Oh!" said Paul vaguely. "I thought when Uncle Oscar said *filthy lucker*, it meant money."

"*Filthy lucre* does mean money," said the mother. "But it's lucre, not luck."

"Oh!" said the boy. "Then what *is* luck, Mother?"

"It's what causes you to have money. If you're lucky you have money. That's why it's better to be born lucky than rich. If you're rich, you may lose your money. But if you're lucky, you will always get more money."

"Oh! Will you! And is Father not lucky?"

"Very unlucky, I should say," she said bitterly.

The boy watched her with unsure eyes. "Why?" he asked.

"I don't know. Nobody ever knows why one person is lucky and another unlucky."

"Don't they? Nobody at all? Does *nobody* know?"

"Perhaps God! But He never tells."

"He ought to, then. And aren't you lucky, either, Mother?"

"I can't be, if I married an unlucky husband."

"But by yourself, aren't you?"

"I used to think I was, before I married. Now I think I am very unlucky indeed."

"Why?"

"Well—never mind! Perhaps I'm not really," she said.

The child looked at her, to see if she meant it. But he saw, by the lines of her mouth, that she was only trying to hide something from him.

"Well, anyhow," he said stoutly, "I'm a lucky person."

"Why?" said his mother, with a sudden laugh.

He stared at her. He didn't even know why he had said it. "God told me," he asserted, brazening it out.

"I hope He did, dear!" she said, again with a laugh, but rather bitter.

"He did, Mother!"

"Excellent!" said the mother, using one of her husband's exclamations.

The boy saw she did not believe him; or rather, that she paid no attention to his assertion. This angered him somewhat, and made him want to compel her attention.

He went off by himself, vaguely, in a childish way, seeking for the clue to "luck." Absorbed, taking no heed of other people, he went about with a sort of stealth, seeking inwardly for luck. He wanted luck, he wanted it, he wanted it. When the two girls were playing dolls, in the nursery, he would sit on his big rocking-horse, charging madly into space, with a frenzy that made the little girls peer at him uneasily. Wildly the horse careered, the waving dark hair of the boy tossed, his eyes had a strange glare in them. The little girls dared not speak to him.

When he had ridden to the end of his mad little journey, he climbed down and stood in front of his rocking-horse, staring fixedly into its lowered face. Its red mouth was slightly open, its big eye was wide and glassy bright.

"Now!" he would silently command the snorting steed. "Now take me to where there is luck! Now take me!"

And he would slash the horse on the neck with the little whip he had asked Uncle Oscar for. He *knew* the horse could take him to where there was luck, if only he forced it. So he would mount again, and start on his furious ride, hoping at last to get there. He knew he could get there.

"You'll break your horse, Paul!" said the nurse.

"He's always riding like that! I wish he'd leave off!" said his elder sister Joan.

But he only glared down on them in silence. Nurse gave him up. She could make nothing of him. Anyhow he was growing beyond her.

One day his mother and his Uncle Oscar came in when he was on one of his furious rides. He did not speak to them.

"Hallo! you young jockey! Riding a winner?" said his uncle.

"Aren't you growing too big for a rocking-horse? You're not a very little boy any longer, you know," said his mother.

But Paul only gave a blue glare from his big, rather close-set eyes. He would speak to nobody when he was in

full tilt. His mother watched him with an anxious expression on her face.

At last he suddenly stopped forcing his horse into the mechanical gallop, and slid down. "Well, I got there!" he announced fiercely, his blue eyes still flaring, and his sturdy long legs straddling apart.

"Where did you get to?" asked his mother.

"Where I wanted to go to," he flared back at her.

"That's right, son," said Uncle Oscar. "Don't you stop till you get there. What's the horse's name?"

"He doesn't have a name," said the boy.

"Gets on without all right?" asked the uncle.

"Well, he has different names. He was called Sansovino last week."

"Sansovino, eh? Won the Ascot. How did you know his name?"

"He always talks about horse races with Bassett," said Joan.

The uncle was delighted to find that his small nephew was posted with all the racing news. Bassett, the young gardener who had been wounded in the left foot in the war, and had got his present job through Oscar Cresswell, whose batman he had been, was a perfect blade of the "turf." He lived in the racing events, and the small boy lived with him.

Oscar Cresswell got it all from Bassett.

"Master Paul comes and asks me, so I can't do more than tell him, sir," said Bassett, his face terribly serious, as if he were speaking of religious matters.

"And does he ever put anything on a horse he fancies?"

"Well—I don't want to give him away—he's a young sport, a fine sport, sir. Would you mind asking him himself? He sort of takes a pleasure in it, and perhaps he'd feel I was giving him away, sir, if you don't mind." Bassett was serious as a church.

The uncle went back to his nephew, and took him off for a ride in the car. "Say, Paul, old man, do you ever put anything on a horse?" the uncle asked.

The boy watched the handsome man closely. "Why, do you think I oughtn't to?" he parried.

"Not a bit of it! I thought perhaps you might give me a tip for the Lincoln."

The car sped on into the country, going down to Uncle Oscar's place in Hampshire.

"Honor bright?" said the nephew.

"Honor bright, son!" said the uncle.

"Well, then, Daffodil."

"Daffodil! I doubt it, sonny. What about Mirza?"

"I only know the winner," said the boy. "That's Daffodil!"

"Daffodil, eh?"

There was a pause. Daffodil was an obscure horse, comparatively.

"Uncle!"

"Yes, son?"

"You won't let it go any further, will you? I promised Bassett."

"Bassett be damned, old man! What's he got to do with it?"

"We're partners! We've been partners from the first! Uncle, he lent me my first five shillings, which I lost. I promised him, honor bright, it was only between me and him; only you gave me that ten-shilling note I started winning with, so I thought you were lucky. You won't let it go any further, will you?"

The boy gazed at his uncle from those big, hot blue eyes, set rather close together. The uncle stirred and laughed uneasily.

"Right you are, son! I'll keep your tip private. Daffodil, eh! How much are you putting on him?"

"All except twenty pounds," said the boy. "I keep that in reserve."

The uncle thought it a good joke. "You keep twenty pounds in reserve, do you, you young romancer? What are you betting, then?"

"I'm betting three hundred," said the boy gravely. "But it's between you and me, Uncle Oscar! Honor bright?"

The uncle burst into a roar of laughter. "It's between you and me all right, you young Nat Gould," he said, laughing. "But where's your three hundred?"

"Bassett keeps it for me. We're partners."

"You are, are you! And what is Bassett putting on Daffodil?"

"He won't go quite as high as I do, I expect. Perhaps he'll go a hundred and fifty."

"What, pennies?" laughed the uncle.

"Pounds," said the child, with a surprised look at his uncle. "Bassett keeps a bigger reserve than I do."

Between wonder and amusement, Uncle Oscar was silent. He pursued the matter no further, but he determined to take his nephew with him to the Lincoln races.

"Now, son," he said, "I'm putting twenty on Mirza, and I'll put five for you on any horse you fancy. What's your pick?"

"Daffodil, Uncle!"

"No, not the fiver on Daffodil!"

"I should if it was my own fiver," said the child.

"Good! Good! Right you are! A fiver for me and a fiver for you on Daffodil."

The child had never been to a race meeting before, and his eyes were blue fire. He pursed his mouth tight, and watched. A Frenchman just in front had put his money on Lancelot. Wild with excitement, he flayed his arms up and down, yelling, "*Lancelot! Lancelot!*" in his French accent.

Daffodil came in first, Lancelot second, Mirza third. The child, flushed and with eyes blazing, was curiously serene. His uncle brought him five five-pound notes; four to one.

"What am I to do with these?" he cried, waving them before the boy's eyes.

"I suppose we'll talk to Bassett," said the boy. "I expect I have fifteen hundred now, and twenty in reserve, and this twenty."

His uncle studied him for some moments. "Look here, son!" he said. "You're not serious about Bassett and that fifteen hundred, are you?"

"Yes, I am. But it's between you and me, Uncle! Honor bright!"

"Honor bright all right, son! But I must talk to Bassett."

"If you'd like to be a partner, Uncle, with Bassett and me, we could all be partners. Only you'd have to promise, honor bright, Uncle, not to let it go beyond us three. Bassett and I are lucky, and you must be lucky, because it was your ten shillings I started winning with."

Uncle Oscar took both Bassett and Paul into Richmond Park for an afternoon, and there they talked.

"It's like this, you see, sir," Bassett said. "Master Paul would get me talking about racing events, spinning yarns, you know, sir. And he was always keen on knowing if I'd made or if I'd lost. It's about a year since, now, that I put five shillings on Blush of Dawn for him; and we lost. Then the luck turned, with that ten shillings he had from you; that we put on Singhalese. And since that time, it's been pretty steady, all things considering. What do you say, Master Paul?"

"We're all right when we're *sure*," said Paul. "It's when we're not quite sure that we go down."

"Oh, but we're careful then," said Bassett.

"But when are you *sure*?" smiled Uncle Oscar.

"It's Master Paul, sir," said Bassett, in a secret, religious voice. "It's as if he had it from heaven. Like Daffodil now, for the Lincoln. That was as sure as eggs."

"Did you put anything on Daffodil?" asked Oscar Cresswell.

"Yes, sir. I made my bit."

"And my nephew?"

Bassett was obstinately silent, looking at Paul.

"I made twelve hundred, didn't I, Bassett? I told Uncle I was putting three hundred on Daffodil."

"That's right," said Bassett, nodding.

"But where's the money?" asked the uncle.

"I keep it safe locked up, sir. Master Paul, he can have it any minute he likes to ask for it."

"What, fifteen hundred pounds?"

"And twenty! And *forty*, that is, with the twenty he made on the course."

"It's amazing!" said the uncle.

"If Master Paul offers you to be partners, sir, I would, if I were you, if you'll excuse me," said Bassett.

Oscar Cresswell thought about it. "I'll see the money," he said.

They drove home again, and sure enough, Bassett came round to the garden-house with £1500 in notes. The 20-pounds reserve was left with Joe Glee, in the Turf Commission deposit.

"You see, it's all right, Uncle, when I'm *sure*! Then we go strong, for all we're worth. Don't we, Bassett?"

"We do that, Master Paul."

"And when are you sure?" said the uncle, laughing.

"Oh, well, sometimes I'm *absolutely* sure, like about Daffodil," said the boy; "and sometimes I have an idea; and sometimes I haven't even an idea, have I, Bassett? Then we're careful, because we mostly go down."

"You do, do you! And when you're sure, like about Daffodil, what makes you sure, sonny?"

"Oh, well, I don't know," said the boy uneasily. "I'm sure, you know, Uncle; that's all."

"It's as if he had it from heaven, sir," Bassett reiterated.

"I should say so!" said the uncle.

But he became a partner. And when the Leger was coming on, Paul was "sure" about Lively Spark, which was a quite inconsiderable horse. The boy insisted on putting a thousand on the horse. Bassett went for five hundred, and Oscar Cresswell two hundred. Lively Spark came in first, and the betting had been ten to one against him. Paul had made ten thousand.

"You see," he said, "I was absolutely sure of him."

Even Oscar Cresswell had cleared two thousand. "Look here, son," he said, "this sort of thing makes me nervous."

"It needn't, Uncle! Perhaps I shan't be sure again for a long time."

"But what are you going to do with your money?" asked the uncle.

"Of course," said the boy, "I started it for Mother. She said she had no luck, because Father is unlucky, so I thought if *I* was lucky, it might stop whispering."

"What might stop whispering?"

"Our house! I *hate* our house for whispering."

"What does it whisper?"

"Why—why"—the boy fidgeted—"why, I don't know! But it's always short of money, you know, Uncle."

"I know it, son, I know it."

"You know people send Mother writs, don't you, Uncle?"

"I'm afraid I do," said the uncle.

"And then the house whispers like people laughing at you behind your back. It's awful, that is! I thought if I was lucky—"

"You might stop it," added the uncle.

The boy watched him with big blue eyes, that had an uncanny cold fire in them, and he said never a word.

"Well, then!" said the uncle. "What are we doing?"

"I shouldn't like Mother to know I was lucky," said the boy.

"Why not, son?"

"She'd stop me."

"I don't think she would."

"Oh!"—and the boy writhed in an odd way—"I *don't* want her to know, Uncle."

"All right, son! We'll manage it without her knowing."

They managed it very easily. Paul, at the other's suggestion, handed over £5000 to his uncle, who deposited it with the family lawyer, who was then to inform Paul's mother that a relative had put £5000 into his hands, which sum was to be paid out a thousand pounds at a time, on the mother's birthday, for the next five years.

"So she'll have a birthday present of a thousand pounds for five successive years," said Uncle Oscar. "I hope it won't make it all the harder for her later."

Paul's mother had her birthday in November. The house had been "whispering" worse than ever lately, and even in spite of his luck, Paul could not bear up against it. He was very anxious to see the effect of the birthday letter, telling his mother about the thousand pounds.

When there were no visitors, Paul now took his meals with his parents, as he was beyond the nursery control. His mother went into town every day. She had discovered that she had an odd knack of sketching furs and dress materials, so she worked secretly in the studio of a

friend who was the chief "artist" for the leading drapers. She drew the figures of ladies in furs and ladies in silk and sequins for the newspaper advertisements. This young woman artist earned several thousand pounds a year, but Paul's mother only made several hundreds, and she was again dissatisfied. She *so* wanted to be first in something, and she did not succeed, even in making sketches for drapery advertisements.

She was down to breakfast on the morning of her birthday. Paul watched her face as she read her letters. He knew the lawyer's letter. As his mother read it, her face hardened and became more expressionless. Then a cold, determined look came on her mouth. She hid the letter under the pile of others, and said not a word about it.

"Didn't you have anything nice in the post for your birthday, Mother?" said Paul.

"Quite moderately nice," she said, her voice cold and absent. She went away to town without saying more.

But in the afternoon Uncle Oscar appeared. He said Paul's mother had had a long interview with the lawyer, asking if the whole five thousand could not be advanced at once, as she was in debt.

"What do you think, Uncle?" said the boy.

"I leave it to you, son."

"Oh, let her have it, then! We can get some more with the other," said the boy.

"A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, laddie!" said Uncle Oscar.

"But I'm sure to *know* for the Grand National; or the Lincolnshire; or else the Derby. I'm sure to know for *one* of them," said Paul.

So Uncle Oscar signed the agreement, and Paul's mother touched the whole five thousand. Then something very curious happened. The voices in the house suddenly went mad, like a chorus of frogs on a spring evening. There were certain new furnishings, and Paul had a tutor. He was *really* going to Eton, his father's school, in the following autumn. There were flowers in the winter, and a blossoming of the luxury Paul's mother had been used to. And yet the voices in the house, behind the sprays of

mimosa and almond-blossom, and from under the piles of iridescent cushions, simply trilled and screamed in a sort of ecstasy, "There *must* be more money! Oh-h-h! There *must* be more money! Oh, now, now-w! now-w-w—there *must* be more money!—more than ever! More than ever!"

It frightened Paul terribly. He studied away at his Latin and Greek with his tutor. But his intense hours were spent with Bassett. The Grand National had gone by; he had not "known," and had lost £100. Summer was at hand. He was in agony for the Lincoln. But even for the Lincoln he didn't know," and he lost £50. He became wild-eyed and strange, as if something were going to explode in him.

"Let it alone, son! Don't you bother about it!" urged Uncle Oscar. But it was as if the boy couldn't really hear what his uncle was saying.

"I've got to know for the Derby! I've *got* to know for the Derby!" the child reiterated, his big blue eyes blazing with a sort of madness.

His mother noticed how overwrought he was. "You'd better go to the seaside. Wouldn't you like to go now to the seaside, instead of waiting? I think you'd better," she said, looking down at him anxiously, her heart curiously heavy because of him.

But the child lifted his uncanny blue eyes. "I couldn't possibly go before the Derby, Mother!" he said. "I couldn't possibly!"

"Why not?" she said, her voice becoming heavy when she was opposed. "Why not? You can still go from the seaside to see the Derby with your Uncle Oscar, if that's what you wish. No need for you to wait here. Besides, I think you care too much about these races. It's a bad sign. My family has been a gambling family, and you won't know till you grow up how much damage it has done. But it has done damage. I shall have to send Bassett away, and ask Uncle Oscar not to talk racing to you, unless you promise to be reasonable about it. Go away to the seaside and forget it. You're all nerves!"

"I'll do what you like, Mother, so long as you don't send me away till after the Derby," the boy said.

"Send you away from where? Just from this house?"

"Yes," he said, gazing at her.

"Why, you curious child, what makes you care about this house so much, suddenly? I never knew you loved it!"

He gazed at her without speaking. He had a secret within a secret, something he had not divulged, even to Bassett or to his Uncle Oscar.

But his mother, after standing undecided and a little bit sullen for some moments, said, "Very well, then! Don't go to the seaside till after the Derby, if you don't wish it. But promise me you won't let your nerves go to pieces! Promise you won't think so much about horse racing and events, as you call them!"

"Oh, no!" said the boy casually. "I won't think much about them, Mother. You needn't worry. I wouldn't worry, Mother, if I were you."

"If you were me and I were you," said his mother, "I wonder what we *should* do!"

"But you know you needn't worry, Mother, don't you?" the boy repeated.

"I should be awfully glad to know it," she said wearily.

"Oh, well, you *can*, you know. I mean you *ought* to know you needn't worry!" he insisted.

"Ought I? Then I'll see about it," she said.

Paul's secret of secrets was his wooden horse, that which had no name. Since he was emancipated from a nurse and a nursery governess, he had had his rocking-horse removed to his own bedroom at the top of the house.

"Surely you're too big for a rocking-horse!" his mother had remonstrated.

"Well, you see, Mother, till I can have a *real* horse, I like to have *some* sort of animal about," had been his quaint answer.

"Do you feel he keeps you company?" she laughed.

"Oh, yes! He's very good, he always keeps me company, when I'm there," said Paul.

So the horse, rather shabby, stood in an arrested prance in the boy's bedroom.

The Derby was drawing near, and the boy grew more and more tense. He hardly heard what was spoken to him,

he was very frail, and his eyes were really uncanny. His mother had sudden strange seizures of uneasiness about him. Sometimes, for half an hour, she would feel a sudden anxiety about him that was almost anguish. She wanted to rush to him at once, and know he was safe.

Two nights before the Derby, she was at a big party in town, when one of her rushes of anxiety about her boy, her first-born, gripped her heart till she could hardly speak. She fought with the feeling, might and main, for she believed in common sense. But it was too strong. She had to leave the dance and go downstairs to telephone to the country. The children's nursery governess was terribly surprised and startled at being rung up in the night.

"Are the children all right, Miss Wilmot?"

"Oh, yes, they are quite all right."

"Master Paul? Is he all right?"

"He went to bed as right as a trivet. Shall I run up and look at him?"

"No!" said Paul's mother reluctantly. "No! Don't trouble. It's all right. Don't sit up. We shall be home fairly soon." She did not want her son's privacy intruded upon.

"Very good," said the governess.

It was about one o'clock when Paul's mother and father drove up to their house. All was still. Paul's mother went to her room and slipped off her white fur cloak. She had told her maid not to wait up for her. She heard her husband downstairs, mixing a whisky-and-soda.

And then, because of the strange anxiety at her heart, she stole upstairs to her son's room. Noiselessly she went along the upper corridor. Was there a faint noise? What was it?

She stood, with arrested muscles, outside his door, listening. There was a strange, heavy, and yet not loud noise. Her heart stood still. It was a soundless noise, yet rushing and powerful. Something huge, in violent, hushed motion. What was it? What in God's Name was it? She ought to know. She felt that she *knew* the noise. She knew what it was.

Yet she could not place it. She couldn't say what it was. And on and on it went, like a madness.

Softly, frozen with anxiety and fear, she turned the door handle.

The room was dark. Yet in the space near the window, she heard and saw something plunging to and fro. She gazed in fear and amazement.

Then suddenly she switched on the light, and saw her son, in his green pajamas, madly surging on his rocking-horse. The blaze of light suddenly lit him up, as he urged the wooden horse, and lit her up, as she stood, blond, in her dress of pale green and crystal, in the doorway.

"Paul!" she cried. "Whatever are you doing?"

"It's Malabar!" he screamed, in a powerful, strange voice. "It's Malabar!"

His eyes blazed at her for one strange and senseless second, as he ceased urging his wooden horse. Then he fell with a crash to the ground, and she, all her tormented motherhood flooding upon her, rushed to gather him up.

But he was unconscious, and unconscious he remained, with some brain-fever. He talked and tossed, and his mother sat stonily by his side.

"Malabar! It's Malabar! Bassett, Bassett, I *know*; it's Malabar!"

So the child cried, trying to get up and urge the rocking-horse that gave him his inspiration.

"What does he mean by Malabar?" asked the heart-frozen mother.

"I don't know," said the father stonily.

"What does he mean by Malabar?" she asked her brother Oscar.

"It's one of the horses running for the Derby," was the answer.

And, in spite of himself, Oscar Cresswell spoke to Bassett, and himself put a thousand on Malabar, at 14 to one.

The third day of the illness was critical; they were watching for a change. The boy, with his rather long, curly hair, was tossing ceaselessly on the pillow. He neither slept nor regained consciousness, and his eyes were like blue stones. His mother sat, feeling her heart had gone, turned actually into a stone.

In the evening, Oscar Cresswell did not come, but Bas-

sett sent a message, saying could he come up for one moment, just one moment? Paul's mother was very angry at the intrusion, but on second thoughts she agreed. The boy was the same. Perhaps Bassett might bring him to consciousness.

The gardener, a shortish fellow with a little brown mustache and sharp little brown eyes, tiptoed into the room, touched his imaginary cap to Paul's mother, and stole to the bedside, staring with glittering, smallish eyes at the tossing, dying child.

"Master Paul!" he whispered. "Master Paul! Malabar came in first all right, a clean win. I did as you told me. You've made over seventy thousand pounds, you have; you've got over eighty thousand. Malabar came in all right, Master Paul."

"Malabar! Malabar! Did I say Malabar, Mother? Did I say Malabar? Do you think I'm lucky, Mother? I knew Malabar, didn't I? Over eighty thousand pounds! I call that lucky, don't you, Mother? Over eighty thousand pounds! I knew, didn't I know I knew? Malabar came in all right. If I ride my horse till I'm sure, then I tell you, Bassett, you can go as high as you like. Did you go for all you were worth, Bassett?"

"I went a thousand on it, Master Paul."

"I never told you, Mother, that if I can ride my horse, and *get there*, then I'm absolutely sure—oh, absolutely! Mother, did I ever tell you? I *am* lucky!"

"No, you never did," said the mother.

But the boy died in the night.

And even as he lay dead, his mother heard her brother's voice saying to her, "My God, Hester, you're eighty-odd thousand to the good, and a poor devil of a son to the bad. But, poor devil, poor devil, he's best gone out of a life where he rides his rocking-horse to find a winner."

GEORGES CAROUSSO

THE WARDEN

THE SEARCHING PARTY WAS GATHERED on the open hotel porch, smoking silently, casting uneasy glances up at the shrouded mountains. It was snowing hard up there. It would be a nasty search. Harlan Bellamy, the game warden, walked heavily up and down the porch, chewing viciously on the stem of his pipe. There was a man lost somewhere on the Big Panther range. Some fool tenderfoot deer hunter with not enough sense to carry a compass, or know how to use it if he did.

Having a man lost in your district meant trouble. It meant you had to make out reports to the Department; you had to gather up state troopers and the fire ranger and what guides did not happen to be working, and as many natives as you could get; you had to go out and find the dumb tenderfoot, and then you had to start making reports all over again. And all that while, every violator who had a piece of illegal doe meat could sneak right out of the country without a man to check him. If Game Warden Bellamy had his way, lost hunters could stay lost.

A little apart from the natives, the lost man's hunting companions formed a small, restless group. They were city slickers. They talked too much. They argued too much, in nervous little sentences that blamed Bill, the lost man, and the weather, and Joe, who should have stuck by Bill, and the country in general, and Big Panther Mountain in particular. The natives sat passively by. They listened and said nothing.

"What the devil are we waiting around here for?" a big man asked. He seemed to be the leader of the hunting-party.

Bellamy looked the man over coolly. "We're waiting for Bert Ellis," he said, trying to keep the anger out of his voice. "Best guide up Big Panther country. Knows it better than any of us."

Then suddenly, because he was scared, anger came into

his voice. "We don't go off half-cocked," he said irritably. "And if you folks didn't go off half-cocked, there wouldn't be men getting lost around here!" He knew he was scared. Big Panther country was plenty big! And Bear Trap Swamp, in back of it, was bigger still. The chances of finding the lost hunter were small. Bellamy faced the hunters, hemming them in with his bulk and anger.

"Just because there's a hard-surface road through here, you city folks think that this is tame country. It ain't! It's seventy-five miles of mountains and swamps and lakes straight west to the next road. You fellers think you can hunt this country without guides or compasses, or without even studying a topographical map. Every year some of you get lost. And when you get lost, you panic. And the panic kills you, if the cold don't."

The hunters did not answer but they looked up at the snow clouds on the mountains. A battered jitney pulled up and Bert Ellis, a small, wiry middle-aged man with a week's growth of beard, got out. He passed a critical eye over the men on the porch.

"This all the men you got?" he asked.

The warden nodded. "That's all, Bert."

The little man shrugged. "That Panther country's mighty big," he said thoughtfully. He got back in his car. Bellamy got in beside him. The rest of the men walked to their cars and started piling in.

"How're you goin' to run this search?" the warden asked.

"Dunno," said Ellis. "Most lost men sort of swing around the shoulder of the mountain and get themselves tangled up in Bear Trap Swamp. Need a thousand men to spook 'em out of there."

"This feller's pals claim he ain't lost," the warden said. "Claim he must be hurt because they didn't hear no signal shots."

"Most likely threw his gun away minute he found he was lost. Most of 'em do. They get excited."

They drove the cars to the foot of Panther Mountain and pulled them in along the old tote road that cut off the main highway. They went single file along the tote road,

Ellis leading, then the natives, then the city hunters. Bellamy brought up the rear.

Ellis walked with his shoulders hunched against the snow, his hands in his pockets and the gun hanging loosely from the crook of his arm. Most of the natives walked that way, loose-hipped, slouched, their guns an integral part of them. They walked fast—faster now that they had a bunch of city slickers with them, showing off a bit with a subconscious mixture of pride and malice.

The hunters were walking stiffly, their bodies tensed against the dangers of the unfamiliar footing. The guns they carried were alien to them, and they shifted them from one hand to the other, from one shoulder to the other, unable to make them part of the balance of their motions. The gap between them was widening. One of them kept at the heels of the close-packed group of natives for a while, then he too dropped back.

Ellis sure is setting a pace, Bellamy thought. He sure is giving them the works.

Bellamy himself was puffing. Well, he was not as young as he had been, and he had put on a bit of weight, too. There had been a time, ten-fifteen years ago, when he could have walked the whole bunch of them off their feet—Ellis included. In those days he could shoulder a pack basket full of traps and grub, head out over the range and drop down to Little Wolf Pond without even stopping to roll a smoke or get a breather. Fifteen—? It must have been a good twenty years ago. He had been in the Service that long. In the Service there wasn't much call for a warden to go traipsing around the woods. A warden had to cover a lot of territory but he covered most of it in a car. Now a wiry little squirt like Bert Ellis could walk the legs off him.

Ellis stopped up ahead, and the thin single line of men blunted around him. He had rolled and smoked half a cigarette before the last of the hunters and Bellamy reached the group. Yes, sir, he had certainly set a pace! You could see the steam coming off the hunters. It must be cold to see steam like that, but Bellamy didn't feel cold. Sweat drenched his backbone. He took out a red ban-

danna and blew his nose, fumbling with it before his face so they would not notice his gasping breaths.

"I guess we'd better start droppin' off men from here," Ellis said. "You take this here end of the line, Warden. I'll take the rest up yonder along the tote road, and drop them off say every couple or three hundred yard. I'll drop one of you folks next, then somebody who knows the woods. We're gonna keep hollering, 'Hey, Jack!'—or whatever the feller's name is."

"Bill," one of the hunters volunteered.

"Okay, then, 'Hey, Bill!' And keep listenin' for the man on your right and left. By gosh, I ain't aimin' to get any more of you lost. I got chores aplenty to do." He dropped his cigarette in the snow and stepped on it from force of habit. "And no shootin' unless we find this feller Bill. Shoot two quick ones if you find him. We'll answer with one. Shoot a couple every fifteen minutes to guide us to you."

He turned to Bellamy. "We'll spread out and work up the range, far as the rock cliffs. If he's hurt down here somewhere, we might find him. I dunno what else to say."

The warden nodded. He wanted to offer some suggestions, but breath was still choking in his throat. Ellis's plan was good enough.

"How about the swamp?" one of the hunters asked.

"A man ain't got no call to go into that swamp. It'd take the Army, with some Marines to boot, to find a man in there unless he signals. Your friend don't seem to be the signaling kind." He turned away and led the searching party on.

There was a half-rotted log at the side of the trail, and the warden sat down. He could breathe more evenly now but his knees trembled from the exertion.

I guess I'm not as young as I was, he thought. Ellis sure set a pace.

Dry pellets of snow almost as heavy as hail hissed through the evergreens. Bellamy shivered. The cold was already working inside of him, spreading along his spine. After a while he got up and started beating his arms to-

gether, and twice he looked at his watch to see how long it was since Ellis had left him.

He began to think maybe the starting signal had gone down the line and he had not heard it in the hissing of the wind and snow. When he strained his ears, he could hear "Hey, Bill! Hey, Bill!" far away, blending into the sounds of the wind, and he was ready to shout himself when he heard other voices calling, and far away the strains of ghostly music, and the bugle tones of a hound baying, and the voice of his wife saying, "The wood . . . the wood . . . the wood . . ."

When the real voices came, they were unmistakable, and the ghost sounds of the woods disappeared instantly. He heard a faint voice shouting "Hey, Bill!" Then another voice, nearer, repeating the cry, and then the man directly to his left, so near that it startled him. He started to shout and his voice croaked in his tight throat and he swallowed a couple of times and cleared it and then shouted.

I could always hear things in the sound of running water, he thought. When I was a kid, I used to sit by the brook and hear whole conversations and hear a girl laughing.

He cut at right angles from the trail and headed into the thicket of young beech seedlings not much higher than his head, but so thick that he had to shoulder his way through them. The beech seedlings kept tangling him up and whipping across his face. To his left, the man shouted, "Hey, Bill!" and he stopped and shouted back.

The ground sloped upward, and he came out of the belt of young beeches to a small clearing where the trees had been cut down. The logs had been dragged out but the tops lay in a tangled heap. He was breathing hard again when he came out into the hardwood timber. He wanted to rest, but the cry of the man on his left sounded, fainter this time and farther up the slope, and he kept on going.

"Damn' city slicker," he murmured. "Damn' race horse." Showing off up there somewhere, going fast just because the going under *his* feet was good and solid. No thought that somebody else might have it tough. Well, it

would take more than a burst of speed by a city hunter to leave him behind, even if he wasn't as young as he used to be.

The snow stopped for a few moments, and he could see the mist-shrouded hulk of the mountain through the bare tree branches. It looked immense in the dim light. A tough mountain, uncompromising and sinister, and for a moment Bellamy felt sympathy for the man who was lost somewhere in its grasp.

Poor fella, he thought. *What chance has he got? And then the resentment welled up in him again. Well, they got no business tanglin' with mountains like this one. They ain't got no right to be so cocksure and sassy.*

It began to snow again, big soft flakes. The giant mountain drew back into the haze and disappeared. He could no longer see the crest of the ridges in front of him. Once he had scrambled to their tops, he could not see the bottoms of the ravines he had left. *It's like walking inside of a cocoon*, he thought. He stopped and called the lost man's name, feeling the futility of it for the first time. If the man had slipped and fallen and knocked himself out, his body would long ago have been covered by the snow.

It occurred to him that he had not heard the man on his left for some time. He cupped his hands and called out. He shouted again and again, trying to pierce the muffling snow, but it was like shouting with his face buried in a pillow. He needed a rest and the comfort of tobacco, but here was another guy straying off his post. He took off his mittens and tried whistling through his fingers. Only a couple of off-key sounds came out. He walked on for a few hundred yards, calling all the while, then suddenly stopped.

There was something wrong. He was supposed to be skirting the base of the mountain. The swamp had been to his right, and now it should be in back of him. The man to his left should be uphill from him. Yet, in spite of the rise and fall of the ground, he was definitely going downhill. He tried to peer through the thick curtain of snow. He took a few steps in one direction, stopped and looked around him again. Then he trotted back to where

the snow was churned up by his turning feet. He looked all around. But there was nothing to see, and he felt fear growing inside him.

It was ridiculous. The swamp had been to his right. The other man had been to his left and farther up the slope. But the ground was dipping away from him. He cupped his hands to his mouth and shouted. In the mute fluttering of the snow, he heard an answer to his cry. He stood still and held his breath. He heard the cry again. It was from the direction he had expected and he thought with relief, *I was right all the time.*

Then he heard the cry again and it came from in back of him, and then it came from his right and from his left, until it was all around him, until it became a part of the soft music he had not noticed before and the sound of a girl's laughter, and his wife's voice saying, "The wood . . . the wood . . ."

I can back-track, he thought. I can follow my own tracks until I get to a spot I recognize, then set myself right again. He looked around him, picked up his dim track in the snow, and started to follow it. But after a few steps, the track curved back, and came to the churned place in the snow where he had been standing. The tight fist of fear in his chest grew bigger.

"That's the track I made looking around trying to get located," he muttered. "Sure! The other one must head off that way."

He started to circle, looking for the track, and he almost stepped over it before he saw the dim rounded outline in the snow. The snow was filling the track fast; he followed it, bent almost double. Once he thought he had lost it but he was able to pick it up again where his boot had brushed the snow off a stump. He began to trot, racing against time, racing against the endless curtain of snow, against the inevitability of defeat softly stamped in each dimming print.

The prints disappeared. He stopped. His eyes darted in all directions. There was no avenue of escape, no opening in the white cocoon of snow.

"I'm lost," he said. The mute voices of the woods echoed his words and flung them back at him, the voices blending with the music and the girl's laughter and his wife's words. Lost—

He began to run, as if running would rend the invisible veil that hemmed him in, and still the mute voices. He scrambled up the side of a ravine that he did not remember crossing, his mouth gaping, his breath coming in wheezing gasps. He almost reached its crest when the choking feathers in his chest filled it completely. Hot wires of pain tightened across his chest. They crossed and recrossed in a spot over his heart. They touched and exploded in a blinding shower of pain-filled sparks. He clutched at his chest, staggered a few steps, and sank against the base of a tree.

Take is easy, he thought. Got to take it easy.

He was not conscious of the pain diminishing but he began to hear the sharp rasping of his breath, and feel the rapid thumping of his heart. He sat where he had fallen, his cheek pressed against the rough bark of the tree, and stared at his mittened hand lying palm upward in the snow, and watched the snowflakes settling softly on it. The pain over his heart gradually diminished.

I'm lost, he thought. Lost!

The desire to run swept over him in uncontrollable waves. He would have started running if he had been standing up, instead of lying in the snow. He would have started running again, blindly, unthinkingly. But in the time and effort of raising his body, of clawing his way upward along the tree trunk, he stifled the impulse. He stood up with his arms still clutched around the tree trunk, holding himself from running.

You're acting like a tenderfoot, he thought. You're acting like a damn city slicker. You've got to stop and think.

He dug out his pipe and tobacco, and took off his mittens. But his hands were trembling so that the tobacco spilled. He dropped the pipe and, in an unreasoning fit of anger, threw the tobacco pouch down. He forgot them immediately and started to put on his mittens. He got the

right one on but when the left one fell in the snow at his feet, he forgot that, too, in the welter of thoughts racing through his mind.

He was lost. A mile from the trail. Maybe more. Maybe a lot more. The snow was a heavy, muffling curtain that closed in all around him. The trail was somewhere to the south of him. Only there was no way of telling which way was south. The wind usually blew in from the north and the snow was usually stuck on the north sides of the trees. But it did not work out that way all the time. Some of the worst storms came in from the south. The mountains made their own wind currents. You couldn't tell, except with a compass, and he never carried one. No native ever carried one.

"Shucks, I wouldn't give pocket room to one of them things. All's I got to do is follow my nose back to one of Ma's pies." All natives said that to city slickers. Or else they said, "Comes a time I get turned around, I just set my gun down on its feet and follow it plumb into camp."

There was a bunch of men in the woods. There might be one of them just beyond the curtain of snow, for all he knew, and if there was he could set himself right; he wouldn't have to admit that he was lost. He cupped his hands around his mouth and shouted, "Hey, Bill!" He was not thinking of the lost man; he shouted that name because he'd shouted it before. He walked and he shouted, lifting his face to the falling snow, but there was no answer.

He thought of his pistol then—the .45 strapped around his waist. They would hear that. They were bound to, in spite of the muffling snow. He opened the holster, rested his hand on the butt. But he didn't draw the gun out. "No shooting unless we find the lost man," Ellis had said. He hadn't found the lost man. If he shot, they would answer him, and they would converge on him, the natives and the city hunters. He couldn't tell them that he had shot because *he* was lost. He couldn't stand before them and say, "I'm the warden, but I got lost. I got lost and panicky, and I got a pain across my heart, and I needed help." He

couldn't say that to the city slickers. Not even to the natives. He couldn't be the warden and say that.

He kept on walking, shuffling with heavy feet through the snow. He was lost and he must get out of there, and walking was the only way that he could get out. He must not run. If he started to run, he must wind his arms around a tree and hold on until the impulse to run left him. *I'm lost*, he thought. *Lost—lost—lost—* The words became the rhythm of his motions, the total of his reasoning. When the pain returned to his chest, now dull and heavy and constant, he did not think of it as pain containing a meaning and a warning of its own but only as part of being lost.

He walked with head lolling on his neck, and downcast eyes that seldom raised above the obstacles before his feet. The wind had begun to blow again. The snowflakes were heavy and hard-driven. It was getting much colder but he did not notice that. He stumbled blindly forward, sometimes falling. Once he twisted his wrist in a fall, but the pain of it mingled with the rhythm throbbing in his head.

Time became a blank infinity that held no meaning for him. Once he ran headlong into a tree, and the shock startled him. He touched his skinned forehead with *his* hand and looked vaguely at the blood on his fingers. A deer bounded out of its bed beside a small fir; he watched it dully as it disappeared into the haze with noiseless leaps. He came to a spruce thicket and crashed through the dead, interlocked branches with the full weight of his body.

It was much lighter now. But he failed to notice he was out of the big timber, walking in tall, matted beaver-meadow grass. His feet broke through the surface of small, ice-crustured puddles. He did not notice them until he stepped into one deeper than the others, and the water welled over his boot tops.

He was in a swamp clustered with thickets of alder. On the drier ground, here and there, were even thicker clusters of spruce and cedar. He climbed over rotted tree trunks, half hidden in the tall grass. He skirted many ice-covered pools and once, very carefully, crossed a large one along the branch network of an old beaver dam. He felt

proud of having crossed the beaver dam; floundering forward, he thought about it, but there was no meaning to his thoughts.

He was shouldering his way through a thicket of low, snow-covered spruce when suddenly he stopped. It was the first time he had stopped voluntarily. He raised his head and looked dully around him. He became aware of the pelting of the wind-driven snow, of the heavy pain in his chest, and the dull pain of his forehead, and the sharper pain of his wrist. He became conscious of the icy water inside his boots and the throbbing of his leg muscles.

I'm lost, he thought in surprise. The thought held a meaning once more.

He looked around carefully. He was standing on a low, flat ridge that rose out of the swamp like a whale's back out of a heaving sea. He was somewhere out on a swamp. On Bear Trap Swamp—the terror of the whole district! Yet, somehow, the thought did not startle him. The *thing* that had stopped him suddenly still lingered in his subconscious, driving out panic. He turned slowly, looked all around him. His senses were alert. Suddenly, he knew. He had smelled wood smoke!

He sniffed the air hungrily. There it was! Unmistakable! It had been there all along—a thin link between the wilderness that surrounded him and civilization. His eyes spied a twisting, transparent wraith, thicker than the haze of snow. A cry escaped his lips. He started to run. But he stopped suddenly and his eyes narrowed. It must be the lost hunter. He had forgotten completely about him. There would be no one else out here in this dismal swamp but that damn-fool hunter hunching over a little fire. It would never do to go up to him, panting and gasping like a worn-out old engine.

He moved cautiously through the screen of spruce until he saw the cone of rising smoke, and then the small fire and the figure of the man hunched down beside it. Belamy crouched down out of sight and breathed carefully until the fierce panting of his chest subsided. Then he stood up and walked toward the man.

He said evenly, "Hi, Bill. Kind of cold out, ain't it?"

The man by the fire leaped up with a strangled cry. He gazed with wide, terrified eyes for a moment; then the cry came from his open lips again, and he stumbled toward the warden, hopping on one leg and dragging the other one grotesquely behind him. He threw his arms around the warden and sagged against him, and buried his face against his coat, and sobbed.

"Easy, feller," the warden said. "Take it easy. You're all right now." The sobbing slowed and stopped. The man rubbed his face back and forth against the warden's coat, then straightened himself up slowly. "You'll be all right," the warden said. "Here, lean on me, and let's get over to that fire."

"I'm all right now," the man said.

He leaned on the warden's shoulder and hobbled back to the fire.

"Pulled my ankle sometime yesterday. Guess it was yesterday—"

"It was," said the warden. "Here—you lie down here and let me pile up some wood on this fire. I guess I'd better signal. There's a reg'lar army out lookin' for you."

He took out his pistol and fired two quick shots. There was no answer for a moment, and fear inside him began to mount again. Then he heard an answer dimly from somewhere in back of him. He turned and faced that way, and the gust of wind in his face brought the sound of other shots more clearly.

"Have a gang here in less than an hour," he said cheerily.

The hunter smiled up at him.

"Here, let me take a look at that foot," Bellamy said.

"It's all right," the hunter said.

Bellamy found a dead spruce near by, and broke off an armful of branches and piled them on the fire. "That's what I call a fire," he said. "Only city folks¹ believe that bunk about Indians building little fires. Any man wants to keep from freezing builds a heaping big fire."

Suddenly he remembered something. He dug into his pocket and brought out a small vacuum of coffee and

poured out a steaming cup. The hunter reached out for it. His eyes opened in sudden amazement.

"Say, I've got a sandwich in my pocket!" he said. "I thought a while ago that I was going to starve to death out here—and I never remembered that sandwich in my pocket."

"Lost men do mighty queer things," the warden said. "Why the devil didn't you shoot when you found out you was lost?"

The man sipped the hot coffee thoughtfully as if trying to remember. "I couldn't," he said at last. "I slipped and fell and banged my head. Knocked myself cold. When I came to, it was just getting dark and my ankle was on fire. I started to look for the gun, but I couldn't find it. Then I started out for home. I—I guess I got lost then—I found myself out here when it got light."

"You mean you traveled all night?"

"Yes, I think I did."

"You ought to be darned glad you didn't drown yourself in one of them ponds down there. The ice would never hold you up. Of all the stupid—"

"I know," the man said.

The warden got up and fired two quick shots with his pistol. The answers were much more distinct.

"I'm sorry," the man said. "I guess I led you through some tough going. That's a nasty cut on your forehead."

Bellamy reached up his unmitten hand and touched the spot tenderly. "Ducked one branch and ran smack into another I hadn't seen."

His hat was gone, too. He didn't remember losing it. He remembered going through a real tough thicket once. That must have been the place he lost it. It would be just like Ellis to find it in that thicket and start asking questions. Ellis had a nose for such things. The two men sat by the fire, staring into the leaping flames and thinking their own thoughts. The hunter finally said:

"Warden, when I first saw you—I mean—I guess I acted sort of like a fool."

"Shucks," the warden said. "Rest easy. There's some things one man never tells about another."

"Thanks," the man said.

And later, when a new armful of branches blazed high against the darkening sky, the hunter looked up once more.

"I've been wondering how you found me," he said.

Warden Bellamy thought for a long time before answering. "Years ago, when we used to run deer with dogs," he said slowly, "every deer we started on a certain mountain would go pretty near along the same ridges, and through the same notches, and finally across the brooks at certain places. A wounded deer will pretty near always travel over a certain way. Maybe the going is easier that way—maybe, for generations, they've gone that way, to some thicket or swamp, to die. I guess maybe all lost men travel in the same paths without even knowin' it—"

The hunter thought that over, nodding slowly. "You ever been lost, Warden?"

This time there was no need to stop and think.

"Shucks, no! Been turned around for two-three days, a couple of times. But lost—"

He chuckled at the idea, and his arm came up and he rubbed his sleeve absently over his badge, the way he always chuckled, the way he always rubbed his badge when he was telling it to a tenderfoot, to a damn'-fool city slicker. The hunter believed him. They all did. Sometime, he might even grow to believe it himself again. He had to. He was a native. He belonged to these mountains. He was the warden.

ELLIS ST. JOSEPH

LEVIATHAN

FAIR TODAY AND WARMER. A hot sun ballooned on high, held to the sweltering earth by the thin thread of a well-ordered universe. The hovering clouds, like cream turned sour by the heat, curdled into spoon-drift. Transfixed by the sun's ray and roasted at oven temperature, a deluded weathercock pointed with undeviating accuracy the way of yesterday's wind.

Mr. Campaspe's train carried him away from the city at a rattling pace, past factories and suburban dwellings, across the fields, and out into the open countryside. Having reversed the back of his green plush seat, he sat with the engine behind him, traveling backward, looking out the window at the succession of scenes which took him by surprise and fell away before his blurred vision.

His wife sat with her lover on the opposite bench, a patent-leather bathing-bag between them, and both so close to Mr. Campaspe that each of his outspread knees was caught separately in a fork of legs. The guilty couple sat erect, open-eyed and unwinking, like a pair of dolls. Their conversation had died in his presence and was buried under the meaningless smile on her lips.

Clad in a white linen suit, the wrinkles of which followed the swells and creases of his bulging corpulence, Mr. Campaspe felt blissfully cool; the purple stripes of his shirt faded to pink as the wind dried its damp cloth; and even the coarse fiber of the plush upholstery ceased to burn and irritate the soft flesh of his buttocks. With a movement of tremendous upheaval he brought forth a handkerchief from his hip pocket, mopped well within the horseshoe of his baldness, rubbed his bulbous half-buried nose to a turn, wiped the accumulated oil from the hanging corners of his grim full-blooded lips, and concluded by raising his head like a turtle to get at the bag of his chin. Then he opened his small eyes, which were bright and full-viewed, and took in everything. Pursing

his lips into a sadly apologetic, fat man's smile, Mr. Campaspe addressed his two companions.

"Hot, eh?"

Pola hesitated before replying, taking time to consider, not her husband's words, but his incomprehensible behavior for the past 24 hours. The acute uneasiness which comes from perceiving a stranger in a familiar body tempered the customary asperity of her response. "Yes," she said, with a nod which set the bloated celluloid cherries of her straw hat clattering on the brim. "It's hot enough to roast an ox."

Otto judged Mr. Campaspe with his eyes and damned him with a smile. "You feel it worse than we do," he commented.

Mr. Campaspe looked in the direction of his wife's lover, cast shy hangdog glances, envious and admiring, at the swarthy blue-chinned virility of him, the broad nose and flat lips, and the lean line of joining between neck and jaw bone. Suddenly, when Otto answered with a companionable wink, the stout man flushed like a woman. He felt his coat hanging open in the wind and made desperate efforts to jerk it about and cover the shameless bulging of his breasts and belly. He was terribly self-conscious. Inexplicably, Mr. Campaspe felt culpable in the presence of this young culprit.

It was envy, rather than jealousy, which prompted Mr. Campaspe's rejoinder. "I suppose I do. But then I don't know what it is to be any different, since I've always been"—he paused—"as I am. Just the same, I wouldn't mind changing places with you."

A wayward smile feathered his wife's face, as, absently, with her elbow on the window sill, she flattened her red bangs. Each new onslaught of the sun revealed her with the bold, uncompromising rigor of an overexposed photograph and fixed the unnatural smile on her lips.

"I can't wait to take off my clothes," announced Otto, "and get into bathing-trunks."

"A bathhouse will look pretty good to all of us," Pola agreed in her hoarse throaty voice.

"I'm going to dive into the first cold green wave I see,"

continued Otto. "How about you, Campaspe? Do you swim?"

"Me?" murmured Mr. Campaspe. "Like a whale. Once you get me in, you can't get me out!"

Abruptly he burst into a shrill falsetto laugh, a little too high and held too long, but accompanied by such shaking and straining that the syllables of his mirth were flung out of his mouth explosively, like the intermittent coughing of a man with a fishbone stuck in his throat.

Many years this line had served Mr. Campaspe, by way of a joke, as an excuse for his long immersions. He was accustomed to hide his big and proportionately sensitive body in the waves, hour upon hour, finding refuge from the pointed fingers and pointless jibes in which any beach abounds. He would lumber down the sandy incline at breakneck speed, so fast that terrified bathers looked to their safety and not at him; plunge into the water with a belly-ripping splash, and never rear his shoulders above the surface until it was time to go home; only then would he walk out of the ocean, dripping wet and pickled in brine, and show himself to the gaping crowd in a soaking skin-tight bathing-suit molded to his womanly swells. Mr. Campaspe was prodigious in the water, on shore a comic buffoon.

"There's nothing like swimming to take off weight," said Otto. "You should do a lot of it, Campaspe."

"I do," Mr. Campaspe replied. "Only it doesn't help—"

In so far as Pola could not fathom her husband, she feared him, and it relieved her sense of insecurity to trample him underfoot. Laughing, she covered her open mouth with both hands as if to bottle up her glee, a pretty child-like gesture that made men love her, and also served to suppress her ugly pink gums, broad as ribbons, which disfigured her face when the lips split.

"Don't listen to him, Otto," she blattered. "He hasn't been in for a year. It's enough to get him into the tub, he's so lazy!"

"It's not that," stoutly maintained Mr. Campaspe.

"Or maybe," Pola continued from under her hand, as another grin slowly disgorged itself, "he's so modest—"

She knew his secret. Seven years of married life had told her nothing of him, except that which he would not have her know. Slyly she looked at him, to catch his glance and judge the extent of his wound, but his eyes were shut tight and his full red lips were buttered with an idiotic smile, as gently he rocked frontward and back.

"Modest? A big fellow like him, that's good! That's a good one, Campaspe!" Indulgently Otto winked at the husband, giving him credit for the joke, and simultaneously he nudged the wife. She felt the hard flesh of his arm pressed against her, and she was so perturbed that she breathed twice in one breath.

"Yes!" she cried hoarsely, "a good one!"

"Me?" crowed Mr. Campaspe, still shaken by the painful implication in Pola's remark concerning a bathhouse, and dismayed at the bare possibility of being made to undress in Otto's presence. "*Modest—?*" He could get no further; his tongue thickened, and he shuddered with laughter. Otto joined him, boisterous in his approval, perhaps a bit derisive, but determined to give the old man a good time for his money.

"So that's why you won't come out of the water!" Otto shouted uproariously. "And you said you were a swimmer! Man, I bet I can swim rings around you!"

Pola divined some inscrutable purpose, an unconscious direction, to the conversation, unsuspected by Otto, perhaps even by Mr. Campaspe, and she dreaded its possible outcome. By an association of thought so wide that an uninitiate to its science would have construed it as intuition, she warned Otto, crying, "He could drown you!"

She took the breath out of their laughter, but in the subsequent moment of embarrassment, it was reborn; even Pola succumbed to the redoubled merriment, and had all she could do to keep both hands over her open mouth; in the end they were unable to stop.

Their train veered round upon a high trestle, shrieking wildly, and a long streamer of black smoke struck their open window. Almost smothered with coal dust and deafened by the piercing whistle, the three of them, in all this

noise and confusion, filled the car with the muffled dead sound of their laughter.

Mr. Campaspe had been a fat child, a fat youth, and now he was a fat husband. Boys had mocked him on the street; girls had tittered like mice in his presence; now his wife grimaced wryly at his touch as though her teeth had grated on gristle when she thought to have closed them on meat. She had discovered early in their marriage that he was immensely funny until taken personally, and then he became a bad joke. Though the unfortunate man made frantic efforts to ensnare her affection, using costly luxuries as bait, the wily fugitive nibbled, consumed, and was off; and his constantly renewed offerings barely sufficed to keep her in the vicinity of the trap. Finally, convinced of his failure before he commenced, he sought to reduce, and tried diet after diet, as a chronic unbeliever turns from church to church, looking for a miracle where there is no faith. The upshot of the whole business was that, after he once had paid tribute and acknowledged her superior power, she tyrannized over him, and held him in subjection as Britannia once did the mammoth India.

Before marriage Pola had been the cashier in his favorite restaurant; she was little more than that now as his wife. Yet he adored her, and deep inside him he knew that she was right to treat him as she did, for nobody, least of all Mr. Campaspe, could love anybody so disgusting as himself. He regarded his obesity as a crime which must be concealed at all cost, even to mitigating its appearance by the use of constricting garments, carefully planned postures and poses, and by acting the married Victorian in a nightshirt, or rather pajamas. It was because he had never revealed himself to male or female before that he was now trembling with fear at the mere thought of halving a bath-house with his wife's lover.

Mr. Campaspe was suspicious of them from the start, and little things made him more so. They would cease talking when he entered a room. Alone they laughed together as though they owned an unspeakable joke at his expense. Otto tolerated him with a smile of cynical indulgence, and Pola covertly laughed at him behind her

hands. Then one day he came home to find an obscene drawing of a fat man, on which was carefully printed: *MR. CAMPASPE*.

That evening he flung a fat arm around Otto's waist, giving him a constricting hug, the while he looked for the effect of his words, and said, "You're a regular carpet knight with the ladies, aren't you? You lucky dog!"

Somewhat embarrassed, but pleased in spite of himself, Otto rewarded Mr. Campaspe with an ambiguous smile.

"Come now," continued Mr. Campaspe, pulling the young man still closer, "you can tell an old married couple like us. We know what kind of tricks you're up to. Don't try to pull the wool over our eyes. You're a devil with the women, sure as you're born!"

Otto colored slightly under Pola's jealous gaze. She loathed his boasting because she believed it, and knew that, whatever her husband's plot, Otto must succumb to such mental seduction.

"Sure," Otto chuckled. "Sure. Sure."

"That's not the way to talk," objected Mr. Campaspe. He clutched the muscle of Otto's right arm with frantic fingers and felt it in one place after another. "There's muscle for you, yes, sir! How the women love it, eh? You've got the build that gets them. There isn't an ounce of fat on you, just muscle and bone. That's what they love—they'd let you do anything to them when you've got a build like that—"

A wave of devilry and swelling desire raised Otto to his toes and then down on his heels.

"Yes, sir!" sang out Mr. Campaspe, red in the face, and grinning through a horse collar. "You're a man, that's what you are! You don't want people to think that you're a fish! And you've got to have your women, sure you do. Not one, not two—"

"I've got a hundred!" shouted Otto, and shook himself free. Then he fell back a step and just stood and looked at Mr. Campaspe with a foolish leer on his face.

"You—swine!" It was Pola's hoarse voice, and hurled with such venomous passion that Mr. Campaspe, whose fat back was turned to her, felt it enter into him like a

harpoon. He spun around with the shock, and his little eyes caught her as she left the room.

"What do you think of that?" Otto asked thickly. "Tell me, Campaspe. Why would she say a thing like that? And to me?"

"To *you*?" shrieked Mr. Campaspe. He bent double, as with a cramp, and the whole apartment echoed with his strained fishbone laughter.

When Otto had left, crowding the house by his absence, Mr. Campaspe, to whom no blind hope remained for corrosive doubt to destroy, worded the accusation of his wife. He had barely spoken before she was upon him. He had never believed her capable of such raving invective, or of such energy, even in anger; emphatically she denied the whole charge; she cursed Otto and she cursed Mr. Campaspe; and she defended her virtue with the vilest words she knew. As she shouted, the veins in her neck were swelled out by the pressure within, and the broad pink gums so nakedly bared that her face resembled a spitting skull. Finally: Even if it were so, she yelled, what would he do about it? And she flounced out of the room.

Mr. Campaspe sat for a long time with his face covered by his hands. Then, with a long downward movement, he pulled down the corners of his eyes and the corners of his mouth, and clenching his hands under his chin, brought them down upon his lap as if in prayer. He sat for so long that his feet went to sleep, but he formed a resolution at last, resolved it into words, and limped inside to let it fall.

Oppressed by the heat, Pola lay in bed, her face creamed for the night and her red hair set with combs. She watched as he came into the room, and a cold fear with him, which beat him to her bedside. Mr. Campaspe knew what he had to say, dropped his jaw to say it, and said something completely different.

"We'll go to the beach tomorrow, all three of us," he said, and, no less than his wife, heard the unexpected speech with amazement.

It was incomprehensible to Mr. Campaspe why, when he planned to break with Pola, his tongue had wagged at some unbidden impulse and to such conflicting purpose,

but so profound was the feeling of inexplicable bliss which followed upon it, so sweet the assuaging waters, that he sounded their depth without questioning their presence, or his being in them, and contented himself with the flood. Whereas another man in like circumstance would have felt 20 years younger, Mr. Campaspe felt 20 pounds lighter.

Arrangements were concluded the following morning, and before noon Mr. Campaspe boarded the train, happy as a clam at high water. Though Pola had been compelled to oblige him, she considered his invitation ominous and his present self-complacency foreboding; and in so far as she suspected an ulterior motive, though she could not fathom it, she was apprehensive, fidgety, and constantly on the defensive. She surmised hidden springs of action in Mr. Campaspe, which actually he had not tapped himself. She felt the presence of something other than jealousy, which joined her husband and her lover, and separated her from them both. Till suddenly their positions were transposed, and it was she and her lover who laughed, while her husband, at the passing mention of a bath-house, was rocked by a heartquake.

It may be that Mr. Campaspe arrived at his destination on this unusually hot September afternoon; that he was pushed amid many sweltering people into a bus and was jounced off to the beach; perhaps he spoke with Pola who sat beside him and with Otto who clung to a strap above them; it is possible that they entered a bathing-pavilion which welcomed them with flying pennants and gaily colored umbrellas and the combined roar of voices and waves; still Mr. Campaspe was oblivious of it, of everything but the fact that he must undress before other eyes and display his embarrassing body.

A sunburned young man in spotty canvas trousers conducted Pola, Otto, and Mr. Campaspe down a central aisle transected by numerous rows of wooden lockers. Occasionally they stepped aside to avoid contact with returning bathers, whose muddy feet incautiously pattered over the splintery boardwalk. Carefully they skirted the puddles and water-pans. They passed hundreds of identical doors, bleached bone-white and warped, before the bath-

house keeper indicated the locker assigned, turned his passkey in the latch, bestowed towels upon them, and walked away.

"Ladies first!" snickered Pola. She disappeared within and slammed the door behind her. The two men hardly had settled down to wait outside in the broiling sun before Otto removed his coat impatiently, undid his tie, and began to open the buttons of his shirt.

"I'm just getting ready," he said.

Cold and perspiring, Mr. Campaspe leaned against the house opposite, and studied the crooked, peeling boards of the locked door.

"I'll be out in a moment," shouted Pola; and she flung her pink slip over the transom, so that the strap end hung in full view of the men. Parrying each other's eyes by staring at the flimsy piece of silk, they shifted uneasily upon their feet.

"Just a second and the two of you can get in!"

Mr. Campaspe was shivering with apprehension; the blood rushed to his cheeks, felt wet on his cheeks; and his tongue constricted like a dead mollusk in the hard cavity of his mouth. He had anticipated the memory of this moment for so long that it seemed to comprise his entire life. Fool—blundering idiot—madman: he was worse than all of these combined! How could he have proposed such a trip as this? Why, when it was furthest from his thoughts, had he suggested it in the first place? How blindly, stupidly happy he had been—without reason—as he had taken the steps which led to his own undoing! Now he must go in with Otto, undress before Otto, strip for Otto—! No!

"Take your coat off, man!" Otto ordered. "You'll burn up alive!"

"No! No!" cried Mr. Campaspe, almost before Otto had spoken. "Didn't you know? I'm modest! That's a good one!" His shriek of fishbone laughter was smothered by the sight of Pola's soft step-ins as they followed her slip to the transom.

Mr. Campaspe's eyeballs trembled dizzily in their sockets and then rolled in Otto's direction. He saw that Otto was weighing the niceties of Pola's underwear as he wiped

the sweat from his neck and chest. A solitary curl of black hair hung out over his white undershirt and glistened in the bright sunlight.

"I'm dripping," said Otto.

Mr. Campaspe yearned for the ocean, for its intimate embrace and infinite expanse; he longed to wed the ringed horizon, to be at home on its heaving bosom, secure in the hurricane. Terror had schooled him, taught him the way of escape. He had chosen between the paternal ocean and its postdiluvian rib of land, and like the lunged whale, briny mammal that drowns in the ocean it inhabits and is helpless when stranded on shore, he sought the impregnable deep of his origin. Hidden, he would fear nothing. Then *he* should be supreme. Then it would be Otto's turn—"

Suddenly, leaping without warning from the deep waters it had been troubling into the brilliant light of day, the latent reason for his words to Pola and his subsequent happiness was revealed to him; he recognized what grim purpose had moved him in the dark, he realized what there was still to do. And when Pola opened the door and stepped out into the heat, attired in an abbreviated brown suit, he scarcely looked at her, but smiling with happiness, locked himself in the bathhouse with his wife's lover.

It was dark and blood-warm inside. The wooden walls of their confining cubicle, though dry as cork, were marked with streams and pools of evaporated moisture; a sandy sediment, covreing the floorboards, crackled and scraped under foot. Their movements were so restricted that the men could not turn without touching each other. Pola's apparel hung around them, hemming them in, interlarding the faint odor of salt water and perspiration with the feminine smell from powder and cheap perfume.

"It's a pretty close fit," chuckled Otto.

Otto's voice sounded unnaturally loud to Mr. Campaspe, who in his turn, whispered, "I hope I'm not crowding you out—"

"Hell, no! But if you'd rather, you can take off your clothes first, and I'll wait for you outside. What do you say?"

Thus, unexpectedly, came his chance—a means of escape from the purging shame and premeditated crime into the monotonous horror of his past life! For a moment he hesitated, and then: “No,” he said slowly, “you get undressed with me.”

A narrow board in the rear wall served as a bench. Otto, after discarding his shirt, sat down and opened his legs wide in front of him. Mr. Campaspe watched him rip open the fly-buttons of his trousers and insert his fingers to loosen up the cotton pants.

“Whew!” sighed Otto. “This is a relief.”

“We’ll hurry, eh?”

Without replying, Otto lighted a cigarette and inhaled a few lung-filling puffs, clouding the locker with a gray-brown smoke which floated upward and over the transom.

Mr. Campaspe could not avert his smarting eyes from his companion. Something brazen about Otto—an aggressive physical virility, perhaps—embarrassed Mr. Campaspe, but compelled his gaze, made him continue to look and struggle to see nothing.

“Well,” Otto said, “let’s get it over with.”

Then Otto stood up. Slowly pivoting round, the two men began to strip. Back to back, with their buttocks touching, they undid, unloosed, and unbuttoned. Otto drew his undershirt over his head, dropped his trousers and pants, and then, abiding stark naked, sat down to remove his shoes. Meanwhile Mr. Campaspe felt his warmth, and breathing audibly, followed his movements from beneath lowered lids. He contrived to put off all his clothes, except for his striped-pink shirt, with its front and back tails which fell in generous folds that covered him amply. It would require a Herculean effort to unburden himself of it, for it was more than cloth, a fleshly burden, and he was resolved that the weight of it should be felt by Otto.

His socks poked into his shoes, and both pushed under the bench, Otto stood up nakedly, and observed Mr. Campaspe with some surprise, that he did not divest himself of his shirt, and appear as Otto did. But Mr. Campaspe was oblivious of inequality; his eyes saw outward only; he lived in Otto. The muted sunlight haloed the man’s

black hair as with St. Elmo's fire, and blotted his eyes darkly, and purpled the bristles of his chin, so that his head was difficult to look at; but his body was bathed in a green sub-aqueous light that cast no shadows, and which betrayed his form clearly, flatly, and unglamorously, as in a medical chart of anatomy.

The fat man stared with a painful fascination at the broad shoulders and narrow hips, the build of a land creature, a tight-bellied runner, olive in color, slender and lithe, and well-hung; with long, flexible muscles that formed the skin without corrupting it; a chest that swelled gently, broke on the ribs, and rippled down to his middle; long, straight legs tapering to trim ankles, large feet, and a generous spread of toes; and a mat of stiff, dank hairs, wet with perspiration, curling and twining on his chest, triangular-shaped, with its inverted apex in the navel, from which the hair trickled in a narrow line over his abdomen and down to his loins. . . . Yes, Mr. Campaspe informed himself, this was a stallion, a stag, a goat, a creature of the land, of the hills, of the high places, of cavorting in the sun and copulation in the dark—as though there were shame in a drop of moisture—humiliation in man's humble conception in the water.

Mr. Campaspe's arms hung impotently at his sides, soft and boneless, unable to raise themselves aloft, to effect his will. His prodded brain was like the beach sands, erased and marked in turn, by each new wave of pain. Otto had what he loved, and for that Mr. Campaspe hated him; it was the destructive love of the ocean for the land, that twice a day takes the land, and consuming it, is repulsed amid repeated caresses. Yet, because fulfillment lay only in death, because this nude young man would never laugh again, dry-eyed in the sunlight, nor repeat what he had seen, Mr. Campaspe's arms rose palpitating, and dropped the shirt at his feet.

Otto pored over the incredible sight. He did not perceive the exultant smile on the fat man's lips, nor the shuddering of those lips, which threatened to disrupt their muscular mask. Though Otto had seen fat men before, their wrinkled, creased obesity, repellently obscene, never

had he believed possible the baggy white monstrosity swelling in front of him. It was epicene. With an emotion disturbingly new, Otto gazed at the great pendulous breasts, big-nippled and covered with a coarse brown hair, like huge milk coconuts. Then Otto chuckled uneasily, and lunging with his fist, playfully struck Mr. Campaspe a blow on the breast. It hurt, but Mr. Campaspe stood unashamed, with a smile tugging at the corners of his grim mouth and his eyes closed, completely surrendered.

"You!" Otto exclaimed. "You're like a woman!"

Quite suddenly, as though it were he who was embarrassed, and not Mr. Campaspe, Otto turned away, stepped into his stiff dry trunks, and left the bathhouse. Following briefly after, Mr. Campaspe led the way to the beach. They had scarcely begun when they encountered their locker boy, who bowed in passing, and as he caught sight of Mr. Campaspe burst into a coarse laugh. Strangely, Otto was provoked and took the fellow's laugh as meant for himself; somehow the exposure of another's shameful secret had made him a party to it; and he felt the hurt of it as formerly had Mr. Campaspe. His hot blood climbed in spurts and starts until it drowned his brain and flooded his eyes. Abruptly compacting his fist, he rammed it into the laughing boy. The youth sank to his knees, coughing, gasping for breath.

"What's the matter with you?" screamed Pola. "Otto! Have you lost your mind?"

"He laughed," Otto mumbled.

It was Mr. Campaspe's turn to be jubilant. He had expelled the horror which had possessed him by transmitting it to another. The fat man was not to be deceived by this act of seeming generosity. And as he looked back over his shoulder and saw the bathhouse keeper struggling to rise, he acknowledged the fact that more bodies than his own would be left behind him this day.

When they lay down on the crest of the beach, surrounded by crowds of supine sun-bathers, Mr. Campaspe breathed contentment, pleased by this brief period of rest as he needed all available strength for the completion of his plan.

"I'll tell you," he said at last, rolling over in the sand. "I'll give you a race."

"To the water?" queried Otto.

"And out."

"So you think you can run faster than I can?"

"No."

"Then what good is a race?"

"I can swim better than you."

"You're a liar, Campaspe."

"No, he's not," averred Pola. As she bent over, blinking, to brush a green bottle-fly from her leg, the crease of bosom rode up toward her throat. Her lowered head, with its red hair encased in a swimming-cap, had become characterless as a rubber ball.

"Come on," urged Mr. Campaspe; "let's have a race."

"Look out, Otto! You don't know him!"

"I'm not afraid," Otto insisted.

But Pola was piqued. "He's better than you are," she said.

Otto mumbled, "I'll show you whether he is or not." And rising precipitately, he began to run, zigzagging through the people, stepping over arms and between bodies and legs, down to the water's edge.

"Unfair!" shouted Pola.

That was the last word Mr. Campaspe heard. He was lumbering down the sandy declivity so fast that women looked to their children's safety and not at him. He plunged into the ocean a second after Otto, and came up to the surface a full yard ahead of him.

Out they swam, through the breakers and beyond the ropes, with the roar of the ocean in their ears and its briny taste in their mouths. Submerged completely but for one side of his face and his flailing arms, Otto lashed the surf into a frothy foam with his crawl. Mr. Campaspe moved relentlessly forward, causing scarcely a ripple by his breast stroke, cutting through the water as though drawn on a towline. Side by side, with the fat man leading slightly, they battled the incoming tide, and left the outmost of daring bathers behind them. Though Otto never slackened his speed for a moment, and magnificently strained

himself to overtake his competitor, rising chest-high as the rollers struck him, always just ahead of Otto, seemingly without effort, moved Mr. Campaspe. Sometimes the latter's head disappeared in the water for a full minute, and rose again, having gained a perceptible advantage.

It's inhuman, Otto thought. And then, with unseeing glassy eyes, as he wrestled with the green waves, he viewed the whole afternoon in a strange new light. He sensed, without comprehending it, what Mr. Campaspe had done to him; and he belabored the ocean, beating it to a jelly, as hatred changed his blood into vitriol. Now Mr. Campaspe was a full 20 feet in advance, and so confident of victory that not once did he look back to see what had become of Otto "Unfair!" Pola had shouted. *It is!* shouted Otto with a mouthful of water. Anger at being taken advantage of, wrathful indignation at the horror which had been heaped upon him, spurred Otto, and precipitated him from a race into pursuit of the tremendous creature who sped before him. Determined that this elder man should not down him, that he should not be surpassed by Pola's husband, he retched his breath, sick with violent effort, and broke himself in vain. At last, when they had swum to where the land birds rarely wing their way, Otto gave up; a great weariness consumed him, a carelessness of all cost and consequence, and in a weak voice, dreamlike, he cried, "Wait! Wait!"

Mr. Campaspe heard him and pitch-poled in the water. Otto perceived the little eyes impersonally studying him, waiting, it seemed, for Otto to approach. Otto was sinking. "Campaspe!" he wailed. But the little eyes looked at him as though there were no brain behind them, and they were only two green dots dancing on the blue water. Heroically, Otto toiled over the stretch that was longer than its length, nearer, nearer to Mr. Campaspe. *Campaspe doesn't hear me*, his tired brain reiterated. *He doesn't know I need him. I must reach him to tell him—* Ultimately he was there. Desperately, his strength expiring, he cried, "I'm played out!"

"Go down, you bastard! Drown!"

Mr. Campaspe seized him by the shoulders and shoved

him under the surface. Then the fight began. If Mr. Campaspe believed that a dying man has no more resource than his last breath, he rapidly discovered that he was mistaken. No sooner had Otto's eyes opened upon green water than he grabbed whole handfuls of Mr. Campaspe's flesh, pulled at him savagely, ripped the fat man's trunks, and so rigorously clamped him that if Otto sank to the bottom, he would bring down his assailant with him. Over and over they rolled, now above the water, splashing and grunting, now under, locked in hushed, murderous embrace. Panting and coughing, Mr. Campaspe fought to keep Otto below, but despite his exceeding weight, he was unable to pry free from the powerful hold that Otto had on him, or to break the man's hold on life itself. How the fat man gloried in the pain of his clutched flesh! Mr. Campaspe hated that flesh even beyond Otto's hatred of it, and blissfully he gave it away, that he might be free.

Finally he found means to finish the combat. With Otto clinging to him like a drowning infant, Mr. Campaspe rose bodily from the ocean, filled his lungs full of air, and sounded the shuddering billows. Down they went together. The water became a maelstrom about them, green, then gray, moiling before their eyes, muffling the heart-beat in their ears, down, slowly down, as a minute flowed by and more. At last Otto's mouth broke open; bubbles rolled out into Mr. Campaspe's face; the entangling fingers and knees relaxed their passionate hold; and the young man's body quietly fell away from him after the orgasm of death.

When Mr. Campaspe uprose to the surface, he beheld a new world about him. It was a very silent, empty, and awesome world. Apathetic—stunned by the murder—he listened profoundly. The silence was appalling. He looked upward; but the clouds were too distant to catch hold of, and there was no sound in heaven. . . . A last bubble arose and broke with the sound of thunder on the waves. Again the old world surrounded him. Again he heard the chopping gait of white horses up the whale path. And from the shore, faintly over the carrying water, the combined cry of happy men and holiday-makers came to him as a pro-

longed wail of human woe. He looked to the beach, and witnessed a great commotion, a running and panic, which blackened the sands with people, and brought the bathers down to the water's rim, where they stood, pointing with their outstretched arms to the sea.

He had been seen! Thousands of eyes were upon him! Frozen with fear, he watched men plunging into the water, catamarans being launched, and Mr. Campaspe was powerless to flee from them. Like bits of the land broken from shore, they came to claim him who belonged to the sea! Unexpectedly their direction altered, and following their new path with his eyes, he learned that it was not he they wanted, not he they had noticed, but between Mr. Campaspe and the beach a tiny dot, a human head, now on the surface, now beneath, fighting for life, appearing and disappearing, flashing a telegraphic message for help.

Treading water slowly, secure now and safely hidden, Mr. Campaspe watched hundreds of people bent upon the rescue of one human life, bringing effort, hope, and prayer to the saving of it; and he balanced the great labor of preserving life with the comparative ease of taking it.

Terror possessed him. With the bit of horror clamped between his teeth, he made for the beach. He awakened to a realization that the tide had turned; the waters were running out; he was farther from land than he had ever been before. And he began to battle with the ocean itself, with his own destiny, struggling to gain the beach; but apparently the land sent out great waves to repulse him and drive him away. Mr. Campaspe was no longer calm. The movements of his vast body made the waters boil. The waves spouted high their defiance to the sky, and flew like spittle before the battering charge of his direct attack. Open-mouthed, but unheard, he thundered silence to the sea. But the more ponderously he tossed about, the deeper he sank, and the farther he drifted from shore.

When Mr. Campaspe had turned finally, tired of fighting himself, and outward passed with the tide, his way was clear. He swam out and out, until it seemed that he had no weight, no body at all.

LOUIS POLLOCK

BREAKDOWN

MIAMI BEACH GLEAMED in its best travel-folder colors. Along the ocean front of the Hotel Adorado an attendant made his way down a long line of cabanas. He stopped in front of two men, and spoke to the younger, more aggressive-looking of the two.

"New York calling, Mr. Callow," he said. "Your office, I believe. A Mr. Hubka."

William Callow lowered his highball and considered a moment, before he rose to his feet. He was a tall man, about 40, with a well-nourished breadth to him. His manner had a discernible, pugnacious air to it that sometimes characterizes those who have met life squarely and profited from it.

"Have to get this, Ed," he said to his friend. "Be back in a minute."

The other waved in understanding.

Walking toward the telephone at the end of the beach walk, Callow tried to control his annoyance. It was Saturday, he realized, and Hubka must have just received the dismissal notice Callow had dictated before flying down to Florida at the beginning of the week. It was an impersonal act. Hubka, a veteran employee in Callow's company, had somehow displeased Merling, the new and very successful sales manager. To Callow, office disputes were disorganizing, particularly when small men were stupid enough to joust with big men, and the remedy was obvious. Accountants of Hubka's abilities were hardly at a premium. A good sales manager was.

He picked up the phone and greeted Hubka crisply. The accountant started out with a level voice but a tremor soon worked into it. He began with a humble apology for disturbing his employer. But could he be told what he had done to be fired like this? After all these years—well, it was a shock. He couldn't understand it.

Callow looked out to sea where the dark-blue run of the

Gulf Stream cut across the sky line. Tomorrow he and Ed would be out there trolling for the big ones again. Hubka's pleading continued to beat against his ears and he waited for the faltering that he knew was due soon. When it came, he cut in. Surely Hubka had received an explanatory memo? He knew there was to be a realignment of accounting personnel and methods to conform with Mr. Merling's new sales setup? That's all it amounted to. Regrettable, but unavoidable.

Yes, Hubka had received the note. But he still couldn't understand. What had sales to do with accounting? Or, rather, why couldn't *he* keep whatever records were necessary? For years he had charted the results of all types of selling. It didn't make sense.

There was a bite to Callow's voice when he answered. "It may not make sense to you, Hubka, but don't you think we ought to leave that question to Mr. Merling? I do."

That did it. Hubka sputtered, and became inaudible for a moment. Then he became a little maudlin and Callow sensed, with deep contempt, that the man was weeping.

"Good Lord, man!" he said sharply. "You haven't been sentenced to Siberia, you know. There are other places—"

"No, no!" Hubka came back as if he couldn't bear to stand the finality of the situation. "It's the upset, the suddenness. My family won't know what to think. Why, the company—it was just like our own business. Even the children felt they belonged to it, and it to them. I just can't go home and face them. If a thing like that can happen then I am not sure of anything, of nothing."

He fought for control a second. "It was the last—the very last thing I thought could happen," he finished brokenly.

He was sobbing heavily and plainly unable to go on. Callow listened, then carefully replaced the phone on its cradle. He told the attendant to report him unavailable if the call came back. When he returned to the waiting Ed and his highball, he explained the nature of the call and expressed his deep disgust with men of Hubka's type. "Damn' weakling," he said.

Ed shook his head. "Not at all. The bottom dropped

out of the fellow's world and he was honest enough not to pretend otherwise."

"But a man can't give in to his emotions like that!" Callow said.

"He must if they are strong enough and everything else has failed," Ed said. "When all that a man knows and all he has learned convinces him that there is no hope, nature steps in to take a hand to save him."

"From what?" Callow almost sneered as he put the question. "What did it save Hubka from?"

Ed thought a moment. "Well," he said, "it may have saved him from killing himself or hating you. Or from wanting to kill you or this Merling, perhaps, and thus endangering his own life. There was a benefit, you can depend on it. The most human thing about human beings are their emotions. We cannot really live without them."

"What bosh, Ed!" Callow said. "What fantastic bosh!"

Ed smiled and raised his glass, unwilling to argue the point.

The next morning, on the launch, they ran into a school of dolphins, and though their skipper continually searched for the coveted marlin, they hooked nothing but sea-green dolphins. When it got monotonous, they gave up and put ashore. After lunch Callow fidgeted and finally announced he was driving back to New York. It was typical of him not to be able to take relaxation in anything but small doses. He said good-by to Ed, packed, and a half hour later was headed north in his convertible.

At West Palm Beach his motor started overheating and bedtime found him no farther than Daytona Beach. He found a mechanic to replace a cracked head gasket, and then headed for a hotel.

Late next morning he started off again. By sundown he was coming up out of Georgia when he hit a detour. It was a red-clay road sunk like a trough between tree- and brush-covered sides. His wheels had hardly found the center ruts when he saw that familiar tableau of Georgia highways—a chain gang.

The convicts were preparing to board the steel cages of the prison truck under the watchful guns of two guards.

On the other side of the road from the truck a tractor was nosed up the incline a bit. Its driver, head bent low, was listening to the motor, which he raced intermittently.

The way was clear; the guards were signaling Callow on. But just as he came up to them the tractor roared again and lurched back into the road directly in front of him. He clawed frantically at the wheel but the ruts held the car. It sideswiped the tractor, and swung around toward the truck. In one brief instant Callow saw the horrified faces of the two guards, and the two prisoners—then the convertible crushed them all against the truck.

Dust was falling on Callow, large, fuzzy clumps of red dust. He heard it fall. And then suddenly he realized there was no sound. He wasn't hearing the dust fall—he was *feeling* it fall and *seeing* it fall because it was falling on his open eyes. *I'll close them*, he thought. But they didn't close. It was as if he didn't know how. He tried to think of how it was done but there was no answer to this. *You either do it or you don't*, he thought, and in his dazed condition he derived a vague satisfaction from this deduction.

Not until full recollection of the accident came to him was he able to place himself. He thought of the four men and knew they must be dead. But what of the others? Why wasn't someone with him? The urgency of the situation awoke in him.

He tried to move, to get up. Nothing happened. A wave of panic started to rise but his ego rebelled at the thought of hysteria. *I am William Callow*, he said to himself, *not— not Hubka or some other lightweight. I'll take this for what it is worth, and nothing more.*

Could he see? There was something in front of his eyes that had meaning, and yet, somehow didn't. Could he actually see or was this some floating pattern in his head? He studied it and after a while became convinced that the pattern was the sky, a darkening expanse of sky. But it was blurred and broken. It had fringes—not just around its outer edge but running through it in all directions. Then part of the fringe, but not all, became familiar. It was between him and the sky and he recognized it as the

windshield of the convertible. The safety glass had fissured and parts of it were hanging in twisted shreds.

An understanding of what might be wrong with his vision struck him. The dirt—a film of it and lumps of it—were over his eyes. And there was more than that, probably. His face had smashed against something. Skin would be torn, perhaps bone.

He tried to check his limbs, tried to force movement somewhere in his body, but without success. No sense of pain, no sense of physical being reached his consciousness. Yet, dimly, he was aware of a pressure against his chest, or rather, deep within his chest. And, just as dimly, he felt that his head was tilted back oddly. That would account for the sky in front of him, he thought. He was staring up, tilted far back in his seat, or else the seat had been jarred loose and was now slanting back like a deck chair.

He wondered how he looked; whether he was whole. He had no inkling. From no point of his body did he get a sense of contact with the car. Yet, he knew he must be on the seat, must be pressed against the back rest; his feet should be on the floor.

He thought of his hearing and as he concentrated he heard voices close at hand. He tried to call out and knew immediately that he couldn't make a sound. Something out of a medical book or article flashed into his mind, something about motor control of the nerves that lead to the body muscles. Had he lost all control or was it just deadened temporarily? He had one hopeful sign, he felt—the sense of constriction about his chest. He was grateful for it. It might indicate that the paralysis was not permanent and recovery a possibility.

The voices were nearer. Two men were talking. A foot scraped against the car and an oval shape—he knew it must be a face—came between him and the windshield. A raspy voice vibrated in his ears.

"Look at this boy in the roadster, Sam! Man, look at him! The steering wheel folded up in his vest somewheres."

"Yeah, he sure a mess, Piney," agreed the other. "Whooley, look at that face. Where his eyes? Them slits? He cut, swollen, and gone, that boy. He dead, all right."

"Deader'n last night's coon, Sam," Piney said. He gave a buzz-saw laugh.

"Well, he should be," Sam said. "He done killed four other men. Come on, Piney, le's get out of here. All them other boys high-tailed it the minute they knew them guards was cold."

Piney's face came closer to Callow, and Sam cried out in alarm:

"Get away from that man, Piney! What you doin'? Don't fool with no dead man, boy!"

If only mentally, Callow tried to wriggle away from the face; but it held close and the raspy voice sounded again with a note of excitement to it:

"Wait, Sam! I see a piece of this boy's eyes in them slits! Can't tell for dirt. Something moving in his eyes!"

Callow's hope surged and his feeling toward Piney changed in a flash. The fellow had detected in some way that he was not a corpse. They wouldn't abandon him—they would get help—

"Ain't nothin' moving," Sam said in disgust. "Get away from him. Ain't nothin' moving in his eyes but you. Can't see his eyes anyway and if you does, that's you'self you see bobbin' around in them."

Piney was hesitant. "Yeah?"

"And it ain't healthy to see you'self in a dead man's eyes," added Sam.

Callow felt he'd be willing to give up all further hope for a chance to leap at Sam. Piney's face was withdrawn instantly, and Callow felt as if he had been robbed. But when Piney spoke again his voice sounded just as close. "Sam! Get up in this car with me. Get on this seat."

"What for?" Sam said. "I ain't gonna sit with no dead man."

"You sit on the far side," Piney said. "I'll sit next to him. Get up here, boy!"

There was a pause. Callow could feel nothing but he knew he had been moved. The top of the windshield beat up and down in a quick shifting. Then he heard the men talking again. Piney was directing Sam to lean back in the seat and put his feet against the dashboard of the car.

They were going to get the dead man loose from under the wheel, he told Sam. Sam grumbled and wanted to know why, but Piney ordered him to push. Metal creaked under the strain. Piney's voice urged Sam on to greater effort. Then a cry of satisfaction came from Piney and Callow thought he sensed an easing of the pressure against his chest.

"Now lemme out of here," Sam said. "What you want him pried out for anyway?"

Piney laughed. "How you 'spect I gonna get away from these parts with these jailhouse clothes on me? How far? How far would I get?"

Sam's voice was horrified. "You mean you gonna take this dead boy's clothes? I'm goin', boy! And I ain't travelin' with you."

"I sees you go," Piney said unconcernedly.

Callow seethed and strained to cry out as he heard the sound of Sam's shoes scuffling a retreat down the road. Then Piney moved into his line of vision again. When the convict spoke he seemed to be breathing right into Callow's ear.

"And now, dead boy," Piney said, "you' valet is going to disenrobe you, if you don't mind, suh? I needs them Sunday clothes!"

It was dark, solid night and no help had arrived. Callow knew that he was lying on the floor boards of the smashed car now, his head partly out of the open door. He could make out a patch of the side of the road and a solid shadow in front of him that must be one of his front wheels stuck up in the air at a displaced angle. He judged that there was a sliver of a moon in the sky. He estimated, from the maneuvering involved, that Piney had left him practically naked, and gave up thanks to fate for at least having provided a Southern climate for the accident.

He could not understand why someone had not chanced along the road and decided that the main highway must have been reopened to through traffic just after he had passed the detour point.

His mind was clear; he had encompassed a thousand thoughts. He had even weighed the possibility that he

was actually dead and his consciousness some spiritual phenomenon. But he was too matter-of-fact an individual to consider this seriously. It suited him better to turn his thoughts outward—toward his surroundings, toward questions of time and place, toward rescue. Someone must come soon. He was on a road. There were people. He remembered that the road map had shown a town not far away. He tried to recall the name of the town, how big the dot marked it on the map. As he stared out into the night thinking of this, something moved out there, something along the side of the road. It moved toward him.

He saw a shadowy blob. As he sensed fright mounting up in him, the shape resolved into a human figure and several others joined it from the underbrush. He felt easier. The figures began whispering, and more appeared—some he could see and others he could only hear. As they converged on the wreckage, he heard sounds reminiscent of a car being torn apart in a junk yard. He knew them now. These were the people who lived in the miserable paper-plastered shacks along the road. The poor whites—Negroes perhaps—who had heard the noise of the crash. They had come, not to help, but to take what they could find or remove from the wreckage.

They were busy, silent shadows, but they did not molest him. It was as if they were awed in the presence of death. And there was death. The four his car had trapped must still be jammed between the two machines.

He heard an auto jack in operation and knew that the car was being raised. They were after the tires. He heard a knife slash through canvas and knew the car's top was gone. There was a scraping and whining of springs and he saw someone back into the shadows with the seat. He heard the creaking of good leather. That would be his bags.

Lying there, listening, unable to flex a muscle, he caught himself deeply interested in these looters. He wondered about their daily lives, their pleasures, their problems. Minutes passed and the noises slackened, the activity lessened. Figures moved back into the thickets.

He was alone with the night's dark stillness again, and

he felt himself wishing that they had stayed a little while longer. He missed them,

Time and again he thought he heard approaching cars but the sounds faded out into night noises again. *Like a mirage*, he thought, *only I'm hearing instead of seeing them*. Somewhere about this time he lost consciousness, or perhaps just fell asleep.

He came to, hearing voices, and knew immediately that help had come. Men were out there talking, commenting on the accident. But in the same instant a shocking thought flashed into his mind.

What if help was here? The two prisoners, Piney and Sam, had seen him in twilight and had thought he was dead. So had the marauders who came later. How would those who were here now know he was not dead? Would they even bother to examine him closely if he lay there lifeless, his face probably formless, torn and overlaid with dirt and blood? Would they just bundle him off with the others—a nasty job quickly completed?

He fought off fear by telling himself that now, more than ever, he must keep his wits about him. His life depended on it, perhaps. He tried to think of something he could do—something to show them that he was still alive. Move! If he could move. But how? He was set fast as if in concrete and the conviction that nothing *could* move persisted. But he must try. Perhaps he had recovered some control over his muscles. Perhaps he could awaken something. He strained to move. Again and again he tried.

And then, he not only felt something give—he heard it? It came to him that it was a forefinger—yes—the forefinger on his right hand. He heard it beat against the floor board of the car. The sound was faint but he heard it. Had he been able to speak he would have cried out in triumph. As it was, he tapped with all the vigor he could summon. It was almost as if he were bragging boisterously that he was alive. *Alive! Hear that?*

His finger tired suddenly and he stopped. *Better take it easy*, he thought, *till the right time*. He waited. Footsteps

sounded close. He saw two forms. Then a voice, a man's voice, casual as if experienced with these things, spoke out.

"Yes, that convict we caught wasn't stringing us none. It's just as he made it out to be."

Another voice came in. "And this is the fellow in the roadster, Sheriff! Killed, too?"

A light shone square in Callow's face, blinding him. He couldn't avoid it and it bored a bright shaft deep inside his head. Then the light went off.

"Yeah, he's through," the sheriff said. "Head snapped back like he'd been dropped through a trap on a rope."

The finger! Callow moved it. He heard its tapping—would they?

But just then a man called from out of the night: "Sheriff! You want the doc with you?"

"No!" the sheriff yelled. "This is morgue stuff here."

He and the other man moved off. It was over so quickly. The first opportunity was gone. A car with a noisy motor drew up. Callow was lifted up, and deposited aboard. His finger beat soundlessly in the air until he was lowered onto a flat surface. It was the floor of an open panel truck, a heavy, thick floor which deadened his tapping to only the faintest of sounds. Another motor roared and there was a rending as if a tangle of steel had come apart. That would be his car being pulled away from the truck so that they could reach the lifeless bodies of the others. They began piling the victims into the truck with him. When the loading was finished the truck moved off.

His thoughts flew on ahead. Could it be possible that he, the *living* he, would never be discovered? That he would be treated just as a corpse? That he would be, well—he couldn't stomach the first term that came to him and chose another—*prepared* for burial in the usual way?

He didn't answer the questions. He sternly told himself to do some straight thinking or quit thinking altogether.

He was on his back. He could faintly see stars in the sky and, as the truck went on, occasional lights which floated by directly overhead. Soon, thickening traffic and the green and red glow of stop-and-go lights told him the

truck had reached town. A few minutes later the truck came to a stop, and the driver and another man jumped to the sidewalk. He heard their steps and then the rattle of a doorknob.

When the door opened a conversation began. For the most part the voices were unintelligible as the soft Southern drawl was obscured in the background noise of passing motors. A few minutes later he heard the sound of small wheels and realized this was a roller stretcher. He heard a new voice, the voice of an old, tired man, he reflected, near the truck.

"You boys will have to cart them in, Bob," the old man said. "I don't know where I am going to put them all. Got three in there now. Tell me, they all identified?"

"All but one," the man called Bob said. "That farthest one in the truck, that naked boy. His stuff's missing. But the sheriff's got his license number. New York car. He's wiring tonight and you'll get a name on him tomorrow."

The words grabbed at Callow. New York! They would wire. For a second it represented hope. But then he recoiled at the thought of what it would mean. News of his death would circulate throughout the industry, among his friends, in his own office. He visualized the scenes. He saw his own board of directors in session. They would vote a resolution marking their bereavement and the company's great loss. Then, quickly, the business at hand, the selection of his successor. He thought of a half-dozen possible candidates and disliked everyone of them. The very idea of it made him desperate; galled him.

He had to get out of this before these shocking things could happen. It would be morning before a reply could possibly come from the New York State Motor Vehicle Bureau in Albany. He had till then. But he could not dare wait that long. He must do something tonight, now!

There was a thump as if someone had jumped onto the truck. From the sounds that ensued, he knew that one of the bodies was being removed. He heard the small metal wheels again as the body was rolled away. Quickly he made a sort of plan. When it came his turn, after they had

brought him inside, just as they were lifting him off the stretcher—then he would signal with his finger. At that moment they would have to see it, hear it.

He counted the trips. Four times the stretcher rolled its course. Each time the old undertaker, Chesey, peevishly issued instructions on the handling of the bodies. Each time he complained there was no more space and it made Callow uneasy. They might relegate him to some dark anteroom. He caught himself praying and cut it short to devote his fullest attention to what was going on.

Then he was being carried. The wheels sounded, the wall of the building came to him, passed over, and he knew he was inside the undertaker's establishment. The narrow walls of a hallway passed on each side. There was another doorway and then he was rolled into a brightly lighted room. The ceiling stopped sliding by; he was no longer moving. Now! The moment they lifted him he would start. They would have to be looking at him. Then Chesey's weary voice broke into his tenseness.

"All right, Bob. He's the last. Might as well leave him on the stretcher and I'll snap off the lights. We'll move him first thing in the morning."

There was a mumble of assent from Bob, and the sound of departing steps. The upset to his strategy stunned Callow. Before he could struggle back to presence of mind again, the light flicked out.

Foolishly he wasted moments as he tried to cry out in protest. Then he remembered his finger and beat it against the leather of the stretcher. But a door shut—shut, as he well knew, between the men and himself. Inside of him a shriek formed but he could not force it from its place. He was alone with the dead and the darkness, a darkness that now began to swirl around him. He could see it. It grew into an inverted vortex that went faster and faster and he yearned to grasp it—to spin with it till he knew no more.

Chesey's voice. Callow heard Chesey directing that he be moved. Then all was quiet again. The darkness was gone but all he could see was a patchwork of red and brown flecks against a white background. In time he reasoned it out. He was seeing through the dried blood and

dirt on his eyes, seeing a white sheet and the daylight beyond it. So he was still alive—and still marked for dead.

He felt more weary than frightened now and it was almost with disinterest that he became conscious of Chesey's voice again.

"There they be," said Chesey.

"Yes," said another voice, a voice that spoke with an authoritative ring. "We've got our work cut out for us, haven't we, Chesey? Well, as soon as the coroner's jury is convened out front I'll march them all back here to view the bodies. But after the preliminary evidence, identities, witnesses' names and so forth, I'll continue the inquest until we can get a full report of the sheriff's investigation."

"You going to give me a burial certificate on all these now, Coroner?" Chesey said.

"Yes, of course," the coroner said. "That is, all but that unidentified fellow from New York. No word on him yet?"

"No," Chesey said. "Expect I'll be hearing, though, before the day is over."

"Let me take a look at that man."

They were coming to him. The white flew out of the patchwork but the red and brown remained to obscure the plane of the ceiling above him. Two vague crescent shapes moved into the lowest extreme of his field of vision. These would be the heads of the two men, he reasoned.

A tuneless humming came from deep in the throat of one of the men and he felt it must be the coroner. The humming ceased and the coroner spoke. "Wonder what he looked like."

"Hard to tell, ain't it?" Chesey said.

Something in the tone the men used told Callow that his face must not be a pretty sight. The coroner was talking again, this time his tone more professional.

"Chest crushed. Extensive internal injuries, probably. Head's at an odd angle, isn't it, Chesey? Is that why you've got it propped up?"

"Yes. It's tilted so far back he'd be all chin and neck where his face should be if we let him lay flat."

"Yes," the coroner said, "it indicates a bad condition at the base of the skull where the spine makes its entry."

But he seems in a fine state of preservation, otherwise. Barely cyanotic, I would say."

Chesey, his voice marked with the disinterest of one who has seen too many corpses in his day, said, "Think so?"

Something exploded in Callow's mind and wiped out the fog of apathy that had been clouding it.

This was his chance! The two men must be looking directly at him. He couldn't miss now!

His brain wildly set about to put his forefinger in motion and he felt instant response. But—there was no sensation of movement. Nor could he hear any tapping. Frantically he stopped and started afresh. Perhaps he had lost the knack of it. But he knew that wasn't the fault. He was certain the impulse had gone through to the finger as before—he could feel it in his finger! What was it?

Then it came to him. This feeling that his finger was trying to move but could not told a plain story of what had happened. When he had been lifted from the stretcher his hand must have swung down under his thigh, been caught by it as he was laid on the table.

His full weight was on the finger. It was trapped!

It was an excruciating realization, a thousandfold more terrible than he could stand. He was utterly beaten, and far beyond that. His mind could no longer resist a torrent of thoughts, pictures, phases of his life—all of which underlined the coming of his death. He saw the manner in which he would actually die under the undertaker's hand, and he saw it in horrible, if misconceived, detail.

Words, certain words danced through his mind and seemed edged with significance. When he could grasp them they proved to be the words Ed had spoken to him two days before: *when all that he knows and all that he has learned convinces him that there is no hope . . . that's when a man's emotion comes into play . . . to save him.*

He tasted them bitterly. "To save him!" *God, how bitter, bitter!* he thought. Yes, to save anyone who at least had life, simple, sweet life to look forward to. *But how to save me? How to save me from the stiff, solid flesh in which I am locked and which will not give? The marble that holds me and will forever refuse to let me free? Damn Ed.*

Damn everyone who walks through life and hides its truths with little rules and platitudes—

He stopped. It didn't matter any more. There was something else that did. He wanted it desperately. Not to be saved. He was past that. He wanted comfort. He was reduced to the lonesomeness and fright of a child.

If only someone would take his hand—and he could feel it—

But he could not have even that. Not even that. In his full desolation something happened to him, something which had not been allowed to overcome him since he had been a small boy met with sudden grief. A feeling gathered within him, swelled stronger, and would have overflowed but it could not get beyond his throat where it was halted in pulsing throbs.

"Chesey!" The coroner's startled tone rang through the room. "Look at this man, Chesey! There, at that dirt around his eyes and coming up from under! What is it? What is that?"

"They're watering," the undertaker said. "His eyes must be watering. Looks like tears to me, I'll be damned if they don't!"

"They *are* tears!" the coroner cried. "Good God! This man is—"

Unbelievably, Callow saw one of the crescent heads duck down below his sight. Then it lifted back again, purposefully.

"Chesey, there's a heartbeat! There's a heartbeat and this man is crying. Chesey, get blankets, quickly! I'll get my bag in the front office and call the hospital!"

They were gone and still Callow dared not believe. Then Chesey was back with a blanket and was spreading it over him. As he tucked it in securely the old undertaker's head bent low and he began murmuring to Callow. His crusty voice deepened with compassion.

"There, there, son," he said. "You're safe now. We'll take care of you. We know. Poor fellow, poor fellow."

Each word came as a loving caress to Callow, pressing him ever deeper to the warm bosom of life again. He wept, fullhearted.

EUGENE MANLOVE RHODES

THE FOOL'S HEART

CHARLEY ELLIS DID NOT KNOW WHERE HE WAS; he did not know where he was going; he was not even cheered by any hope of damnation. His worldly goods were the clothes he wore, the six-shooter on his thigh, the horse between his legs, and his saddle, bridle, and spurs. He had no money; no friend closer than 500 miles. Therefore, he whistled and sang; he sat jauntily; his wide hat took on the cant joyous; he cocked a bright eye appreciatively at a pleasant world—a lonesome world just now, but great fun.

By years, few-and-twenty; by size, of the great upper-middle class; blond, tanned, down-cheeked. Add a shock of tow-colored hair, a pug nose of engaging impudence—and you have the inventory.

All day he had ridden slowly across a dreary land of rolling hills, northward and ever northward; a steepest, interminable gray ridge of limestone on his right, knife-sharp, bleak, and bare; the vast black bulk of San Mateo on the west; and all the long day the rider had seen no house, or road, or any man.

One thing troubled him a little; his big roan horse was road-weary and had lost his aforetime pleasing plumpness. He had also lost a shoe today and was intending to be very tender-footed at once.

Charley was pleased, then, topping a hill, to observe that somebody had chopped a deep notch into the stubborn limestone ridge; and to see, framed in that tremendous notch, a low square of ranch buildings on a high tableland beyond. A dark and crooked chasm lay between—Ellis could see only the upper walls of it, but the steep angle of the sides gave the depth. A deep and broad basin fell away before his feet. Westward it broke into misty branches between ridges blue-black with pine. Plainly the waters of these many valleys drained away through the deep-notched chasm.

It was late. The valley was dark with shadow. Beyond, the lonely ranch loomed high and mysterious in a blaze of the dying sunlight. Ellis felt his blood stir and thrill to watch it higher and higher above him as he followed down a plunging ridge. Higher and higher it rose; another downward step and it was gone.

Ellis led his horse now, to favor the unshod foot on the stony way. He came to a road in the valley; the road took him to a swift and noisy stream, brawling, foaming-white, and narrow. They drank; they splashed across.

A juniper stood beside the road. To it was nailed a sign-board, with the rudely painted direction: *Box O Ranch, Five Miles*. Below was a penciled injunction: *Don't try the box canyon. It's fenced. Too rough anyway. Keep to the road.*

"Vinegaroan, you old skeezicks," said Charley, "I'm goin' to leave you here and hoof it in. Good grass here and you're right tired. Besides, that foot of yours'll be ruined with a little more of these rocks. I'll rustle a shoe and tack it on in the morning." He hung the saddle high in the juniper—for range cattle prefer a good \$60 saddle to other feed.

Charley hobbled old Vinegaroan and set out smartly, hobbling himself in his high-heeled boots. As the dim road wound into the falling dusk he regaled himself with the immortal saga of Sam Bass:

*"Sam Bass he came from Indiana—it was his native state;
He came out here to Texas, and here he met his fate.
Sam always drank good liquor and spent his money free,
And a kinder-hearted fellow you'd seldom ever see!"*

The Box O Ranch stands on a bone-dry mesa, two miles from living water. It is a hollow square of adobe; within is a mighty cistern, large enough to store the filtered rain water from all the roofs. The site was chosen for shelter in Indian times; there is neither hill nor ridge within gunshot. One lonely cedar fronts the house, and no other tree is in sight; for that one tree the ranch was built there and not in another place. A mile away you come to the brink of Nogales Canyon, narrow and deep and dark; 1000 feet below, the sunless waters carve their way to the

far-off river. The ranch buildings and corrals now mark one corner of a fenced pasture, three miles square; the farther cliffs of Nogales Canyon make the southern fence.

The great mesas pyramid against the west, step on step; on that heaven-high pedestal San Mateo Peak basks in the sun, a sleeping lion. But the wonder and beauty of San Mateo are unprized. San Mateo is in America.

Two men came to the Box O in the glare of afternoon—a tall man, great of bone and coarse of face, hawk-nosed; a shorter man and younger, dark, thin-lipped, with little restless eyes, gray and shifting. He had broad eyebrows and a sharp, thin nose.

A heavy revolver swung at the tall man's thigh—the short man had an automatic; each had a rifle under his knee. They were weary and thirst-parched; the horses stumbled as they walked—they were streaked and splashed with the white salt of sweat, caked with a mire of dust and lather, dried now by the last slow miles, so that no man might know their color.

The unlocked house lay silent and empty; the stove was cold; the dust of days lay on the table. "Good enough!" croaked the shorter man. "Luck's with us."

He led the way to the cistern. They drank eagerly, prudently; they sluiced the stinging dust from face and neck and hair.

"Ain't it good?" said the short man.

"Huh! That wasn't such a much. Wait till you're good and dry once—till your lips crack to the quick and your tongue swells black."

"Never for mine! I'm for getting out of this. I'm hunting the rainiest country I can find; and I stay there."

"If we get away! What if we don't find fresh horses in the pasture? There's none in sight."

"Reed's always got horses in the pasture. They're down in the canyon, where the sun hasn't dried up the grass. Oh, we'll get away, all right! They've got to track us, Laxon—and we've left a mighty crooked trail. They can't follow our trail at night and the Angel Gabriel couldn't guess where we are headed for."

"You don't allow much for chance. Or for—anything

else. We sure don't deserve to get away," said Laxon. He led his horse in, took off the bridle, and pumped up a bucket of water. The poor beast drank greedily and his eyes begged for more.

"Not now, Bill. Another in ten minutes," he said in answer to a feeble nickering. He unsaddled; he sighed at the scalded back. "I'll douse a few bucketfuls on you quick as your pard gets his."

He turned his head. The younger man leaned sullenly against the wall. He had not moved. Laxon's face hardened. It was an ugly and brutal face at best—the uglier that he was slightly cross-eyed. Now it was the face of a devil.

"You worthless cur, get your horse! I thought you was yellow when you killed poor Mims last night—and now I know it! No need of it—not a bit. We could 'a' got his gun and his box of money without. Sink me to hell if I've not half a mind to give you up! If I was sure they'd hang you first I'd do it!"

"Don't let's quarrel, Jess. I'll get the horse, of course," said Moss wearily. "I'm just about all in—that's all. I could sleep a week!"

"Guess your horse ain't tired, you swine! I ought to kick you through the gate! Quarrel? You! Wish you'd try it. Wish you'd just raise your voice at me! Sleep, says he! Sleep, when somebody may drop in on us any time! All the sleep you get is the next hour. We ride tonight and sleep all day tomorrow in some hollow of the deep hills, over beyond the Divide. No more daylight for us till we strike the Gila."

Moss made no answer. Laxon hobbled stiffly into the house and brought back canned tomatoes, corned beef, and a butcher knife. They wolfed their food in silence.

"Sleep now, baby!" said Laxon. "I'll stand watch." He spread the heavy saddle blankets in the sun; he gave the horses water, a little at a time, until they had their fill; with a gunny sack and pail he washed them carefully. Their sides were raw with spurring; there were ridges and welts where a double rope had lashed.

A cruel day to the northward two other horses lay stark

and cold by Bluewater Corral; a cruel night beyond Bluewater by the paymaster of the Harqua Hala Mine lay by the broken box of his trust, with a bullet in his heart.

Laxon found a can of baking-powder and sprinkled it on the scalded backs. "Pretty hard lines, Bill," he said, with a pat for the drooping neck. "All that heft of coin heaped up behind the cantle—that made it bad. Never mind! You'll come out all right—both of you."

His thoughts went back to those other horses at Bluewater. He had shot them at sunrise. He could not turn them loose to drink the icy water and die in agony; he could not stay; he could not shut them in the corral to endure the agony of thirst until the pursuit came up—a pursuit that so easily might lose the trail in the rock country and never come to Bluewater. It had been a bitter choice.

He built a fire and investigated the chuck room; he put on the coffeepot, took a careful look across the mesa, and came back to Moss. The hour was up.

Moss slept heavily, his arms sprawled wide, his fingers jerking; he moaned and muttered in his sleep; his eyes were sunken and on his cheek the skin was stretched skull-tight. The watcher was in less evil case; his reserves of stored-up vitality were scarcely touched as yet. Conscious of this, his anger for the outworn man gave way to rough compassion; the hour had stretched to nearly two before he shook the sleeper's shoulder.

"Come, Moss! You're rested a little and so's your horse. I've got some good hot coffee ready for you. Get a cup of that in your belly and you'll be as good as new. Then you go drive all the horses up out of the pasture—just about time before dark. While you're gone I'll cook a hot supper, bake up a few pones of bread for us to take along, and pack up enough other truck to do us. I'd go, but you're fifty pounds lighter'n me. Besides, you know the pasture."

"Oh, I'll go," said Moss as he drank his coffee. "There's a little corral down in the bottom. Guess I can ease a bunch in there and get me a new mount. The rest'll be easy."

"We'll pick out the likeliest, turn the others out, and throw a scare into 'em," said Laxon. "We don't want to leave any fresh horses for them fellows, if they come. And, of course, they'll come."

"Yes, and they'll have a time finding out which is our tracks. I'll just leave this money here, and the rifle," said Moss, in the corral. "That'll be so much weight off, anyway." He untied a slicker from behind the saddle. Unrolling it, he took out an ore sack and tossed it over beside Laxon's saddle; it fell with a heavy clink of coins. "Say, Jess! Look over my doin' the baby act a while ago, will you? I should have taken care of my horse, of course—poor devil; but I was all in—so tired I hardly knew what I was about." He hesitated. "And—honest, Jess—I thought Mims was going after his gun."

"Guess I didn't sense how tired you was," said Jess, and there was relief in his voice. "Let it all slide. We're in bad and we got to stick together—us two."

At sundown Moss drove back 12 head of saddle stock. He had caught a big rangy sorrel at the horse pen in the canyon. "This one'll do for me," he announced as he swung down.

"I'll take the big black," said Laxon. "Trot along now and eat your supper. I'll be ready by the time you're done. I've got our stuff all packed—and two canteens. Say, Moss, I've got two bed blankets. I'm goin' to carry my share of grub behind my saddle. My sack of money I'll wad up in my blanket and sling it across in front of me, see? We don't want any more sore-backed horses. You'd better do the same."

"All right!" said Moss. "You fix it up while I eat."

Laxon roped and saddled the black, and tied one of the grub sacks behind the cantle; he made a neat roll of his own sack of money and the blanket and tied it across behind the horn. Then he fixed his partner's money sack and grub sack the same way and thrust the rifle into the scabbard. He opened the outer gate of the corral and let the loose horses out on the eastern mesa.

"Hike, you! We'll fall in behind you in a pair of minutes and make you burn the breezel! Now for Bill, the very

tired horse, and we'll all be ready to hit the trail."

Bill was lying down in a corner. Laxon stirred him up and led him by the foretop out through the pasture gate. The saddle-house door opened noiselessly; Moss steadied his automatic against the door frame and waited.

"You go hunt up your pardner, old Bill. You and him orter be good pals from now on. So long! Good luck!" said Laxon. He closed the gate.

Moss shot him between the shoulder blades. Laxon whirled and fell on his face; the swift automatic cracked. Laxon rose to his elbow, riddled and torn; bullet after bullet crashed through his body. He shot the sorrel horse between the eyes. The black reared up and broke his rope; as he fell backward a ball from Laxon's .45 pierced his breast; falling, another shot broke his neck. Then Laxon laughed—and died.

White, frantic, cursing, the trapped murderer staggered out from his ambush. Shaking horribly, he made sure that Laxon was dead. "The squint-eyed devil!" he screamed.

He ran to the outer gate. The band of freed horses was close by and unalarmed, but twilight was deepening fast. What was to be done must be done quickly.

He set the outer gate open. He bridled old Bill and leaped on, bareback; with infinite caution he made a wide circle beyond the little bunch of horses and worked them slowly toward the gate.

They came readily enough and, at first, it seemed that there would be no trouble; but at the gate they stopped, sniffed, saw those dim, mysterious forms stretched out at the farther side, huddled, recoiled, and broke away in a little, slow trot.

Moss could not stop them. Poor old Bill could only shuffle. The trot became a walk; they nibbled at the young grass.

Once he turned them back, but before they reached the gate they edged away uneasily. Twilight was done. Twice he turned them back. All the stars were out and blazing clear; a cool night breeze sprang up. Nearing the gate, the horses sniffed the air, they snorted, wheeled, and broke away; the trot became a gallop, the gallop a run.

Moss slipped the bridle off and walked back to the corral. His whole body was shaking in a passion of rage and fear. He drank deeply at the cistern: he reloaded the automatic; he went to the dead horses. Whatever came, he would not abandon that money. After all, there was a chance. He would keep the notes with him; he would hide the gold somewhere in the rocky cliffs of the canyon; he would climb out over the cliffs, where he would leave no tracks to follow; he would keep in the impassable hills, hiding by day; he would carry food and water; he would take the rifle and the first time he saw a horseman alone he would have a horse.

Eagerly he untied the two treasure sacks and emptied one into the other. He started for the house. Then his heart stopped beating. It was a voice, faint and far away:

"Rabbit! Rabbit! Tail mighty white!"

Yes, good Lord—he'll take it out o' sight!

Take it out o' sight!"

In a frenzy of fear the murderer dropped his treasure and snatched up the rifle. He ran to the gate and crouched in the shadow. His hair stood up; his heart pounded at his ribs; his knees knocked together.

"Rabbit! Rabbit! Ears mighty long!"

Yes, good Lord—you set 'em on wrong!

Set 'em on wrong!"

It was a gay young voice, coming from the westward, nearer and nearer. Slinking in the shadows, Moss came to the corner. In the starlight he saw a man very near now, coming down the road afoot, singing as he came. "*Sam Bass he came from Indiana—it was his native state.*"

From the west? His pursuers would be coming from the north along his track—they would not be singing, and there would be more than one. Why was this man afoot? With a desperate effort of the will Moss pulled himself together. He slipped back into the kitchen and lit the lamp. He threw dry sticks on the glowing coals—they broke into a crackling flame; the pleasant tingling incense of cedar filled the room. He dabbed at his burning face with a wet towel; he smoothed his hair hastily. Drawn, pale, and haggard, the face in the glass gave him his cue—

he was an invalid.

Would the man never come? He felt the mounting impulse to struggle no longer—to shriek out all the ghastly truth; to give up—anything, so he might sleep and die and rest. But he had no choice; he must fight on. Some way he must use this newcomer for his need. But why afoot? Why could not the man have a horse? Then his way would have been so easy. His throat and mouth were dust-dry—he drank deep of the cool water and felt his new life steal along his veins. Then—because he must busy himself to bridge the dreadful interval—he forced his hands to steadiness; he filled and lit a pipe.

“Hello, the house!”

Moss threw open the door; the dancing light leaped out against the dark. Along that golden pathway a man came, smiling.

“Hello yourself, and see how you like it! You’re late. Turn your horse in the corral while I warm up supper for you.”

“I left my horse back up the road. I just love to walk,” said Charley. At the door he held up a warning hand. “Before I come in, let’s have a clear understanding. No canned corn goes with me. I don’t want anybody even to mention canned corn.”

“Never heard of it,” said Moss. “Sit ye down. How’d fried spuds, with onions and bacon suit you?”

“Fine and dandy! Anything but ensilage.” Ellis limped to a box by the fire and painfully removed a boot. “Cracky! Some blisters!”

Moss bent over the fire. “You’re not from round these parts, are you?” he asked. He raked out coals for the coffee-pot and put the potatoes to warm.

“Nope. From Arizona—lookin’ for work. What’s the show to hook up with this outfit?”

“None. Everybody gone to the roundup. Oh, I don’t live here myself. I’m just a-stayin’ round for my health.” *If I could only get to this man’s horse—if I could leave this man in the trap! The pursuit must be here by tomorrow. Steady! I must feel my way.* “Horse played out?”

“No; but he’s right tired and he lost the shoe off his nigh

forefoot today. Stake me to a new shoe, of course?"

"Sure!" *But this man will tell his story. I can never get away on a tired horse—they will overtake me; they will be here tomorrow. Shall I make it seem that Laxon and this man have killed each other? No; there will still be his tracks where he came—mine where I leave. How then?* "Sorry I can't let you have a horse to get yours. Just set myself afoot about sunset. Had all the saddle horses in the corral—saw a coyote—ran out to shoot him—did you hear me, mister? I didn't get your name. Mine's Moss."

"Ellis—Charley Ellis. No; I was 'way over behind that hill at sundown. You're sure looking peaked and pale, Mr. Moss."

"It's nothing—weak heart," said Moss. The heavy brows made a black bar across his white face. *How then? I will stay here. I will be the dupe, the scapegoat—this man shall take my place, shall escape, shall be killed resisting arrest.* "Just a little twinge. I'm used to it. Where was I? Oh, yes—the horses. Well, I didn't shut the gate good. It blew open and away went my horses to the wild bunch. Idiotic, wasn't it? And I was planning to make a start tonight, ten mile or so, on a little hunting trip. That reminds me—I got a lot of bread baked up and it's out in my pack. You wash up and I'll go get it. There's the pan."

This man Ellis was the murderer! I left my horse. Ellis stole away while I was asleep. He tried to escape on my horse. He can't get far; the horse is about played out. When I woke and missed Ellis I found the dead man in the corral!

The black thought shaped and grew. He hugged it to his heart as he took bread from the pack sacks; he bettered it as he hid the sack of money. He struck a match and picked out a sheaf of five-dollar bills; he tore them apart way across, near one corner, perhaps an inch. Then he took one bill from the torn package, crumpled it up and wadded it in his pocket, putting the others back in the sack.

Next, he found the empty ore sack, the one that had carried Laxon's half of the plunder. With a corner of it he pressed lightly over the dead man's back, so that a tiny

smear of drying blood showed on the sack. Then he took the bread and hurried to the house, dropping the ore sack outside the door. It was swiftly done. Ellis was just combing his hair when his host returned.

"There! Coffee's hot and potatoes will be in a jiffy. Sit up. Where'd you say you left your horse?"

"Where the wagon road crosses the creek west of the box canyon—where there's a sign nailed to a tree."

"Which sign? There's several—different places."

"Five miles to the Box O Ranch, it says."

"Hobbled your horse, I reckon?"

"Yep. Wasn't really no need of hobbling, either—he won't go far. Some gaunted up, he is. He'll be glad when I get a job. And I'll say this for old Vinegaroan—he's a son-of-a-gun to pitch; but he don't put on. When he shows tired he's tired for fair. Only for his wild-fool ways, he'd be the best horse I ever owned. But, then, if it hadn't been for them wild-fool ways the VR wouldn't never 'a' let me got my clutches on him. They never raised a better horse, but he was spoiled in breaking. He thinks you want him to buck. Don't mean no harm by it."

"I see! Roan horse, branded VR and some devilish; you might say he named himself."

"That's it."

"What is he—red roan?"

"Naw—blue roan. Mighty fine looker when he's fat—the old scoundrel!"

"Old horse? Or is that just a love name?"

Charley laughed. "Just a love name. He's seven years old."

Moss poured the coffee and dished up the potatoes. "There! She's ready—pitch in! I'll take a cup' of coffee with you. Big horse?"

"Fifteen hands. Say, this slumgullion tastes mighty ample after—you know—fodder. Last night I stayed in a little log shack south of the peak."

Moss interrupted. "How many rooms? So I can know whose house it was."

"Two rooms—HG burned on the door. Chas. J. Graham, Cañada Alamosa, stenciled on the boxes. No one at

home but canned corn and flour and coffee. Night before at the Anchor X Ranch. No one at home. Note sayin' they'd gone to ship steers at Magdalena. Didn't say nothing about goin' after chuck—but I know. There wasn't one cussed thing to eat except canned corn—not even coffee. Blessed if I've seen a man for three days. Before that I laid up a couple of days with an old Mexican, right on the tip-top of the Black Range—hunting, and resting up my horse.”

“I knowed a V R brand once, up North,” said Moss reflectively. “On the hip for mares, it was; thigh for geldings; side for cattle.”

“That one's on the Gila—Old Man Hearn—shoulder for horses; hip for cattle.”

“Let me fill your cup,” said Moss. “Now I'll tell you what—I wish you could lay up with me. I'd be glad to have you. But if you want work bad, and your horse can make eighteen or twenty miles by noon tomorrow, I think you can catch onto a job. They're meetin' at Rosedale tomorrow to start for the north roundup. This country here has done been worked. They'll light out after dinner and make camp about twenty-five miles north. You follow back the road you came here for about a mile. When the road bends to come here, at the head of the draw, you bear off to the left across the mesa, northwest-like. In six or eight miles you'll hit a plain road from the river, running west, up into the mountains. That'll take you straight to Rosedale.”

“Well! I'll have to be up and doin', then, and catch 'em before they move. Much obliged to you! Think I'm pretty sure of a job?”

“It's a cinch. Them V-Cross-T cattle are a snaky lot, and they never have enough men.”

“Look, here! Stake me to a number-one shoe and some nails, will you? Loan me a rasp and a hammer? I'll stick the tools up in the tree where the sign is. Clap a shoe on at daylight and shack along while it's cool. I'll make it by ten o'clock or later.”

“But you'll stay all night?”

“No—we might oversleep. I'll chin with you awhile and

then hike along back and sleep on my saddle blankets. Then I'll be stirrin' soon in the mawnin'."

"Well, I'm sorry to see you go; but you know your own business. No more? Smoke up, then?" He tossed papers and tobacco across. "Say, I want you to send a Mex boy down here with a horse, so I can drive my runaways in off the flat. Don't forget!"

"I'll not. May I have a bucket and wash up these blistered feet of mine before I hike?"

"Sure you can! Sit still; I'll get the water. I'll rustle round and see if some of the boys ain't left some clean socks too; and I'll wrap you up a parcel of breakfast."

"Well, this is luck!" declared Charley a little later, soaking his feet luxuriously and blowing smoke rings while his host busied himself packing a lunch. "A job, horseshoe, socks, supper and breakfast—and no canned corn! I'll do somebody else a good turn sometime—see if I don't! I wasn't looking for much like this a spell back, either. About an hour by sun, was countin' on maybe makin' supper on a cigarette and a few verses of *The Boston Burglar*—unless I could shoot me a cottontail at sundown—most always you can find a rabbit at sundown. Then I sighted this dizzy old ranch peekin' through the gap at me. Bing! Just look at me now! Nobody's got nothin' on me! Right quaint, ain't it? What a difference a few hours'll make—the things that's waiting for a fellow and him not knowin' about it!"

Moss laughed.

"Well, I got to be steppin'," said Charley.

"Hold on! I'm not done with you yet. That's a good pair of boots you've got there—but they'll be just hell on those blistered feet. How'd you like to swap for my old ones? Sevens, mine are."

"So's mine. Why, I'll swap with you. Yours'll be a sight easier on me. I'm no great shakes on walking, me."

"Why, man, did you think I meant to swap even? Your boots are worth ten dollars—almost new—and mine just hang together. I wouldn't take a mean advantage of you like that. Come! I'll make you an even offer: Give me your boots and your forty-five, with the belt and scabbard, for

my automatic, with its rigging and five dollars, and I'll throw in my boots."

"Shucks! You're cheating yourself! Trade boots and guns even—that'll be fair enough." Charley unbuckled his spurs.

"Don't be silly! Take the money. It's a long time till payday. I've been all along that long road, my boy. If you're broke—I'm just guessing that, because I've been broke myself—why, you don't want to ask for an advance the first thing."

"I'll tell you what, then—swap spurs too. That'll make about an even break."

"Nonsense! Keep your spurs. Lou don't want these old petmakers of mine. They'd be a hoodoo to a cowboy. Take the money, son. I wish it was more. I've got plenty enough, but not here. If you feel that way about it, call it a loan and pay it back when you're flush. Better still, pass it on to somebody else that needs it."

Charley surrendered. "I'll take it, then—that way. You're all right, Mr. Moss! Try on your new boots and see how they fit."

"Fine as silk! Couldn't be better if they was made to order," said Moss. "Good boots. That's always the way with you young fellows. Every cent goes for a fancy outfit. Bet you've got a fire-new saddle—and you without a copper cent in your pocket."

"Well, purty nigh it," admitted Charley, grinning. "Set me back fifty-four pesos less'n a year ago. But she's a daisy."

Moss smiled indulgently. "Well, I must rig you out for horseshoein'. You stay here and rest up. Number-one shoe, I think you said?"

He came back with the horseshoe and tools, bringing also the discarded ore sack, now bulging with a liberal feed of corn. "For Vinegaroon, with my love!" he said, laughing, and clapping Ellis on the shoulder.

A lump came into Charley's throat. "I reckon you're a real-for-certain white man, Mr. Moss. If old Vinegaroon could talk he'd sure thank you. I'm going now and let you go to bed. You don't look so clean beat out as you did,

but you look right tired. *Adios!* And I hope to meet up with you again."

"Oh, you'll see me again! Good-by!"

They shook hands. Charley shouldered his pack and limped sturdily along the starlit road, turning once for a shouted "Good-by!" Moss waved a hand from the lighted doorway; a gay song floated back to him:

*"Adal Adal Open that do', Adal
Adal Adal Open that do'
This mawnin'.
Adal Adal Open that do'
Or I'll open it with a forty-fo'
This mawnin'!"*

"Oh, yes! you'll see me again!" said Moss, smiling evilly. Then he closed the door. "Tired?" he said. "Tired? I've got to sleep if I swing for it!"

BOX O RANCH, August 5th.

Statement of Elmer Moss

My name is Elmer Moss. I left Florence, Arizona, three weeks ago, looking for work. I did not find a place and drifted on to this ranch. I stayed here a week or two, six years ago, when George Sligh worked here.

Last night my horse was pretty well give out and had lost a shoe; so I left him at the crossing of Nogales Creek, west of the pasture fence, and walked in.

I got in soon after dark and found a man who said his name was Charley Ellis, and that he was working here. He was a young fellow, with rather a pleasant face. He was about my size, with light hair and blue eyes and a pug nose. He made me welcome. Said he couldn't say about the work, but for me to stay here till the boss came back. We talked quite late.

I woke up early in the morning. Ellis was not in his bed. I supposed he had gone to wrangle horses out of the pasture and I went back to sleep, for I was very tired from riding a slow horse. I woke again after a while and got up. Ellis was not back yet. I went out into the corral. And there I found a dead man. He was shot all to pieces—I

don't know how many times. There were two dead horses, both shot and both saddled.

I found the boot tracks where Ellis had gone back the way I came. He is trying to get away on my horse and leave me with a murdered man on my hands to explain.

I was so scared I didn't know what to do. I went out in the pasture to the rim, where I could see all over the canyon. If I could have got a horse I would have run away. There wasn't a horse in sight except one. That one was close up under the rimrock. He had been ridden almost to death. He wouldn't have carried me five miles. After I came back I found another one, in worse shape than the first, outside the corral gates. I let him in and gave him water and hay. There were horse tracks of all sizes round the corral.

I don't know what to do. I don't know what has happened here. It may be a week before anybody comes. If anyone comes today, or while the tracks are fresh that I made coming and that Ellis made going away, I'm all right. The story is all there, plain as print. My boots are new and his was all worn out. There's no chance for mistake. And my horse has lost a shoe from his left forefoot; so he will be easy tracked. And he's badly jaded—he can't go fast. If anybody comes today they can trail him up and catch him easy. If no one comes today I'm a goner.

I just now went and spread a tarp over the dead man. He was laughing when he died. He's laughing yet—and his eyes are wide open. It's horrible! Left everything else just as it was. Am writing this now, and taking my time at it, to get everything straight while there's no one to get me rattled and all mixed up. And in case I go out of my head. Or get hold of a horse somehow and try to get away. No, I won't try to run away. If I did it would be just the same as confessing that I was the murderer. If they caught me I'd hang sure.

Nothing can save me except the straight truth. And that won't help me none unless somebody comes along today. This man Ellis was about my size—but I told you that before. He wore blue overalls, pretty badly faded, and a gray flannel shirt. I didn't notice his hat; he didn't have it on

much. I saw a revolver belt under his pillow and it's gone now; but I didn't see the gun.

That made me think. I went back and looked round everywhere to see where Ellis had reloaded his gun. I found fresh shells—nine of them, .32's automatic shells, smokeless, rimless—scattered over the floor of the saddle room just as an automatic would throw them. He killed his man from ambush. I went back and looked at the dead man. He was shot in the back—twice anyway. Hit six times in all, as near as I could see. I couldn't bear to touch him. He looked too terrible, laughing that way—and I'm about to break down. There was a hole in his neck about the size a .32 would make.

There was a six-shooter in the sand near his hand with three empty shells in it. Them shells was what killed the horses—after the dead man was first shot, I reckon. I covered him up again. I see now that I shouldn't have gone near him. I see now—too late—that I never should have made one single foot-track in that corral. If I had only known—if I had only thought in time—the tracks in there would have cleared me. All I had to do was to stay out. But how could I think of that?

Later: There is a tree in front of the house and I have started a grave there. If no one comes by sundown I'll bury the poor fellow. I will rig up some sort of a sled and put the body on it and make the give-out pony drag it out to the grave.

The work of digging has done me good and steadied my nerves. I am half done and now I am able to set a little. I will go back and finish it now.

Later—ten o'clock: Thank God! When the grave was done and I climbed out I saw a big dust off in the north coming this way. I am saved! They are closer now and coming very fast—ten or twelve men on horseback. I have looked over this statement carefully and don't think I have forgotten anything. This is the truth and nothing but the truth, so help me God.

I want to make one thing straight: Moss is not my right name. I have used that name for nine years. I was of good family and had my chance in life; but I was wild. What-

ever happens I will bring no more disgrace to the name. I shall stick to Elmer Moss. If it had rained and washed the tracks out—if the wind had covered them with sand—what a shape I would be in now! They are quite close. I am leaving my gun on these sheets of paper. I am going out to meet them.

"That's all," said Tom Hall.

No one answered. Every man drew a long, deep breath—almost a sigh. There was a shuffling of feet.

The dark looks that had been bent on Moss, where he sat leaning heavily on the table, were turned long since to pity and rough friendliness. A dozen stern-faced men were crowded in the kitchen—a little white and sick, some of them, from what they had seen in the corral.

Each man looked at the others. Young Broyles let his hand rest lightly on Moss's shoulder. Then Old Man Teagardner frowned into his beard and spoke:

"Your story sounds like the truth, Mr. Moss," he said. "The boot tracks going away from here are the same tracks we found in Bluewater Pens, and these two played-out horses came from Bluewater. If you're telling the truth you've been up against it hard. Still, you must be held as a prisoner—for the present, at least, till we find your man. And we'll want you to answer a few questions. What kind of a horse did you have?"

"A blue roan, VR brand, thin, fifteen hands high, no shoe on left forefoot, seven or eight years old. Saddle nearly new," answered Moss dully. Then he raised his head and his voice swelled to sudden anger: "You can ask me questions any time—you got me. Why don't you go after Ellis? That's your business! He's gettin' farther away every minute. Of course you'll keep me prisoner. What do you take me for—a fool? S'pose I'd think you'd find a man in the shape I'm in an' let him go foot-loose as soon as he said, 'Please, mister, I didn't do it?' Send some of your gang after Ellis and I'll answer all the fool questions you can think up."

"Son," said Teagardner evenly, "your party won't get away. We've sent men or messages all over the country and

everybody's forwarded it on. Every man not accounted for will be held on suspicion. Some of the boys will go in a little while; but, ten to one, your man Ellis is caught now—or killed. Say, boys, let's get out where we can get a breath of air."

"He won't fight, I tell you!" urged Moss as he followed his questioner outdoors. "He'll be as innocent as a lamb. If he don't ooze away without bein' seen his play is to saw it off onto me."

"All the more reason, then, why you should answer our questions."

"Questions!" cried Moss bitterly. "I wish somebody'd answer me a few. Who was that dead man? What did Ellis kill him for? Who was your gang lookin' for?"

"We don't know the dead man's name. None of us ever seen him before," said Cook. "We've followed them for two days. Robbery and murder. Now one has killed the other for his share of the stolen money."

"Then you didn't know the man you was after? But," said Moss, "this man may have got killed himself for reasons of his own. He may have nothing to do with your bank robbers. There was all sorts of shod horse tracks leading away from the gate—I saw 'em this morning. Maybe that was the outfit you're after."

Teagardner stroked his long white beard and motioned the others to silence. Said he, "Some of us'll follow 'em up, to be sure—but them was only saddle horses that they turned out, I judge—so us fellows couldn't get 'em. As I figure it out, that's how come your Ellis man to be in the fix he was. He shot his pardner and his pardner set him afoot before he died. So when you come, Ellis left you to hold the sack. Well! Cal, you and Hall pick out two other men to suit yourselves, and follow Ellis up. Watch close for any sign of him hiding out the money. He dassent keep it with him. We'll look for it here. Made your choice?"

"These two sticks'll do us, Uncle Ben."

"All right, then; get a mouthful to eat first and take something with you. I'll see you before you start. Broyles, you and Dick take the trail of that bunch of saddle horses after dinner. Bring 'em back—or see where they went to.

It's just barely possible that there's been two separate gangs on the war path here; but I judge not. I judge them's just saddle horses. Sam, you and Spike cook dinner. You other chaps make some sort of a coffin. Keep Moss with you. After while we'll all turn to and see if Ellis hid the money here."

In the kitchen Teagardner spoke aside to the four who were to follow Ellis. "Now, whatever happens, you fellows get that man alive—*sabe*? No shooting. I ain't quite satisfied. Moss, he tells a straight enough story and everything seems to back him up so far; but this man Ellis—where does he get off? If he comes along peaceful and unsuspecting—why, he's guilty and playin' foxy, layin' it all onto Moss. If he's scared, it hangs him; if he keeps his upper lip right, he's brazening it out, and we hang him for that. If he fights you, he's guilty; if he hides out, that proves he's guilty. If he gets clean away, that absolute proof. Any game where a man hasn't got one chance to win don't look just right."

Young Broyles burst into the room. "See what I found! It was out in the corral, in the sand. I kicked at that ore sack lyin' there by the dead horses—and I kicked up this! Nineteen five-dollar bills, done up like a pack of envelopes."

"They're all torn—see? And they're usually put up in hundred-dollar bunches, aren't they?" said Hall. "There's one gone—maybe."

"Yes," said Cal eagerly, "and that ore sack—there was two of 'em, likely, and after the murder Ellis put all the stuff into one and dropped this bundle doin' it! Say! We ought to call Moss."

"I'll tell him," said Teagardner.

"But how'd them bills get torn? And where's the other one?" demanded Cal.

Hall shrugged his shoulders. "How'd I know? Come on, fellows—let's hike!"

Dinner was eaten; Broyles and Dick departed on their search; the coffin was made; and the dead man was laid in it.

"Will you bury him now?" asked Moss.

"I hope so!" said Spike with a shudder.

"Me, too," echoed Sam. "I can't stand that awful laugh on his face. Let's get him out of sight, Uncle Ben."

"No. We want Ellis to see him, for one thing. Then again, the sheriff may come and he may want to take charge. Besides, I think maybe we'll bury the murderer here and take this one to San Marcial."

Moss licked his lips.

"Put them both in one grave—why not? It's deep enough," suggested Cook. "They killed old Mims—let them talk it over together."

Only one man shot Mims," said Teagardner. "This poor fellow may not have been the one. The man that killed him—his own pardner—the man that shot him in the back from behind a 'dobe wall, and then left an innocent man to stand for it—that's the man killed Mims. I don't think we've any right to force such company on this dead man. Come on! Let's get to work."

They dragged the dead horses far out on the plain; they piled sand where the blood pools had been; roof and wall and floor, they ransacked the house, the outbuildings, and the stables for the stolen money.

"You're forgetting one thing," said Moss. "As I am still your prisoner I am naturally still under suspicion. I may be the murderer after all and Ellis may be the victim—as, of course, he'll claim to be. Somebody ought to follow my track where I walked out to the rim this morning."

Teagardner eyed him, with mild reproach. "Set your mind at rest, Mr. Moss. We're taking all bets. We did exactly that while you were resting just before dinner. You didn't take a step that isn't accounted for. You didn't ride one of the give-out horses down in the canyon and hide it there, either. And it will be the same with Ellis. That money will be found. We need it—as evidence."

"Well, if you've done looking I'd like to rest—go to sleep if I can. I'm done!"

"Yes—you look fagged out. No wonder—you've been under a strain. It's blistering hot—we'll all go out to the grave, under that tree. It's the only cool place round here. Bring some water, you boys."

"Nice pleasant place for a sleep," suggested Sam, with a nervous giggle, at the grave side. "What's the matter with the shady side of the house?"

"No air," said Moss. "This suits me."

Teagardner sat on a stone and gazed long into the grave, smoking placidly. He was a very old man—tough and sturdy and straight and tall for all that. Long and long ago, Teagardner had been an old-timer here. Half a lifetime since—at an age when most are content to become spectators—he had fared forth to new ventures; after a quarter century in Australia and the Far East—Hong Kong last—he had come back to the land of his youth—to die.

If Napoleon, at 80, had come back from St. Helena, some such position might have been his as was Uncle Ben's. Legend and myth had grown about his name, wild tales of the wild old days—the days when he had not been the Old Man, or everybody's Uncle Ben, but strong among the strongest. The chase had passed his way that morning and he had taken horse, despite his 77 years, with none to say him nay.

"It is a deep grave—and the soil is tough," he said, raising his eyes at last. "You have been a miner, Mr. Moss?"

"After a fashion—yes."

"You must have worked hard digging this."

"I did. It seemed to do me good. I was nervous and excited. Shucks! I was scared—that's the kind of nervous I was."

"You say you rode across from Arizona. Where did you stay night before last?"

"In a two-room log house under San Mateo Peak, to the south; H. G. Ranch—or it has been once, for them letters are branded on the door. No one was there."

Spike nodded. "Charley Graham's. Charley, he's at the roundup."

"Well, I'm right sorry he wasn't there, as things turned out; but if you'll send a man over tomorrow he'll find the corn cans I opened—and some flour and coffee, and nothing else—only my horse's tracks and the shoe he lost somewhere on the road. That'll prove my alibi, all right—at

least, as far as your bank robbery's concerned. The greenbacks you found seem to hook these two other gentlemen up with that."

"We'll send a man there, all right, if needed. And it wasn't a bank that was robbed—it was a mine—a paymaster," said Uncle Ben.

"Well, you didn't tell me."

"No; I didn't tell you. And the night before that?"

"I stayed at the Anchor X Ranch. No one there, either. If your man goes that far he'll get canned corn straight—not even coffee to go with it. And he'll find a note to the effect that the outfit has gone to ship a bunch of steers at Magdalena."

Again Teagardner's quiet eye went round the circle and again the prisoner's story was confirmed.

"That's right. They load up today. Aw, let the man sleep, Uncle Ben. He's giving it to you straight."

But Uncle Ben persisted. "And before that? You must have seen some man, somewhere, sometime."

Moss shook his head impatiently. "For nearly a week before that I camped with an old Mexican hunter, on the divide south of Chloride, letting my horse rest up and hunting deer. Leastwise he hunted and I went along for company. I didn't have any rifle and he wouldn't lend me his. His name was Delfin Something-or-Other, and he lived in Springerville, he said. Say, old man, you make me tired! Am I to blame because no one lives in this accursed country? By George! If I could have taken a long look ahead I'd have hired me a witness and carried him with me."

"If we could take a long look ahead—or a short one—we'd be greatly surprised, some of us," Teagardner answered without heat. "There—go to sleep, all of you. I slept last night. I'll call you when it's time."

He changed his seat to a softer one on the fresh mound of earth; he twisted his long gray beard and looked down into the grave. Moss watched him through narrowed lids. Then fatigue claimed him, stronger than horror or hate or fear, and he fell asleep.

"You chuckle-headed idiots!" gasped Charley Ellis.

"Oh, that's all right too," said Tom Hall. "Some folks

is too smart for their own good. You keep still."

Three men held Charley, one by each arm and one by the collar. His eyes were flashing; he was red with anger and considerably the worse for wear, having just made a sincere and conscientious attempt to break the neck of Mr. Moss—an almost successful attempt. It had taken more than three men to pull him off. Moss, white and smiling, mopped his bruised face beyond the coffin and the open grave; the sun setting between the clouds threw a red, angry light over all.

"Quiet having been resumed," observed Teagardner patiently, "let us pass on to unfinished business. Tom, we've been so all-fired busy explainin' the situation to Mr. Ellis that we haven't got your report yet. Spit it out!"

"Uncle Ben, this Ellis is the man we want," said Tom Hall. "We found where he'd tacked a shoe on the horse—of course Moss couldn't know that. We tracked him a ways toward Rosedale and then we met these three Rosedale men coming back with him. They told him they was holdin' everybody and gathered him in. He made no objection—handed over his gun without a word. It was an automatic thirty-two. Horse and saddle just as Moss described 'em, all right—and this ore sack tied on the saddle besides."

Uncle Ben shook his head. "It won't do, Tom. Everything is as Moss told it—but everything is just as Ellis tells it, too. So far as I can see they've got only one horse, one saddle, and one interestin' past between them."

"You blithering, blistering, gibbering, fat-headed fools!" said Charley pleasantly. "If you'd told me about what Moss said I would 'a' told you to leave my horse and let Moss try his hand at describin' him. He's got one white hoof; he's been cut with barbed wire; and my saddle's been sewed up with buckskin where the linin's ripped. Moss couldn't have told you that. Did you give me a fair chance for my life? No, sir; you come blunderin' in and let Moss look 'em all over—pertendin' to be petting old Vinegaroan. I wasn't mistrustin' anything like this. They said there'd been trouble and they was makin' all strangers

account for themselves. That seemed reasonable enough and I wasn't worrying."

"We've got only your word for that," sneered Sam. "I reckon Moss could have told us all about it if we had asked him."

"And maybe again he couldn't—Ellis is right," said Hall soberly. "He didn't get an even break. I'm sorry."

"What about the ore sack?"

"Boys," said Uncle Ben, "you're going at this all wrong. Mr. Ellis says he took feed in that sack—that's reasonable. And that he kept the sack by him counts in his favor, I think."

"So do I," said Cal. "And I'll swear that if he had any money in it he must 'a' eat the bills and flung the coins away, one piece at a time. He never hid it after he left this house—that's sure. I know every inch of ground he's been over and my eyes is pretty near out from reading sign. I even went on, to make sure, after we met the Rosedale men, clear to where he met them and loped all the way back to catch up with 'em."

"How about this then?" cried Spike triumphantly. He was one of those who held Ellis. "I just took it out of his pocket."

It was a new five-dollar bill, and it was torn. Teagardner produced the package of bills. The tears matched exactly.

A horrible snarl burst from a dozen throats. They crowded and jostled, Moss with the rest; hands reached out to clutch at the prisoner. "Hang him! Hang him!"

"Stand back! Stand back, you blind fools! I'll shoot the next man that touches him!" shouted Teagardner. "Stand back."

"You'll hang nobody, you howling dogs!" said Ellis coolly. "We stand just where we did before—my word against Moss's."

"Exactly!" said Uncle Ben. "Have a little sense, can't ye? Cook, if you was this man, and guilty, how would you say you got this bill?"

"I'd say Moss gave it to me, of course."

"And you, Spike, if you knew positively that Ellis was innocent—then how did he get this bill?"

The signs are unmistakable —
several drops of still-moist
blood, two sinister shadows
in the night, a half-empty
bottle of arsenic... **ALFRED
HITCHCOCK** has been at it
again, in collaboration with

AGATHA CHRISTIE

D.H. LAWRENCE

JOHN STEINBECK

MARY DEASY

F. TENNYSON JESSE

SAMUEL BLAS

ELLIS ST. JOSEPH

RAY BRADBURY

GEORGES CAROUSSO

LOUIS POLLOCK

ROBERT LEWIS

GRAHAM GREENE

EUGENE MANLOVE RHODES

