

Like bees and honey, women and
money go together. Frank Jennings had both...

UNTAMED LUST

Orrie Hitt



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THE STORY OF A SADIST—OF HIS TWISTED
WIFE AND DAUGHTER, AND OF A GIRL NAMED
JOAN, WHOSE ONLY MANIA WAS LOVE!

GIVE AND TAKE

"How do I know you would pay me, Carole?"

"Because I said I would."

"And how do I know you've got that kind of money?"

"I've got it—and more."

He leaned closer to her and the woman-smell around her made his head throb.

"You said you'd be nice to me," he reminded her.

"Did I?"

"That's what you said."

Her face colored slightly. "I didn't mean it quite the way you took it."

"You want me to do something for you, and I want something from you if I do it. And I don't mean just money."

She got up and walked around restlessly. Then she came back.

"You drive a hard bargain," she said.

She reached out and stroked one of his arms. Her hand was soft—like so much of her would be soft . . .

ORRIE HITT
UNTAMED
LUST



this is a BEACON BOOK

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IT WAS very hot as Eddie Boyd turned off the highway into the private road which led to Wildwood Acres. He didn't mind it—Eddie had worked on farms all his life, and the beating rays of the midday sun were as familiar to him as his body.

Midday—he didn't have a watch, but a glance at the sun told him that it must be nearly time for his noon appointment with Frank Jennings. He lengthened his stride and urged his protesting leg muscles into a quicker rhythm. Joan Kelder had told him that the master of Wildwood expected people to be prompt for appointments.

Eddie yawned as he tramped doggedly along the gravel road. He was bone-weary. Every inch of his six-foot-six frame seemed weighted with lead. His landlady, Mrs. Norton, had locked him out of his room the night before—he owed a month's rent—and he had "camped out" on the riverbank. But it had been years since the last time he had slept on the ground and the discomfort, along with worry over his broke and jobless state, had permitted him little rest.

Joan, who worked as a maid at Wildwood Acres, had recommended him for a sort of gamekeeper's job that was open there. He hoped fervently that he could land it. If he missed this one, he would be in pretty desperate shape—none of the farms were hiring at this time of year, and he knew no other work. He compressed his lips, shook his head and determined to make the best possible impression on Jennings.

"He's a funny guy," Joan had explained two nights earlier, when she had stayed with Eddie in town. "On nice mornings, he sits out on the lawn in his wheelchair. Afternoons he gets drunk. I suppose he's trying to forget he can't walk any more. Then, when he's really potted, he gets the caretaker to push him down into the woods, and he blasts away with a shotgun at anything he sees. Sometimes he makes his wife go along. She hates it. She's young and pretty—I wonder how he got her. I guess she married him for his money."

Joan had offered to pay Eddie's room rent and to help him out until he turned up a source of income, but he had declined. She was saving for a divorce, and every dollar counted. Her husband was in prison, and Eddie knew only too well how desperately anxious she was to be free. She had quit a job at the local diner a couple of months earlier because she hadn't been able to put anything aside, and had gone into domestic service. At Wildwood she got room and board and forty dollars a week, and now her divorce fund was growing steadily. Joan was giving Eddie her body and her love—he was taking enough from her without dipping into her precious divorce money.

"All I want is to get free of Paul and marry you," she often told him. Eddie was uneasy when she mentioned marriage and was careful not to commit himself, not at all sure his own feelings went quite so far. He had known Joan since she was sixteen and he eighteen, five years ago. He and his father had been working a rented farm, and she had been living with an aunt on the next farm, going to school and helping with chores.

It had taken him nearly a year to start making any progress with her. Then, one rainy day, they had been alone in the barn, up in the hay where they had gone to look for eggs. They had fallen to wrestling, squealing like children as they tickled each other's ribs. Joan had been wearing faded blue jeans and an old blue cotton work

shirt, the tails knotted together in front. Neither of them noticed that the knot worked loose until Eddie pinned her down, kissed her playfully, and suddenly grabbed for her ribcage to tickle her again. His face flamed and a hot wave of sensation flushed through him as he found himself holding a warm, soft handful of swelling breast. Instead of letting go instantly, Eddie had followed a sudden impulse to kiss her again, stifling her gasp of protest with his lips. In a moment her arms tightened around him and she was returning his kiss wildly. But then she stiffened and broke partly free, whimpering that they mustn't, they mustn't. Little by little, however, he gained ground, as she yielded to his imploring lips and hands in the age-old ritual of seduction. The memory was so vivid that now, five years and innumerable nights of love later, he could recall every image, sound and sensation—the shiver that had coursed down his spine when he had parted her shirt and had seen the glossy perfection of her breasts; her gasp of indrawn breath as he had fondled her flesh; her wild little cry of mingled pleasure and pain as he had finally, clumsily, reached his goal. And later there had been the flushed, happy look on her face as she had rested, eyes closed and wisps of hay in her braided black hair. . .

Walking down the road, Eddie shook his head as he realized he had relived the scene so vividly that sweat was trickling down his back. So much had happened since that rainy afternoon. They had seen as much of each other as they could, and they were lucky indeed not to have gotten into trouble in their ignorance. Later, after Eddie's father had died of a heart attack and Eddie was working on farms outside Twenty Mile River, they had continued to see each other, but by then he had learned from other young men that he must take precautions.

Their affair had ended one night when Eddie had devoted too much attention to another girl at a Grange Hall dance, and they had quarreled and split up. Joan had met

Paul Kelder, a rather dashing salesman in his thirties, and the two had married only a few months afterward.

The marriage had been a fiasco from the start. Paul was a heavy drinker and a flagrant skirt-chaser, indifferent alike to the age and marital status of his quarry. He had carried his free-booting style of philandering too far when he had taken a naive but maturely built high-school girl named Mamie Hall up into Tremper Park and had held her prisoner there the night long. The result had been a baby before she was sixteen for Mamie, and a richly deserved prison sentence for Kelder.

Eddie shook his head again, and took a deep breath of the scent of the pines along the road, finally banishing the memories. He had to think about making a good impression on Frank Jennings. It wasn't exactly what Eddie wanted to do, this hunting and trapping vermin on the estate, but he had to have a steady job, and at least he was well qualified to handle it. When he was younger, living on the farm and going to school, he had done a lot of hunting and trapping during the open season, and the money from the sale of the furs had paid for most of his clothes. As he looked back at it now, he could understand that he hadn't really enjoyed it. Like many big and powerful men he could be brutal at times, but killing animals always bothered him. It was said that an animal in a trap didn't suffer after its leg became numb, but he didn't believe it—he had seen too often how desperately the helpless wild things fought the traps.

The woods thinned out. Here, on either side of the road, were fields which rolled gently down a slope and came to an abrupt halt at a green lawn, large enough for growing a small herd of cattle. Past the lawn was the house, great twenty-room manor, made of native stone and trimmed with green, and beyond it a lake that glistened silver in the sun.

As he approached the house, Eddie saw a wheel chair with a gray-haired man in it moving out onto the lawn,

reflected sunlight blazing from its chromed parts. The rider was wheeling himself with short, savage strokes that indicated arm and shoulder muscles developed beyond the ordinary.

"Good morning," Eddie said as he came up to the chair. "You must be Mr. Jennings."

The man nodded and reached into his shirt pocket for a cigarette.

"I'm Frank Jennings," he said after he had lit the cigarette, inhaling the smoke and letting it out with a rush of air. "Joan told you I was a cripple, didn't she?"

"She said you'd had an accident of some sort."

"Two years ago a horse threw me during my honeymoon. Great timing, wasn't it? All the money I had couldn't put me back together again. I've been in this damned chair ever since I got out of the hospital. I bought the horse and had it shot the next day," he added. "Got rid of the bastard before he made it his business to kill somebody."

Eddie didn't say anything. It seemed senseless to have a horse killed because of an unfortunate mishap. Apparently a man who had money could buy death at the snap of his fingers, at least for animals.

"You know what the job is?" Jennings asked him.

"A little."

"I have two thousand acres and it would be your duty to hunt and trap every foot of it."

"That's a lot of land."

"And there are two lakes. Moon Lake, which you can see from here, and Goose Lake, which is about half a mile away. There are streams too, but most of them are dried up this time of year."

Eddie wanted to sit down on the grass and rest, but he remained standing.

"You had somebody before this," Eddie said.

"Yes. Man named Jim. He did fairly well with the trap-

ping, but he got fresh with my wife and daughter and I couldn't put up with that."

"No man could," Eddie agreed.

"I happened to mention to Joan that I was looking for somebody to fill his place," Jennings said, puffing on his cigarette. "She said that you were experienced. Are you?"

"I think I could hold my end down."

"What can you catch?"

"Almost anything."

"Foxes?"

"Sure."

"And otter?"

"They're protected this time of year."

Jennings made an unpleasant face and threw the cigarette away. "I don't care what the law says," he snapped somewhat annoyed. "I pay taxes on this property. Otters eat their weight in fish every twenty-four hours. I spend a lot of money stocking both lakes with bass and trout every year, and I'm not going to have it slide down the drain. If you work for me you trap everything from otter to raccoon. If you get arrested I'll pay the fine. But you won't. The game warden never comes out here."

Eddie shifted his weight. There was something about Jennings he didn't like, a streak of meanness that wasn't normal. It looked as though his fall from the horse had made him hate every animal that walked and he had the money to pursue his grudge.

"How much does it pay?" Eddie asked.

"Three hundred a month and your room and board. You eat in the kitchen of the main house, but you have your own room over the garage. Hours are eight to five, with one day off a week. If you want to go into town, ask either Mrs. Jennings or myself for the station wagon. If it's available you can use it."

Eddie thought it over. He still didn't like the idea of killing animals for a living, but three hundred a month

clear would be a godsend. Certainly it was more than he could earn on a farm.

"When could I start?" Eddie inquired.

"Right away. Today if you want."

"All right."

"I imagine you have some clothes and gear to pick up in town?"

"I can't get it," Eddie said.

"Can't get it?"

"No. I'm back a month on my room rent—thirty dollars—and the landlady has my clothes locked up until I can pay her."

"She'd have to find a hell of a big man who could fit into them."

"Big enough."

"I don't like to advance money," Jennings said thoughtfully. "How do I know you won't take it and vanish?"

"You don't have to worry about that. I need the job. Besides, Joan and I have been friends since we were kids. I'd never let her down like that."

"Mrs. Jennings has to go in for groceries this morning. You can ride with her."

"That would be fine."

Jennings reached into his rear pocket, removed his wallet and counted out four tens.

"Here," he said handing the bills to Eddie. "Thirty for your room rent and another ten until payday. You get paid every two weeks."

"Gee, thanks."

Jennings leaned back in the wheel chair.

"Just do a good job and you can stay as long as you want. I pay a little more than I have to, but I expect results."

"What happens to the furs in the winter when they're prime?"

"You can sell them. Consider it sort of a bonus."

"Sounds great."

"And you report to me once a day."

"Okay."

"There's a shed behind the garage. You'll find the traps in there—I think there are about two hundred— If you need more, or bait for your sets, you can buy the stuff in town and I'll pay for it. Jim used to use canned salmon for raccoons and skunks and he had good luck."

"It works," Eddie agreed. "Salmon has a good strong odor. I prefer smoked herring, though. I think the odor lasts a little longer than salmon."

They shook hands, and Jennings told him to go around to the kitchen and get a cup of coffee while he was waiting for Mrs. Jennings. Eddie thanked him again for the advance and promised to do a good job.

The kitchen was large enough for a busy restaurant. A gray-haired woman at one of the sinks turned to stare at him.

"Who are you?" she asked.

"I'm the new trapper, Eddie Boyd."

"I'm Mary. The cook. Have some coffee?"

"Thanks, I could use a cup."

He picked a cup up from the table and poured it full of steaming coffee from an electric percolator.

"You'll find cream in the refrigerator," Mary said. "And sugar on the table."

He sat down at the table and Mary returned to her work at the sink.

"Breakfast is at seven for the help," she said. "Lunch at twelve and supper at five. You're either on time or you don't get it. The family eats later."

"I'll remember the hours."

"If you want to carry your lunch I'll pack one for you."

"Probably that would be best."

The coffee was delicious, not too strong and not too weak, with the nutlike flavor of fresh-ground coffee. He had just about finished it when Joan came in through a

swinging door, the pink uniform which she wore failing to conceal the sweetly curved lines of her body.

"I just heard," she said, stopping beside him. "I think it's great, simply great."

He looked up at her and grinned. She was small and dark, and she had full red lips that could burn against his mouth and drive him almost out of his mind.

"It worked out pretty good," he admitted.

"Mrs. Jennings said to tell you to wait in the car. The Bentley. It's out in front of the house."

He got to his feet, towering over her. They had a private joke about how he could eat off her head when they were standing, but they seemed just the right size for each other lying down.

"I'll walk outside with you," she said.

He held the door for her, then followed her across the porch and down the steps. It was hotter now, really blazing, and the lake looked inviting. He could see a strip of sandy beach and a big umbrella over a table.

"I can't go far," she said, stopping, reaching for his arm and making him stop beside her. "Today I have to clean the upstairs and there's a lot to be done." She kicked at a little stone on the cement walk, missed, and kicked again. "I'll clean up your room and make your bed," she said. "When I get through for the night, usually about nine, I'll sneak up to see you. Wait for me, Eddie."

"Hell, you think we should?"

"Why not? They won't know. Mr. Jennings has blasted his brains out with booze by that time, and she wouldn't care even if she knew." She laughed and squeezed his arm. "It ought to be just right for us out here, Eddie. We'll both be working and when we're off our time will be our own."

"Sounds fair enough."

She turned, leaving him, and he continued on around the house. What, he asked himself, was he supposed to do?

Tell her that he didn't want to see her? A guy lived once and he took what he could get.

The Bentley, its windows down, was parked under the porte-cochère, in front of a fairly new Plymouth station wagon. As he got in he could almost smell the money the car had cost, and he sighed as he relaxed on the deep cushion. Why did some people have so much and others so little?

A package of cigarettes lay beside him on the seat and he helped himself to one. He hadn't had a cigarette in more than two days and it tasted wonderful, the way a cigarette tastes after a swim. The night before, lying along the river bank, he had been desperate in his need for a smoke.

He had just thrown the butt away when he saw, coming toward him, a girl wearing yellow shorts and halter. Jet-black hair fell all the way down to her shoulders, framing a sensuous face which would have well suited the cover of a girlie magazine. She was deeply tanned and her legs were long and straight. Her shorts rode high and tight on her legs, cutting slightly into her flesh, and the halter rose and fell with each step.

"You must be waiting for me," she said, as she opened the door on the driver's side.

He watched her get into the car, and he licked his lips with the tip of his tongue. That halter didn't hide a great deal.

"If you're Mrs. Jennings I am," he said.

She favored him with a bright smile.

"My husband says you have to pick up your clothes in town."

"Yeah."

She started the car and they moved down the road, increasing speed as they neared the fields. He knew he shouldn't be looking at her legs, but he couldn't tear his eyes away. No wonder the other man had made a pass at her. Any man would if he thought he had the slightest

chance of success. She was married to a man who was undoubtedly useless in the bedroom, and if he knew anything about women she was drying up on the vine.

"I don't know your name," she said, as they reached the highway.

"Eddie."

Once they were on the highway she drove faster.

"You can call me Kitty," she said, reaching for the cigarettes. "When my husband isn't around. If he's around, make it Mrs."

"Whatever you say."

He didn't say anything more but he didn't stop looking.

EDDIE STRETCHED his body, yawned and rolled over on the bed, blinking his eyes open and staring down at the splash of sunlight pouring in upon the faded red carpet. He shook his head and struggled to his feet.

He walked to the window, not looking down at Joan who had slept beside him, standing big and naked in the daylight and rubbing the sleep from his eyes. Outside, the early sun was bright and clear and the surface of Moon Lake lay like a mirror in front of him.

He stretched his arms over his head and gave a long, luxurious, yawning sigh. He looked at Joan now, and he saw that she was awake. He smiled faintly, remembering how little sleep they had had. She hadn't reached his room until almost ten, and it had been wild after that, not just a few moments of passion but hours of it.

"Good morning," she said, her smile washing over him.

"Hi."

"How about a cigarette?"

He walked to the dresser and opened a fresh pack. He lit two and carried them over to the bed, sitting down and putting one between her lips.

"What time do you go to work?"

"Today is my day off. Remember?"

He scratched his head. "Yeah. Wednesday. Well, what the hell, I don't keep everything in my mind."

"There was one thing that you didn't keep in your mind last night."

"What was that?"

She moved over against him, taking one of his hands. "I don't have to tell you, Eddie. You know. But I don't care. When I manage to get my divorce, we can get married in no time at all."

He got up from the bed and started to dress.

"You'll have to be careful about leaving here," he said. "We don't want to get into trouble right off the bat."

"I don't think they'd mind. We aren't hurting anybody."

"Just the same."

She left the bed and went over to look at herself in the mirror. He examined her body critically and could find nothing wrong with it. He had seen better, but not much better, and not often.

"What did you think of Kitty Jennings?" she wanted to know suddenly.

"Not much," he lied.

"She's pretty, isn't she?"

"I guess you could say so."

"So is the daughter, Carole. Wait until you see her. She's got a sensational shape and wonderful blonde hair. She could be a model if she wanted to. I don't understand how Roger Swingle ever got in with her."

He sat down on a straight-backed chair and tied his shoes.

"Who's Roger Swingle?"

"A creep. He goes with Carole, and usually when she's here he hangs around. Carole is so lovely and he's so homely. You wouldn't think they would be a match."

"What time is it?" he asked as he got up.

"Almost seven."

"I'd better get up to the house."

"And I'm going back to bed." She smiled at him. "I'm tired, honey. I'm tired, but I feel great."

She blew him a kiss as he went out. There were four more rooms on the same floor, but none of them were furnished. The dust lay thick on the unfinished pine boards, dust which had been gathering for years. Joan had

told him the night before that if they remained at the estate after they were married, the rooms could be converted into an apartment. He hadn't thought much of the idea, but he hadn't said so.

His breakfast was waiting when he entered the kitchen, bacon and eggs and coffee. There was a strange man sitting at the table.

"I'm Clark Wilson," he said as Eddie sat down. "The caretaker."

"Glad to know you."

"Hope you make out all right on the new job. Anything I can do, just yell."

"Thanks."

While they ate, they talked. Eddie learned that Wilson was fifty-seven and that his wife had died the year before.

"I'm just putting in my time until I can retire at sixty-five," Wilson said. "I've got a daughter in Florida, and I can go down there and stay with her."

Eddie ate quickly and didn't stay for a second cup of coffee. Jennings had told him that he started at eight, but he wanted to get going. He had a feeling there would be a lot to do.

His first stop was the shed where the traps were kept. He examined each one carefully. None of them seemed to have been boiled and Eddie considered this a must. Boiling them in hemlock bows dulled the metal finish and added a natural scent to the traps. Of course, this wasn't necessary with traps used in water sets—animals couldn't smell what was under water—but a lot of his sets would be blind ones in game trails through the woods. He found several pairs of gloves but he had trouble getting his huge hands into them. Gloves had to be used at all times in handling traps, to mask the human odor, especially when trying to catch foxes or other intelligent animals.

After he sorted out the traps, arranging them outside on the grass according to size, he picked up a hatchet and

walked toward the woods. It took him only a few minutes to gather enough hemlock bows for his purpose.

Getting a pot, however, wasn't so easy. Mary wouldn't give up anything she had in the kitchen.

"There's an old tub down cellar," she said. "Why don't you use that?"

"What about wood? I have to build a fire."

"You'll find that down there, too. There's a pile of kindling for the fireplace."

It took him most of the morning to get organized, building up a fireplace with stones which he carted from the shore of the lake, filling the tub with water, starting a fire and getting the water to boil. It was the better part of an hour before the water began to turn dark from the hemlock, but by noon he was ready to put in the first load of traps.

He didn't know what time it was except roughly by the sun, but he wasn't hungry and he didn't take time out for lunch. It would take most of the day to boil the traps and he wanted to be ready to go into the woods the next morning. He had a feeling that Jennings was an impatient man and that he would anticipate results almost immediately. This was all right as far as raccoons and skunks went, but some of the other animals required advance planning and patience. Anybody could put out two hundred traps in a day, hit or miss, but that didn't mean they would catch anything. Eddie had often taken as long as an hour to prepare a fox set, and his care had paid off. The last winter he had trapped, he had caught fifty-six foxes in a total of only fifteen sets.

The sun was hot and fire added to the heat. He stripped to the waist, sweat rolling down his arms and chest as he worked close to the fire and stirred the water with a stick every once in a while. As the traps were finished he hung them on nails he had driven into the side of the shed, handling them with gloves.

About mid-afternoon he saw Joan leave the garage and

walk toward the main house. She waved but she didn't come over to him, and he was just as well satisfied. He would probably see her again that night and that was soon enough. Maybe, to be honest, too soon. He knew that she was in love with him. When she talked of marriage it gave him the shudders, not because she wouldn't make a good wife, but because he didn't feel ready just yet. Getting married meant a home and kids, and an entirely new life. In the past he had drifted from one job to another, never caring about tomorrow, never having the feeling that he should settle down. There had been several girls for him while Joan was married, but none of the affairs had been serious or important. If a girl had refused him, he hadn't bothered with her again.

He sweated through the afternoon, feeding wood to the fire, taking traps out of the water and putting others in, feeling completely satisfied with his work. Jennings might think the day had been wasted, but he would be mistaken if he did. When a man set out to trap he had to do it right, or he was wasting his time.

"Hello," said a low voice.

He had been bending over the fire, stirring the wood to get more heat, and he straightened quickly.

"Hi," he said as he turned.

Kitty Jennings was wearing as brief a bathing suit as he had ever seen. It was the true Riviera-style Bikini, which seemed to have been improvised out of a pair of pale blue, lace-edged handkerchiefs. The sketchy little top supported her full breasts but made little pretense of containing them, and the lower wisp was barely enough to symbolize officially that she was clothed.

"You drove my husband inside," she said. "He couldn't sit on the lawn."

"How come?"

"The smoke from your fire kept drifting up there. He hates it, especially if it's pine wood that's burning."

"Sorry," he murmured. "I was so busy I didn't notice."

"He'll only get drunk anyway. He can do that in the house as well as outside."

"Must be exciting for you."

"Hardly. I like a drink as well as the next one but he carries it too far. I've talked to doctors about it, but they say if a man doesn't have the will he won't cut down or stop."

"He gets around pretty well," Eddie said.

"In the chair, yes. The big thing is getting him into and out of bed. We should have a practical nurse to take care of him, but he insists that I do it. He says he couldn't stand some strange woman looking at him without his clothes on."

"That's old hat to a nurse."

"I know, but you couldn't tell my husband that. He insists that it's my wifely duty."

"You look ready for the water," Eddie said, studying her figure and trying not to be obvious.

"I spend as much time on the beach as I can. Carole uses the other lake. I think she goes in nude and she doesn't want her father to know. He would be furious."

He removed the last of the traps from the water, and she asked a lot of questions about what he had been doing. He explained carefully.

"Jim never did that," she said.

"Everybody to his own notion."

"I guess you know why Jim was fired, don't you?"

"He tried to bother you and the daughter?"

"That's right."

"You don't have to worry about me doing that, Mrs. Jennings."

"Kitty," she corrected him.

"All right. Kitty." He grinned. "When your husband isn't present, that is."

Still wearing the gloves, he grasped the hot side of the tub and tipped it so that the water spilled onto the fire. A cloud of steam and smoke swirled around them.

"I guess you're pretty well taken care of," she said.

He put the tub aside and removed the gloves.

"How's that?"

"Something a little bird told me."

"Then you know more than I know."

She laughed at him.

"I didn't mean to spy," she said. "I was out for a walk last night and I saw Joan go to the garage. When I crossed the field I could look up into your room, and you didn't have the shade down. She must have broken some sort of a record getting out of her clothes, because you were both bare and kissing when I saw you."

He felt as if he had been caught stealing money from a church.

"Careless," he said simply. "Very careless of us."

She laughed again.

"Don't let it bother you, Eddie. If you love the girl there isn't too much wrong with it. She's talked a lot about you and she sounds serious. Probably you'll make it legal."

"She's already married."

"But she's going to get a divorce, isn't she?"

"As soon as she can."

There were a few things that he had to put away and he did so, fooling around inside the shed longer than he had to and hoping that she would leave. Just having her near him was enough to excite him, and if a guy was smart he didn't allow himself to get excited over the boss's wife. He could understand why the other trapper had made a play for her, but he was determined not to make the same blunder.

"Care to join me in a swim?" she asked as he came out of the shed.

"I'd like to, but I hadn't better."

"Give me one good reason."

"Your husband."

"Jim used to go swimming with me."

"Look what it got him."

"That was because he insisted on being fresh." She fluffed out her hair and her lips had a slight pout. "All I'd have to do is tell Frank that you made a pass at me and that would be the end of you. You wouldn't want me to do that, would you?"

"Far from it."

"Then get your trunks and join me on the beach." She took a deep breath and her breasts pushed up and out. "I'm not used to being refused, Eddie. It's something that you should know."

His throat was dry and tight and the sweat poured out of his skin, running from his forehead down into his eyes and nearly blinding him. A swim, he told himself, wouldn't do any harm. Maybe she wasn't a good swimmer and she wanted someone handy in case she got into trouble.

"Give me ten minutes," he said.

She strolled over and stood looking up into his face, a smile pulling at the corners of her mouth.

"I'll settle on five," she told him.

And then she turned abruptly and left him, swinging down toward the lake, her half-clothed hips undulating provocatively.

Something, he told himself as he picked up his T-shirt, wasn't right.

EDDIE WAS busy that first week, learning the boundaries of the estate, hunting for signs of vermin and setting traps. Every morning he visited the traps he had already set, and in the afternoons he set more, either along the shore of Moon Lake or in the woods. One afternoon he had started for Goose Lake but a thunder shower had come up and he had given it up, spending the afternoon reading in his room. He had fallen asleep on the bed and he hadn't awakened until Joan crept in close to him, her body all soft and warm and quivering with desires. Her passion mounted like lightning ripping through a tree.

"We ought to be careful," he murmured. "I told you that Kitty knows about us. And Jennings might not like it if he got wise."

"What about you going swimming with her every afternoon after work? You think he'd like that?"

"We don't do anything wrong."

"Jim used to do the same thing."

"Did he?"

"Yes, and it cost him his job. But I still think there was more between them than she ever admitted."

"Aw, you've got your mind in the gutter."

Eddie hadn't cared much for Jennings at first meeting, and the more he saw the man the less he liked him. He avoided his employer as much as possible. Therefore, he reported to him only once a day and displayed his day's trophies. Of course, he didn't have much luck the first

few days, then his water sets began to click and he caught about three or four foxes every day, some reds and some grays. As for the raccoons and skunks, he tried not to catch them, not wanting to break the game laws, but a few wandered into his traps anyway, and he shot them with the twenty-two rifle which Jennings had given him. He had hopes of catching a young raccoon for a pet, but the only small one during that first week was too badly hurt and he had to dispose of it. He felt like a murderer as the poor little thing crouched in front of him, probably hoping for help and getting a bullet through the head instead. The raccoon was one animal he had always hated to kill. They seemed almost human the way they used their front paws and he couldn't see that they did much harm. Of course they would kill smaller animals or rob birds' nests, but nature had its own balance of power. He knew that no attempt to alter it would ever be successful. Every morning when he started out to patrol the trap line he told himself that he would keep this job only until he could find another. Had Jennings only been dedicated to exterminating vermin it would not have been so bad. But he was a sadist toward wildlife. Afternoons when he was drunk and barely able to see, he had Wilson push him down into the woods, and leave him there with a bottle. Then he sat there and shot at anything that moved. Eddie made it a practice to stay well clear since he had no desire to get his head shot off.

One trapping chore that was new to Eddie was trapping snapping turtles in the lake, but he soon mastered the technique. The traps were big, about the size of a barrel. They were made of three lead hoops, fixed in position by three longitudinal wood strips, the whole covered with rope netting that looked like a tennis-court net. The front of the trap was funnel-shaped. All Eddie had to do was lower the trap in about four feet of water, drive a stake into the mud to secure the trap, and bait

it with fish. Once a turtle entered the funnel-like opening to take the bait, he was unable to back out. A string arrangement at the back of the trap opened the net to permit removal of the catch. The first morning Eddie checked the turtle traps he had seven snappers, one almost fifty pounds. This pleased Jennings enormously.

"I couldn't ever get Jim to use these traps," Jennings said. "He insisted there weren't any turtles in either lake, but I knew better. That's where the young ducks have been going. They go out for a swim and a snapper drags them down."

This was true, and Eddie didn't mind killing the turtles. The death of just one turtle could save the lives of a lot of ducks. There were any number of them around the lake now, wild ducks that would disappear before winter.

Eddie buried everything he caught in a field, some distance from the house. He hated himself for what he was doing and he often thought of giving up the job. But he knew that he couldn't. He checked the newspaper "help wanted" columns every day and there weren't any farm jobs advertised. All that seemed to be open was door-to-door selling, and he knew nothing of that type of work. He was, he guessed, just a dumb farm kid with a strong back.

Evenings after supper he went down to the lake. Kitty was always there. She had a different bathing suit for every day in the week, all very brief and form-fitting. He admired her red one most. The top was very daring, and when she came out of the water, climbing up onto the dock, the swelling breasts seemed about to burst free. Then, laughing a little, she would hitch at the suit, trying to get a square inch of fabric to cover two of flesh.

"You're doing fine," she said to him one night, as they sat on the sand. "Frank said you're better than Jim ever was."

"Well, I'm giving it the best I've got."

"Time for you to take a day off, isn't it?"

He lit a cigarette. "I don't see how I can," he said. "The law says you must look at your traps every twenty-four hours."

"Frank wouldn't hold you to the law."

"I know, but I'm thinking of the animals. I don't want to torture them. They fight a trap harder during daylight than at night."

She lay back on the sand, staring up at the sky.

"You've got a kind heart," she said thoughtfully. "Frank is vicious in everything he does, but you aren't."

"He has his reasons, I guess."

"Because he's a cripple? Thousands of people are cripples, but they don't turn down the road of hate."

"You married him," Eddie pointed out.

She nodded, putting one of her hands against his bare leg.

"When I married him he wasn't the man he is today. He had lost his wife just a couple of years before and he was lonely. I met him in a club where I was singing, and I felt sorry for him. We had a few drinks, one date led to others, and the next thing I knew I was married to him. Less than a week later he was in a hospital with a broken back."

"Tough."

"It wasn't the horse, Eddie. He was drunk and he shouldn't have been riding, but he wouldn't listen. When he bought that poor horse and had it shot, it made me sick. It proved to me that if I ever did anything he didn't want me to, he'd just as soon have me shot."

"I doubt that."

"You don't know him as well as I do. If I'm not right there waiting for him when he's ready to go to bed, he calls me names that I wouldn't even repeat. Then—well, I won't go into it. The fall pinched some nerve in his back that prevents him from being a man in the way a woman wants a man. Do you follow me, Eddie?"

It was suddenly very hot.

"I guess so," he said.

Her fingers dug into his leg.

"I'm too young for that, Eddie. Much too young."

He had been looking at her breasts while she stared up at the sky but now he glanced away. Jennings might be a slob, but Eddie would be very foolish to get involved with his wife. He might better spend his evenings in his room, waiting for Joan, or take the station wagon into town. If he were lucky he could pick up a girl who wasn't expensive and try something new for a change. This business with Joan was becoming far too serious.

"Carole's coming in tomorrow," Kitty said. "On the bus. You'll have to drive down for her."

"Why me?"

"Because Mr. Wilson will be busy and I drank too much when I was in town this afternoon. It's all right for Frank to drink but he has different rules for me. He says I have to stay away from town for a week and learn a lesson."

"I see. Double standard, huh?"

"Something of the sort."

The early shadows of evening were beginning to creep across the lake, and he could smell the sharp odor of the pine trees.

"What does this Carole look like?" he asked.

"She's blonde, with about the biggest bosom and smallest waist that you've ever seen."

Kitty sounded jealous.

"I guess you don't like her," Eddie said.

"I don't."

"And I suppose the feeling is mutual?"

"It is. She has hated me ever since I married her father. She was not opposed to his getting married again; she just doesn't care for show people and resents having one in the family."

She lifted herself on her elbows, letting go of his leg,

and her back arched. He had a frantic urge to drive his mouth down over her lips and push her down onto the sand again. It washed through his body, like a hot flood.

"I'd better go up to the house," she said. "He'll want something and I won't be there, and there'll be hell to pay."

She got up, brushing the sand from her legs, and then he pulled himself up to his feet and stood beside her.

"I wonder if I could use the station wagon," he said.

"Help yourself. Just don't get a speeding ticket. Last year I got one and he wouldn't let me drive for two weeks."

They walked up the beach and separated. He wanted to turn and look at her, to watch the movements of her body, but he didn't dare. She was a woman, every last ounce of her, and the desire for her was spreading through him like a disease. If he knew what was good for him he'd wash her out of his mind.

Half an hour later he left the estate in the station wagon, choosing not to wait for Joan. He wanted to go to some little bar where he could be alone and think, not just about Kitty but about Joan and lots of other things.

Two miles down the highway he pulled in at a place called The Ferns, which was well known around Twenty Mile River. Girls from nearby farms came in for drinks and the boys who worked at summer camps on the other side of the village drove over to pick them up. It wouldn't be quiet inside, but beer was only ten cents a glass and in town it was fifteen. He didn't have much left of the extra ten Jennings had given him.

The girls were in there all right, clustered around the bar, but he found a stool at one end by himself. He had been there about an hour when the boys began to come in, college kids with crew cuts, and started pairing off with the girls. The free girls would get their chances first and the ones who demanded money would be last,

asking top prices at the beginning and then coming down to what the traffic would bear.

The beer was good and cold and he drank steadily, trying to put his jumbled thoughts together. If that Kitty weren't so pretty it wouldn't be so bad. But he was enormously attracted to her and he couldn't help himself. Even nights when he was with Joan in his room he thought about her, sometimes pretending that Joan was Kitty. It didn't make sense, and he knew that he should forget about her. She was a married woman, and as dangerous to him as a stick of dynamite.

The night was not yet old when he left the bar, but he was feeling the beer and he drove carefully toward Wildwood Acres. He had no real affinity for alcohol, and he was sorry now that he had bothered. Only a few cents remained in his pocket. He was back in the throes of poverty until pay day.

His room over the garage was dark when he arrived. He was not surprised. Probably Joan had seen him drive away, and she had bedded down in her own quarters for a change.

His room was oppressively hot, and he stripped to his shorts before he snapped the light off and stretched out on the bed. The beer reinforced the heat, squeezing rivulets of sweat from his pores.

He dreamed about Kitty that night, dreamed of the sweetness of her lips and the soft hollows of her body and the surging strength of her full thighs. When he awoke in the morning to the drumming of rain on the window—he had that lucky faculty of an internal alarm clock—his head ached and every emotion was stretched to the breaking point.

He stumbled through his morning ablutions, dressed quickly and walked through the rain to the main house, his cheap canvas shoes soaking through immediately. As soon as he was paid he would have to get a sturdier pair.

Mary wasn't in the kitchen, but Joan was waiting for him.

"Thanks," she said bitterly. "Thanks for taking off without me last night."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't you think I get sick of being stuck out here, too?"

"Next time," he mumbled apologetically at the table.

Mary came in as Joan left, greeted him cheerily and went to the stove. In moments the kitchen was filled with the staccato sounds and savory odors of frying eggs and bacon. In a surprisingly short time Mary brought the bacon and eggs over to him, with a cup of steaming coffee, and he fell to.

He had just downed his second cup of coffee when Jennings wheeled his chair into the kitchen.

"Pick up my daughter at the bus station," Jennings said. He glanced at the clock over the sink. "It's due in forty-five minutes."

"Will do."

"Use the Bentley. The keys are in it. After that you can take the rest of the day off."

Eddie shook his head.

"I'd rather look at the traps," he said. "I don't want an animal suffering any more than necessary. I'll save my day off until pay day."

"Suit yourself, but don't miss that bus. If there's anything I hate more than animals it's people being late for their appointments."

"I won't miss it."

Eddie was glad when Jennings wheeled himself out of the kitchen. He wished he could like his employer but somehow he was repelled. The feeling, he tried to assure himself, had nothing to do with Kitty.

Outside, he saw that the rain had almost stopped and the sun was about to break through. He hoped not. Once

the sun came out after a warm rain the heat usually seemed worse than before.

The bus terminal was down near the river, not far from the Hotel Dalton, an unprepossessing building which had seen better days. There was a neon sign outside which hadn't been lit in years—"Quickline Is Your Mountain Route"—and the old siding was in sad need of paint. The bus company had tried to drop Twenty Mile River and some of the other small towns from its schedule, taking the thruway instead, but the state authorities had blocked the move.

He found a place almost in front of the terminal and backed the Bentley into the curb. The sun was out now, hot and bright, and he rolled all the windows down, admiring the silent action of the automatic window lifts. A car like this spelled class, in a way that the chromed and finned vulgarity of a Cadillac could never match. At one point he had owned a Ford. The year after his graduation from high school he had purchased the old wreck for seventy-five dollars but within two days the motor had blown. The dealer had finally agreed to buy it back for ten dollars, as junk. After that experience Eddie hadn't had much desire to own a car.

The bus was on time, and Eddie climbed out of the car, hoping he would be able to spot Carole Jennings.

His concern was unfounded. Only two people got off,—the driver and a girl in a dress so tight and revealing that it made Eddie stare and swallow hard. The color of polished copper, it contrasted sharply with the girl's blonde hair. All her exposed skin was tanned deeply from the sun. But it was the incredibly lush curves of her body that held him in temporary paralysis, curves so startling that a few more would be caricature.

"You must be Carole Jennings," he managed to say as the driver started removing her bags from the luggage compartment.

Blue eyes lifted to his face and studied him briefly.

"Do I know you?" she inquired. She had a nice voice, low and soft, with a bedroom sultriness lurking behind the conversational tone.

"I'm Eddie. I took Jim's place. Your father sent me to meet you."

"They built you big while they were at it," she said.

That always embarrassed him, and he turned to her luggage, three suitcases that the driver had lined up at the curb. As he followed her toward the car his eyes were riveted to her hips, swaying sinuously before him, and he felt a pounding in his head.

Someday, he hold himself, as he put the suitcases in the trunk . . .

WORK WENT along pretty well for Eddie, but everything else was confusion. When he was busy in the woods or out on the lake taking care of his traps it wasn't so bad, but when he had a chance to think, his head spun madly in utter frustration. He was sleeping with Joan every night, but all the while he wanted Carole so desperately that he couldn't see straight. He seldom saw her, but he knew that she went swimming in Goose Lake every afternoon, alone. The temptation to slip over there and spy on her was almost irresistible, but he fought it down.

"You aren't yourself lately," Joan said to him one night.

"I guess I'm getting tired of killing animals."

"I don't think it's that."

"What then?"

"Because Kitty has stopped meeting you on the beach."

"Well, she can't. She says that Carole has a tongue as long as a split rail fence. Not that we've ever done anything wrong. All we ever did was go for a swim and pass the time of day."

It was dark in the room, except for the faint light of the moon slanting through one window. Joan moved against him taking one of his hands.

"Don't tell me you haven't wanted to," she said.

"Wanted to what?"

"Be with Mrs. Jennings the way you are with me."

"Oh, come off it, will you?"

"Or maybe that Carole looks better to you."

"Shut up, you little fool. You think I'm nuts or something?"

"Common sense doesn't have much to do with sex."

"Well, we ought to know. We're proving it every night. If Jennings finds out what we're doing, he won't like it. And then what would we do? You'd be back in the diner and I'd be off on some farm—if I could get a job."

He had promised himself that he wouldn't touch her that night but once their lips were together he forgot the promise. She was a woman and he was a man and there were just the two of them.

"Be good to me," she begged.

He was.

Next morning he skipped breakfast for the first time, and hit the traps early. He had his first otter, a big fellow with a savage snarl and a twisting body that seemed to turn around inside its skin. It took two bullets through the head to finish the frantic animal. Eddie took the trap along with him. The whole area had been torn up by the otter's desperate efforts to free itself, and it would probably be weeks or months before another otter would visit the spot. Had he planned properly, he could have fixed the trap so that the otter would drown, but he had thought this the least likely of all locations, and had not bothered. It just went to prove that no man can always outguess his four-footed quarry.

He returned to the main house around noon. Jennings was sitting in his wheel chair on the front lawn. He hadn't yet started his drinking for the day.

"Well, by God," Jennings exclaimed, when Eddie took the otter from his pack basket. "If that isn't something! Jim could never catch one of those buggers."

Eddie stretched the otter out on the grass.

"Big fellow, isn't he?" he inquired.

"About the biggest I've ever seen. Must be all of four feet. Too bad it's summer and the fur isn't prime or I'd have it made up into something for Mrs. Jennings."

"Too bad any of the animals have to be killed during the summer," Eddie said. "If they have young the young only starve. It just isn't human."

"Well, you're doing it, aren't you?"

"Yeah, I'm doing it, for three hundred a month, room and board."

"You've got no complaints," Jennings said. "And I haven't any either. You get paid and you kill the animals. I'm satisfied." Jennings examined the rest of the day's bag—a mink, three foxes and four snapping turtles. "What about Goose Lake?" he asked suddenly. "You doing anything around it?"

"Not yet, I was thinking about getting over there this afternoon."

Jennings nodded.

"Stay away from this end of the lake," he said.

"Why?"

"That's where Carole swims, and I don't want her disturbed. You stick to the upper end, in the swamps."

"There won't be any trouble," he assured Jennings. "What she does is her business and I'll take care of my job."

"That's what Jim said, but he blew his cork. Men do that sometimes in the woods. Some men shouldn't ever live in the woods. But you seem happy enough."

"Hell, I like the woods." Eddie picked up the animals and the turtles and put them in the large pack basket. "I'll stay away from that part of the lake," he said, not sure whether or not he would. "The swamps are better for trapping anyway. You can't get much along a beach."

It took him about half an hour to bury his take, and then he went into the kitchen for lunch.

"You shouldn't go without breakfast," Mary told him. "It'll ruin your stomach."

"I was in a hurry."

She served him a generous portion of a crisp chef's salad which hit the spot perfectly in his hot, excited state.

During his first trip around the property he had visited Goose Lake once, and he remembered a clump of bushes where a man could hide and watch the narrow beach. He had thought about those bushes and the beach a lot.

After lunch he got some traps from the shed and started through the woods toward Goose Lake. He doubted that Carole had left the house yet. The family didn't eat until one, and it wasn't reasonable to assume that she would go swimming without eating. Joan had told him the girl never missed a meal.

There was a path through the woods, much of it overgrown, and he kept to it. He climbed a short hill and a rabbit ran in front of him. He often saw rabbits and deer during his travels on the estate, and once in a while a game bird, a grouse, or, very rarely, a pheasant. Jennings blamed the dearth of game birds on the animals and birds of prey, but Eddie knew that wasn't the only reason. Some of the fields should be plowed and planted with grain so that the birds would have something to eat. A lot of hunting clubs did that. A hungry grouse or pheasant is like a hungry person—if it can't find food in one place it moves on. It was too bad, he decided, that he couldn't sit down and talk to Jennings in a rational way. The estate had so much to offer, yet no effort was made to improve it. Jennings shelled out three hundred dollars a month for a needless slaughter. What about the little animals that starved because a mother had been killed? Didn't Jennings ever think of that? Eddie guessed that he didn't or, if he did, that he drowned it in a bottle of booze. What normal man would sit in the woods and blast the life out of a harmless song bird? A man had to have a warped mind to do that.

He approached the lake and made his way in the direction of the beach. This was crazy and he knew he shouldn't be doing it. If a girl wanted some privacy she should be left alone. Then he remembered how she had

looked at the bus station, and the pounding in his head started again.

He chose his cover near the beach, out of sight, and he settled down to wait, piling the traps beside him and lighting a cigarette.

He sat there, getting hotter by the second—he was only partly in shade—and the deer flies attacked his sweat-damp skin fiercely. While he waited, smoking and swatting the flies, he studied the lake. Smaller than Moon Lake, it was about three-quarters of a mile long and half a mile wide, bordered mostly by pines and oak, with a few hemlocks thrown in. The extreme end was mostly cranberry bogs. He wondered whether anyone picked the berries when they were ready for market.

It might have been about an hour later—he was almost asleep—when he heard someone coming along the path. Hastily he put out his cigarette, blinked his eyes to clear them and hunched as low as he could, elbows resting on his knees.

She passed within a few feet, her blonde hair reflecting the sunlight. She was wearing a two-piece bathing suit, Bikini style and briefer, if possible, than Kitty's. He sucked in his breath. The suit was black, and it clung to her body like paint.

At the beach she wasted no time but dove into the water, fast and smooth. When she broke surface he saw that she was an excellent swimmer, using an overhand stroke that knifed cleanly through the water with hardly a splash.

She came out in a little while and sat on the sand, her back to him, letting the sun dry her. The pounding was all through him now and he leaned further forward, his hands shaking as though he had been on a drunk for a week. More than anything else, he wished he weren't there. This was wrong, like the time he had peeped in through a woman's bedroom window. She hadn't been much to look at, except that she had been a woman, and

he had been disgusted with himself for days afterward. Now he was doing almost the same thing again, and the disgust was as strong as the longing.

Somewhat later she got up and walked back along the path. When she came opposite him she stopped and spoke.

"Too bad you got cheated," she said. "Better luck next time."

Eddie didn't know what to say, what to do. He felt like a criminal who had just heard a death sentence pronounced. The face turned cold. Slowly, uncertainly he got to his feet.

"I didn't mean anything," he protested. "I was just taking a rest and the next thing I knew you were in the water. There didn't seem to be anything to do but wait."

Her laugh stung, telling him she knew he was lying.

"Wait in the hope that I would take my suit off?"

"No, not that." His stomach felt hollow as he bent over to pick up the traps. "You think I'm that kind of guy?"

She shrugged, "There isn't a man alive who wouldn't give a quart of his blood to see a naked woman. It's funny. We're all pretty much the same—maybe a few inches difference here and there—and it really shouldn't be so interesting. I go to a nudist camp every summer—my father doesn't know that—and there isn't anything cheap about sex in a nudist camp. Sex isn't important there. It's what you are that counts."

Eddie couldn't imagine himself ever going to a nudist camp. It would be too much for him to bear, playing volleyball and swimming with pretty young girls in all their naked loveliness. He simply couldn't believe that there were men who could do it and not get all worked up.

"I suppose you'll tell your father?" he asked anxiously, walking out to her.

She pretended to debate the question, but her face wasn't serious. She was smiling up at him.

"Would you rather I didn't?"

"Well, he told me to stay away from here and, well, I need the job. I—aw, I didn't mean no harm."

"Perhaps not, but I knew you'd get around to it sooner or later," she said. "Jim did and that clump of bushes was his favorite place to hide. I saw a cigarette and knew somebody was there. I'd have bet my last dollar it was you."

He felt like a kid who had been caught stealing apples. The cold sweat on his forehead felt as though someone were pressing an ice bag against it.

"I won't come here again," he assured her. "I promise you that if you don't say anything."

"I— Eddie, isn't it?"

"Yes."

She hitched at the top of her suit, spoiling the view.

"You might have tried something else, Eddie."

He knew what she meant.

"No. Not me."

"Well, Jim did and he was normal enough. He waited until I was stretched out on the sand and then he tried to rape me. But you've probably heard about that, haven't you?"

"Not that much. Something was said that he got fresh with you and Mrs. Jennings."

Carole made a face.

"No man would have to rape Kitty. She's as cheap as they come. Before she married my father she was just a bum who worked the clubs. She only married him for his money. Sometimes the way she looks at him I get the feeling that she'd kill him if she had the nerve. I wouldn't spend a day here if it weren't for my father. He's an old man and he's tired and sick, and he needs someone around him who cares. The worst part is that he's in love with her, or he thinks he is, and he can't see down inside of her and find out what she is." Carole paused. "Maybe they're right when they say there's no fool like an old fool."

"She told me she was partly responsible for Jim being fired," Eddie said. "He drove her into town and he made improper advances to her on the way back."

"That was her story."

"Well?"

"I think there was more to it than that. What really got Jim fired was what he did to me. Roger—he's my boyfriend—was sick that afternoon, and I thought Jim was out tending his traps. I didn't see anything wrong about stretching out nude on the beach and just resting. Then, out of nowhere, he was here and he tried to attack me. It was—horrible."

"No man should do a thing like that."

"I ran all the way back to the house without a stitch of clothes on me. My father was sitting out on the lawn where he usually does—he drinks too much, doesn't he?—and he was furious. Then Kitty got into the act, claiming that Jim had tried to molest her the day before, and that was the end of Jim. My father wouldn't even see him before he left. I guess Jim was just as well satisfied."

Eddie reached into his pocket for a package of cigarettes and she took one. He struck a match and held it for them.

"No use me setting these traps," he said.

"Why?"

She pulled the smoke into her lungs and her breasts grew at least another inch, pushing forward against the fabric with such pressure that their centers were clearly outlined. Her waist was small—Eddie was sure he could encircle her with his hands—and that made her bust appear even larger.

"I had no right being here," he said. "All you have to do is say I stepped out of line and I'm done. I—how did you explain it to your father that you were naked that day?"

"I said that Jim ripped the suit off of me."

"Wasn't that a lie?"

"Isn't a girl entitled to one lie once in a while? I didn't want my father to know I had taken the suit off myself. And Jim did try to take advantage of me."

"You could tell your father the same thing about me and he'd believe you."

"I won't unless I have to. That depends on you."

"Nothing depends on me."

Her lips curved in a secret smile.

"That's where you're wrong," she said. "You're big and handsome and Kitty could go for someone like you. All you need do is have an affair with her, and be willing to get up in court and swear that you have had physical relationships with her. It could be worth a lot of money to you."

He shifted the traps from one hand to the other.

"How much?" he inquired.

"I'd be willing to pay five thousand dollars."

"You really hate her, don't you?"

She shook her head, her eyes serious.

"No, I love my father. I know what she is and I want him to know it, too. She's just waiting for him to die so she can collect her share of his money. That isn't marriage. Marriage means a home and children and all the other good things that go with them. Am I wrong?"

"Well—"

She laughed.

"You might enjoy your work, Eddie. How do you know? She could be a pleasant memory, and if it faded you'd still have the five thousand dollars. A lot of men who work for three hundred dollars a month would go for that combination."

He ground the cigarette out. Five thousand could get him going on a farm of his own, or set him up in a small business.

"I'll have to think about it," he said.

"For how long?"

"Give me a couple of days."

"One day, and if you don't see things my way I'll lie to my father about you. You'll be out five thousand dollars and a job."

"You don't give me much choice," he said as they started up the path. "But I'm still going to think about it."

"You can meet me here at the lake tomorrow afternoon."

They had gone only a short distance when she twisted one ankle on a stone and fell, rolling on the ground and crying out with pain. Quickly he threw the traps aside and bent over her. She was lying face up, her legs stretched out on the leaves. He examined her ankle carefully. There was nothing broken, but it must have been painful from the way she was whimpering.

"Don't," she pleaded as he moved the ankle. "Oh, please don't. I—"

"It's okay, but I may have to carry you." His hand moved from her ankle up along her bare leg, the thrill of touching her flooding through him. "You should wear something besides sneakers. They aren't worth much in the woods."

She sat up and he took his hand away.

"I think I can walk," she said.

"It won't cost you anything to try."

But she couldn't, or she didn't want to, saying that her ankle hurt terribly. In the end he carried her, leaving the traps behind.

It was nice carrying her, her arms circling his neck, with his right arm around her so that his hand lay gently upon one breast. She didn't object and once in a while he moved his fingers, feeling the fullness that was under his hand. He was sweating again, but this time it was a hot sweat, like being in a steam bath. Those red lips of hers were only inches away from his mouth.

"That was stupid of me," she said as he climbed a small hill.

"It could happen to anybody."

She wasn't heavy, probably about a hundred fifteen pounds, but he pretended that he needed to rest before they got out of the woods. He put her down on a soft patch of grass.

"Don't get fresh," she said as he sat down beside her.

"What the hell ever gave you that idea?"

"I can just about read your mind. The mind of one man is about the same as another's when it comes to a girl."

"What about that Roger fellow?"

"We're just good friends."

"He go to those nudist camps with you?"

"You ask a lot of questions."

"It's the only way you ever learn anything."

"I hope you decide to go along with me about Kitty," she murmured. "It means a great deal to me."

"We'll see."

"I might—I might even be nice to you if you did."

The pounding in his head was like someone beating on a hollow drum and his stomach pulled up into one giant knot.

"You're very pretty," he said as he bent over her. "I never saw a girl with a waist so tiny."

"Nineteen inches."

"You're a lot more than that where I'm looking right now."

"I'm forty where you're looking, forty-one on a deep breath."

"Let's see you do it."

"Like this?" she teased.

The glorious mounds rose toward him and he was aware of her hand on his arm. The pounding was all through him now. He felt his legs getting numb.

"You drive me nuts," he said as his arms went around her, fast and hard.

Her lips were warm and soft and yielding, but that was all. When he tried to slip the top of her suit off she made

him stop, breaking off the kiss to bite him on the hand.

"Damn!" he shouted.

She seized the opportunity to roll away from him and spring to her feet. He cursed as he got up and watched her sprint along the path. There was very obviously nothing wrong with her ankle.

Still cursing and rubbing his hand, he plodded back along the path to find the traps.

Next time, he promised himself, would be different.

THERE WERE some fine locations for sets in the cranberry swamp at the upper end of Goose Lake but all Eddie did was scout the area. He put out no traps. He'd forgotten wire, staples and hatchet. Even if he had been fully equipped he guessed he wouldn't have done anything. Carole Jennings had really twisted him apart inside.

After he had covered the swamp he sat down under a big oak tree and had a cigarette. He could still see her. All that magnificence cramming the daring black Bikini to the bursting point. The desire was still inside him, squeezing his guts, the memory of her kiss lingering on his mouth. She must be something in a nudist camp, all right. And he didn't believe that crap about sex not being important. Hell, he wished he had ten bucks for every man who had had her. No man who was any man at all would let something like that get away without a struggle.

He finished the cigarette and got up, still carrying the traps, and walked along the shore of the lake. He saw some bass, a few trout, and if he'd had the twenty-two along he could have killed a rather large water snake. Jennings had told him there were rattlers in the area, that sometimes they even came up onto the lawn by the house. Eddie had watched for them but he had yet to see one. He knew enough about rattlers to know they didn't always sound a warning before they struck. If they happened to be shedding their skins, they couldn't.

The deer flies were as bad as before, biting savagely, but Eddie didn't pay much attention to them. He was

thinking of five thousand dollars, more money than he had ever dreamed of having all at one time. But what he would have to do to earn it made him feel sick. Even if Kitty were as cheap and mercenary as Carol believed, she didn't deserve to be framed that way. No doubt Carole had made the same offer to Jim, and when he had turned her down she had run naked and screaming to the house. Somehow that story about the attempted rape had a hollow ring. But, then, he hadn't known Jim. Nor, for all of that, did he know much about Carole.

He followed the path from the lake toward the house, stopping involuntarily at the spot where she had left him. She had said she might be nice to him if he would do something about Kitty. He wondered whether she had tempted Jim the same way. But mostly he thought about how his mouth had been over her lips, his hands caressing her body, of how he would have known her then and there if she hadn't fastened her teeth into his hand.

He was almost to the house when he heard shots down in the woods. It didn't sound like Jennings, who was so poor a shot that he preferred a shotgun. This sounded more like a twenty-two. Thinking that some kid might have wandered onto the property, he turned right into the woods to investigate.

It was no kid. It was Kitty Jennings.

"I didn't know you went in for that sort of thing," Eddie said as he came up to her.

She favored him with a smile.

"Oh, I'm pretty good and I like to keep my eye sharp." She shrugged. "There wasn't anything to do anyway. Frank is into the booze and I can't stand that Carole. I can see the hate on her face whenever she looks at me."

Kitty was wearing shorts and a halter, the latter the briefest he had yet seen. It barely nodded to convention by covering her nipples and about a third of her breasts. The other two-thirds were on display, and she didn't seem to mind his taking it in.

"What are you shooting at?" he asked.

"That little can down there on a limb."

He finally saw the can. It was a small one, about a hundred feet distant.

"Bet you can't hit it," he said.

She swung the gun up and snapped a shot. The can jumped.

"See?" she demanded. "I don't shoot to miss. I had ten cans up and they're all down." She ejected the remaining shells from the gun and checked to see that it was empty. "I do this about once a week."

"I see." He remembered hearing reports from a twenty-two before, but he had been too far away to tell where they were coming from. "You're a better shot than your husband," he said.

She made a face.

"Hell, he can't hit anything, except with a shotgun. I hate shotguns. Damn things kick too much."

He was standing close enough to smell her, and he wondered how it would be if he took her, there in the woods. He didn't think she would protest or resist. The ground wasn't the best place, but if you wanted it badly enough the ground would do nicely.

"Hot," Kitty observed.

"Hotter than blazes," he agreed.

She nodded toward the traps in his hand.

"You didn't do much this afternoon," she said. "I saw you with those when you left for the lake."

"Forgot half of what I needed."

"Or you followed Carole?"

"No, I didn't." It was the truth. He hadn't followed her. He had gone on ahead of her. "I know what I'm not supposed to do."

She threw her head back and laughed up at him. The action caused her breasts to lift and jump.

"You'd like to see her naked on the beach, wouldn't you, Eddie?"

"You think there's a man alive who would refuse that chance?"

"I don't think Jim tried to rape her that day," she said evenly. "I think he got it free, and that she just put up a yell. And that Roger Swingle who comes up here—he gets it, too. She isn't fooling me. Maybe she's got her father fooled but I'm not blind. Which reminds me that Roger will be with us in a couple of days." She sighed. "I suppose he'll hang around the rest of the summer and make a nuisance of himself. When he wasn't with Carole last summer he was chasing me like some animal. A couple of times I had to slap his face."

"He sounds like a weirdo."

"What Carole sees in him I don't know. A girl with her looks, and she ends up with a creep. But they say the beautiful ones sometimes go for the ugly ones."

They were quite a distance from the house, shielded from view by a growth of trees, and it was a good place for him to try his luck with Kitty. Still he stood quiet, almost rigid, and he did nothing. He had the feeling that once he went the limit with her he wouldn't be able to stop, that it would lead him down a dark road with a very uncertain future. Yet if he wanted to earn five thousand dollars he couldn't fool around.

"I've got to get going," he said.

"Oh, don't be in a hurry. We can talk."

"What about?"

"Joan Kelder might be a good subject," she suggested. He felt uncomfortable.

"I doubt it."

"Such as how she's never in her room at night."

"Well—"

"You two must have it bad. Real bad, Eddie. I check her room every night and she's never in there. Well, once she was. The night you went out in the station wagon. She'd been crying."

"No fault of mine," he said.

"Perhaps not. Love, to a man, is merely the physical satisfaction of the moment. With a woman it goes deeper. Physical or otherwise, love is the most important thing in a woman's life. And children. I guess every woman wants a child of her own."

"Too bad you can't have one if you feel that way about it." It gave him a strange feeling to be talking with her in this way.

"My husband isn't—capable."

"You told me that once before."

"I've even talked to him about me going to a doctor and having it done. He says if it would make me happy he doesn't want to stand in my way, but he has to get used to the idea of me getting pregnant by somebody else."

"That would be true of any man."

"Probably. But men are so stupid when it comes to sex. All they want is a woman and the joy of the moment."

"Not always."

"What about you and Joan?" she challenged him.

"Maybe we're in love," he declared.

"Maybe, but what if you give her a child while she's still married and her husband is in prison? Have you thought of that?"

He shifted the traps from one hand to the other.

"Naturally," he said.

"It would cost you both your jobs. Frank wouldn't go for a thing like that. I guess there was something pure about this first wife that rubbed off on him."

"It didn't as far as animals are concerned. He's—oh, I guess you'd say he's a sadist of some sort."

"He wasn't that way before he fell off that horse," she said. "But the fall and the broken back changed him. It made him vicious. Sometimes when I'm getting him ready for bed he'll grab one of my arms and twist it just to make me cry. Last night I thought he was going to pull one of my arms right out of the socket."

"Jesus!" Eddie said, hating Jennings more and more.

"He laughed at me because I cried. He said I'd be letting myself in for a lot worse pain than that if I went ahead with an artificial insemination. Then he—well, I won't tell you. It was—awful. He—well, he got my breasts in his hand and he made me scream because it was so bad."

"The bastard," Eddie breathed.

"I—I think I may have some bruises."

"Not that I can see."

She wet her lips with her tongue. For a second he thought she was going to drop the halter all the way but she didn't. In fact, she tugged it up a little. For a moment he had a wild impulse to throw the traps away, to find her with his hands, to slam his mouth down on hers and give her a second honeymoon right there in the woods.

"I've still got to get back to the house," he said. "If I'm not there by five I don't eat."

They turned and walked together through the woods. She paused when they neared the edge of the trees.

"You'd better go on," she said. "If he sees us together it's hard to tell what he'll think. Even when we were meeting on the beach for a swim he had something to say."

He stopped walking and stared across the field.

"We didn't do anything wrong, Kitty."

"I know it and so do you, but how does he know it? He's in bed by eleven and he's so drunk he sleeps like a log. Sometimes in the morning he asks me if I had fun the night before. I'm getting so I hate the God-damned beast."

He left her and walked across the field. Back there in the woods he could have scored—he felt sure that he could have—but he had made no attempt. He had only to take her once and he could testify that she was an adulteress. Of course, he could do that anyway, whether it was true or not. However, he supposed for five bills

Carole would want pictures of the act and then there could be no questions.

When he reached the shed he threw the traps on the ground and left them there. He had handled them with his bare hands and they would have to be boiled again, unless he kept them out for water sets.

It was hot in his room, and he took a cold shower, the fine needles of the spray probing every inch of his skin. As soon as he had dried himself he lay down and tried to think. He wished he had a job on a farm for two hundred bucks a month and was away from all of this. Carole wanted one thing and it was more than obvious that Kitty wanted something else, something that had to do with hate and the utter impossibility of her marriage. Money Kitty had, but love she lacked.

He stretched, feeling the sweat gathering on his body, and made an attempt to figure things out. He was powerfully attracted to Carole, but it was purely physical, he didn't particularly like her. In some respects, she was as cruel as her father. She wanted to destroy Kitty's marriage, and she was willing to go to the lowest level to do it. Kitty didn't deserve that. She attended to a cripple, took care of his needs, and he mistreated her for it. If he had to make a choice, he told himself, it would have to be Kitty. She was fighting to keep what belonged to her and nobody could blame her for that.

He finally sat up and lit a cigarette. Jobs were hard to find—how well he knew that—and if he wanted to draw his three hundred a month plus room and board he had to please both Kitty and Carole. Well, it was far from impossible. He could tell Carole he was having trouble scoring with Kitty while he could be looking for something else to do. He didn't want to go the way Jim had gone. That would hurt him getting another job. Most of the farmers had daughters of their own, and they were always suspicious of a fellow who was young and good looking. The farmers didn't take into account that half

of the time their daughters asked for it, one way or another.

He fell asleep thinking about the woods and Kitty Jennings and wondering why he hadn't pulled her down to the ground with him.

A LIGHT warm rain was falling the next morning, hardly more than a heavy mist. Mist or no, the grass and leaves were wet and Eddie's shoes soon wet through, his socks sticking clammily to his feet. Again he told himself that he would get new shoes when he received his first pay.

He checked all the turtle traps in Moon Lake first. They held five of the ugly creatures, which hissed at him when he lifted them from the water. Back on shore, he grabbed them by the tails and tossed them up on the sand. Then he shot each one twice in the head. Cutting their heads off with an axe would have been better but they would die of the bullets before too long. That was why he always checked the turtle traps first—it took them quite a while to die and he didn't want to bury anything alive, not even a snapper.

He left the turtles, carrying the gun, and struck off in the direction of the woods. The mist had thinned, the sun almost coming through the clouds, and the only wet was under his feet. He decided that it would be a hot day, really hot, and he took no traps with him. He was in a hurry and there was too much to do. His line of traps was getting longer and longer, taking more time to cover it, and he had to be over at Goose Lake to meet Carole that afternoon. Unfortunately, he still didn't know what he was going to say to her.

It was wet in the woods, too, and he avoided the low-hanging dripping limbs. The hemlocks were worst. One brush against a limb loaded with water and you were soaked to the skin.

The set was a good one, right in a little spring run, but somehow the animals weren't using it. Raccoons usually paraded through the water, always hoping to find some food, but he hoped they would stay away. Even in winter, the best time for furs, he didn't like trapping them, and their pelts didn't bring much, only a few bucks at most. Mink was about the best to catch if a man wanted to make money from his work.

As soon as the sun came out, red and hot, the deer flies swarmed through the woods. Every fly in the county seemed to be after him. The hotter it got, the more he sweated, and the more the flies came around, getting into his hair and his ears. One, with vicious courage, even made a dive into his mouth.

Suddenly he swore angrily. He had forgotten his pack basket. A pack basket was a must, and any trapper who went without one was half nuts. Well, he had plenty of reason to have forgotten. He was worried sick, and he'd had to force his breakfast down, almost heaving up the eggs and toast as soon as they hit his stomach. Five thousand dollars was a lot of money, but he couldn't see hurting anyone in order to get it. Better, he thought, to be on a farm for two hundred a month.

"You have to be honest," his father had often told him. "Not just honest with other people but honest with yourself."

He hadn't really understood at the time but he knew now. There was a little thing inside him that kept saying that this was wrong, and it was hard to fight it down. Five thousand might give him a start on a farm of his own, a small one, but he was sure that he would never be happy with it. Earning that much was one thing but smashing someone's marriage to do it was quite another. Yet, he supposed, if he didn't do it somebody else would. And, for all he knew, Kitty might have it coming to her. It was fairly obvious that she didn't love her husband, and was hanging on only for her share of his money.

On the other hand, she might deserve it. She wrestled Jennings into and out of bed, and she was generally his personal slave. If, indeed, she had married him for his money, it was hardly any of his business. And—damn it—he liked her. She didn't have Carole's incandescent sexual magnetism, nor did he get from her what he got from Joan, but he was still interested in her as a person, a very lovely one. As for making her, he thought it could be done. She was a sexually deprived girl and he was a man, and they were both normal and healthy.

Turning his thoughts in another direction he made up his mind that he must do something about Joan. She wanted marriage as soon as she had her freedom, and he wasn't convinced that he did. Under these circumstances going to bed with her night after night hardly seemed the decent thing to do. If he gave her a kid they'd be in a real box, and there would be no honorable way out except marriage. A lot of guys were married at twenty-three, or younger, but he just didn't feel ready.

It took him the rest of the morning to cover his traps and he had pretty good luck—five foxes and an otter, with a skunk thrown in. He shot the skunk from a safe distance and he didn't bother recovering the trap. He smelled bad enough already from sweat.

Jennings was on the lawn near the house in his chair, and he was highly pleased with Eddie's take. Jennings was also a little bit drunk, which at this time of the day, was early even for him.

"Killed a dog yesterday," Jennings said. "Blasted his guts right out with a shotgun."

"Might have been somebody's pet."

Jennings sneered. "People should learn to keep their pets tied up."

"Was it running deer when you saw it?"

"No, it just started walking up toward my chair, wagging its god-damned tail."

"My God, how could you shoot it?"

"Easy. I just pulled the trigger."

Eddie buried his game in the field and then he went to his quarters and took a shower. He would rather have gone for a swim, but he feared that Jennings would think he was goofing off.

After the shower he put on clean shorts, T-shirt, trousers and socks, but he had to wear the same shoes. He felt better, and he went over to the main house to eat. But he couldn't.

Mary was out of the kitchen. Despairingly, Eddie just left his plate and walked toward Moon Lake. Now that he wasn't sweating and he was clean the flies didn't bother him so much. He saw them everywhere, though, their wings like silver dots as they flew through the sunlight that filtered down between the trees.

The lake was calm when he arrived, the water cool and inviting, and he sat down on the sand. He hoped Jennings had not seen him leave without any traps. He wouldn't know how to explain it. His hours were supposed to be from eight to five, and although Jennings was generally pleased with his work, the more animals Eddie could kill the better his employer liked it. He thought about Jennings killing the dog and it revolted him. He knew that some dogs ran wild, usually in packs, but most dogs just wandered away from home and then returned. Poor little thing—what a way to treat an animal that was trying to be friendly.

The sun was too hot and he moved into some shade, stretching out on the pine needles and closing his eyes. Would she come? He hoped. He couldn't go on stalling her forever. She seemed like a determined girl who wouldn't be willing to wait very long for what she wanted.

He heard her coming long before she was close and he sat up, his mouth dry and his throat tight. She had let him kiss her the day before, and if he worked it right he might get farther today.

She wore the same suit as the day before, and just the sight of her lighted a ball of fire in his stomach.

"You look lazy," she said, standing over him.

"Hell, I'm tired," he said.

She sat down beside him, Indian fashion, her thighs bulging.

"I feel sorry for you. You work so stinking hard, Eddie."

"Hard enough."

"I hope you put in some of your work on Kitty. And, if you did, did you enjoy it? I think Jim used to."

"I didn't see her," he lied. "You think I can just walk into her bedroom and throw back the sheet?"

She laughed at Eddie.

"You aren't telling me the truth," she taunted him. "I saw you come out of the woods yesterday afternoon. A few minutes later she followed you"

There was no use trying to lie to her.

"Just talking. I heard her shooting that gun and I thought it might be a kid or a poacher."

"What did you talk about?"

"Not much. Just how I like my job and that sort of thing."

"And what did you say?"

"Gee, you ask a lot of questions, don't you? I told her that I don't go for all this useless killing. Most of it's against the law anyway."

"My father never used to be that way," she said thoughtfully.

"I wish I could believe that."

"Well, it's true. When my mother was alive and I was living home you couldn't find a man who had a kinder heart. When some organization was trying to raise money for an animal shelter he donated several thousand dollars. Then he had that horrible fall and it changed him."

"I understand he was drunk."

"I guess he was—the doctor said he was—but I think

Kitty got him that way. I found out later that when she asked for the horses at the stable she requested the liveliest they had. I think she hoped he would fall and be killed."

"You can't think of a good thing about her, can you?"

"Could you, in my place?"

"I don't know," he answered honestly. "I can see why you might resent her. If anything happens to your father she gets part of the estate which, I imagine, is quite big."

"Four or five million, Eddie."

He let out a low whistle.

"And you want it all for yourself, don't you?" he asked. "With her out of the way there wouldn't be anybody else."

She took a deep breath and her breasts filled up like a couple of balloons at a birthday party.

"It isn't the money," she replied. "For my part I hope he lives to be a hundred. But I know what she is and he doesn't. Like the animal in most men he fell in love with her body and he can't get over it."

"He can't do much about her body now," Eddie said.

"No, but he can dream. I've read that half the thrill of sex is the anticipation of the act. You can't take that away from him in spite of the fact that he isn't—well, man enough for her. Which makes what I want you to do very easy. You're handsome and big, and she must be lonely in a physical way. I'm sure that Jim was taking care of her, but he wouldn't admit it. He never went to town very much but he was always reading girly magazines. So he must have been interested in sex."

Eddie lit a cigarette.

"You'd do anything to get rid of her, wouldn't you?"

"Just about. I'd even kill her if I could get away with it, but I'd much rather do it the way I plan. If she sleeps with you he'd hate her for it, and he could get a divorce in New York State. He'd be rid of her, I'd be rid of her, and you'd have your five thousand dollars."

She uncrossed her legs and straightened them out. The bottom part of the suit was tight, fabric digging into her flesh. It was low enough to show off her flat, trim belly.

"How do I know you would pay me, Carole?"

"Because I said I would."

"And how do I know you've got that kind of money?"

"I've got it—and more. But I think five thousand is plenty for what I'm asking you to do."

"I'd have to appear against her, wouldn't I?"

"Yes, but it would be a quiet hearing. There wouldn't be anything in the papers. Roger is pretty good with a camera and we might arrange to break in on the two of you when you're together. She couldn't lie against a photo."

He leaned closer to her and the woman smell around her made his head throb.

"You said you'd be nice to me," he reminded her, pulling the smoke down into his lungs and holding it there.

"Did I?"

"That's what you said." He looked down inside the front of her suit, seeing the beginning swells of her breasts. "I'll bet it could be good." He laughed. "Good? I'll bet it would be out of this world."

Her face colored slightly.

"I didn't mean it quite the way you took it," she said. "Most men, even Roger, take things the wrong way and a girl should be more careful about what she says."

"Now you're backing down."

"Not on the five thousand."

"But on the rest of it you are. You led me to believe—"

"I never have," she said earnestly. "Honest. That's the truth, Eddie. I've gone out with boys and I've parked with them and I've kissed them but—well, I never did anything else."

"What about Roger?"

"We're just good friends and he understands me."

"Don't tell me he hasn't ever tried. I won't swallow that one."

"Yes, he's tried. He says when he sees me in the raw he flips his lid. I don't see why. I look at him that way, too, and it doesn't bother me any."

Eddie was sweating now, a great big drop on the end of his nose, hanging there a second and then dropping down to strike him on the back of one hand. He could hardly believe it. She couldn't have gone through twenty-one years a virgin. Girls just didn't live that way any more. The girls he had known started in high school. But probably he hadn't known the best girls. The girls on the farms saw a lot of sex with the animals around them and they became curious to the extent that they tried it themselves.

"You're handing me a line," Eddie said.

"No, I'm not."

"Oh, come on. You didn't go to no nudist camp and not have some man after you. And you don't strip down in front of this Roger and not get the blocks thrown to you. You think I was born yesterday, huh?"

"I think you're pretty blunt in what you say."

"Sure, I'm blunt. With the shape you've got some man had to make the grade. If you were some skinny little babe without those headlights I might fall for it, but not the way you look. Any guy goes for a pair of knockers and—"

"Eddie, shut your rotten mouth."

"The hell I will. You want me to do something for you, something that isn't right, and I want something from you if I do it." He flipped the cigarette into the water. "And I don't mean just the money. The money is okay but I want what else goes along with it."

She got up and walked around restlessly. Then she came back.

"You drive a hard bargain," Carole said, sitting down beside him, a few inches closer than before.

"I'm out for all I can get." He was more sure of himself now. "If I do a job on Kitty I want you and I want the money."

"What if I made it another thousand?"

"I'd still want you. I wanted you the second you got off that bus, and I want you more this very minute."

"Why?"

"Because you're beautiful."

"Is that the only reason?"

"Does there have to be another one?"

She removed her sneakers and wiggled her toes in the sand.

"Why are all men alike?" she demanded. "Why do they all want the same thing from a girl?"

"Why did you make out that you sprained your ankle yesterday? You knew that I liked you and that I wouldn't carry you back to the house without giving it a try."

"I wanted to see what you would do—if you were like the others. I—I found out. It's funny but none of that stuff goes on in a nudist camp. We have our games and enjoy the sun and there isn't any more to it."

"Crap."

"Well," she admitted, "there may be a few who stray but they don't make an issue over it. A man sees a girl he likes and it's just natural to make a play for her. But you can take it from me there are more babies started outside of nudist camps than inside."

He didn't understand what she was talking about, and he didn't believe her. How could a bunch of naked men and girls run around and not have desire boiling inside them? It was true that most girls looked better with half of their clothes on than they did with them off but it was still, to his way of thinking, a road to sex.

"I wouldn't mind seeing you that way," he blurted.

"What way?"

"Stripped. Naked as the day you were born—but with a lot more equipment."

"I don't get out of my clothes just to be sensational." He looked at her breasts, so full and alive and tempting. "You'd be sensational all right."

She dug her toes deeper into the sand.

"We're getting off the subject, Eddie."

"So we are."

"Either you do as I want you to do or I'm going to cost you your job." Her voice was low but firm. "Just one word to my father about you trying to touch me, and your job is finished."

"I touched you only once yesterday, and you wanted me to."

Her smile washed over him.

"Try and prove it," she said.

She had him backed against the wall and she was shooting arrows on either side of him, each coming just a little closer than the previous one. If he agreed to her demands it didn't mean that he had to follow through. He could keep her on the string for a week or so, and by that time he might be able to find another job.

"All right," he said finally.

She reached out and stroked one of his arms. Her hand was soft, like so much of her would be soft.

"I thought you'd see it my way, Eddie."

Her hand moved up his arm, under the T-shirt, pushing the material out of the way as she did so.

"Did I have a choice?" he wanted to know.

"Not much, I'm afraid."

"Hell, none at all."

He reached for her then, kissing her hard on the mouth and pushing her back onto the pine needles. At first there was no response, but then her mouth began to move under his. Yet when he started fumbling at her suit she fought him off.

"You know what'll happen if I let you," she said.

"I know."

"I don't want it that way. I want it nice when it hap-

pens. I want it right and good. I don't want it to be some cheap moment on the shore of a lake."

"Maybe this is a time when *you* don't have any choice."

She kissed him with feeling and pulled her head away.

"That would be rape," she said. "And you aren't the kind to rape a girl, are you, Eddie? You do that one thing for me and I promise you a reward far beyond your five thousand dollars."

In the end he left her. He felt like a hungry man who had sat down at a big meal and then hadn't been able to eat. It seemed like miles back to the main house, and he was glad Jennings was on the front lawn.

"The hell with it," Jennings said, when he asked for an advance. "It's almost payday so I'll pay you now and deduct the forty dollars you owe me. O.K.?"

"Fair enough."

"You're doing a good job."

"Thanks."

"But you don't like it, do you?"

"I haven't let that stand in my way." He put the money in his pocket and asked for the use of the station wagon.

"Sure," Jennings said "Just don't get loaded and try to climb a tree with it. Me, I get loaded but I can't do much damage with a god-damned wheel chair."

Half an hour later Eddie was seated at the bar in The Ferns and there was a girl beside him, one of the hill girls who had a big bust and hardly any stomach. He stayed at the bar until ten bantering with the girl, but he left alone. The girl was furious at him, and she called him a four-letter word. He couldn't help that. There were only two women he really wanted. Kitty and Carole.

But he had to take Kitty first. That much he knew. The rest, probably the best part of it, would come later. Somewhere, somehow, he had forgotten all about Joan.

JOAN WAS angry at Eddie for having gone out without her again and she stayed away from him the next night. He thought it might be a good thing. Just that morning Jennings had told him—just why, Eddie didn't know—that he didn't approve of the hired help having members of the opposite sex in their rooms.

"That doesn't go for Wilson," Jennings had added. "Wilson has his own house, and what he does is his affair. I think he picks up a girl three or four times a year and makes a night of it. I don't blame him. When a man has been married and he's used to sex it's pretty hard for him to do without it."

Eddie hadn't made any retort to this. Wilson certainly seemed to have it made. He had a big power mower to ride when he mowed the lawn, and the only other thing he did was to take care of a few flowers. He didn't even bother dumping out the boats after a rain—Eddie usually did that. Of course he didn't know how much Wilson was paid, but he was pretty sure it was more than three hundred a month.

He got up in the morning and showered, putting on his last change of clothes and wishing he could take the day off. He couldn't see how he would ever get a day off, unless he just forgot about the traps. He didn't want to do that. It was bad enough to catch the animals, without making them suffer needlessly.

It was already hot when he got outside, but the air had a sweet smell to it, the clean scent of woods surround-

ing a lake. He'd had a full night of sleep and he felt good. Nights Joan stayed with him he didn't sleep much. No matter how tired they were, one of them would make an affectionate move and then they would be at it again, their sweating bodies pressed tightly together and the moans rising in her throat. When he had been rooming with Mrs. Norton in town he had eagerly looked forward to when he could be with Joan, to when they could have a few beers and then, he could slip her up to his room and enjoy her eager body. But—and this was funny—out here in the woods something had happened, something that he couldn't explain. Perhaps Kitty had something to do with it, or Carole, and perhaps he himself was changing.

Mary was in the kitchen, bustling at the stove.

"Busy day for me," she said, bringing him his eggs.

"How come?"

"Wednesday and Joan is off."

He dug the fork into the eggs.

"Yeah, I forgot," he said.

"She had a cab come out for her last night. She was going to spend the night and the day in town. I don't blame her. These woods aren't any place for a young girl who's full of life. Take twenty years off my age and I wouldn't be here ten minutes."

Eddie ate in silence. He wondered, vaguely, what Joan had done the night before. Probably she had put up at the hotel and then gone to some bar to pick up a man. He felt a little jealous about that and a little hurt because she hadn't told him of her plans. Yet he knew that he had no reason to be jealous or hurt. He didn't own her any more than she owned him. They had known each other a long time and they had often slept together, but beyond that there wasn't much else. A lot of people did the same thing and it wasn't serious with them, not unless the girl got in a family way and then it was damned serious. The mere thought of such a thing happen-

ing to her made him cold all over, the cold creeping through his veins and causing his heart to pound heavily. He had been a fool with her, and when he talked to her again he would have to get things straightened out. If she was willing to continue their relationship as it had been, simply for the sake of sex, it would be all right but anything beyond that was out of the question. In a year or so he might change and he might want to marry her, but right then he didn't feel that way. She was good in bed, better than anybody he had ever had, but just to have that wasn't worth being tied down to her forever.

"You aren't eating," Mary said.

"I'm not hungry."

"Oh, you men! You're as bad as Clark Wilson. I say you should eat in the morning to keep your strength up."

"There's nothing wrong with my strength."

"There will be if you don't take care of it." She threw a pot into the sink and it clanged loudly. "If I was a swearing woman I'd swear," she declared.

"Don't let me stop you. Go ahead."

She slammed another pot into the sink.

"That Roger Swingle," she spat disgustedly. "He's coming up on the bus today. Now my life will be hell. He won't eat meat like other people, and he's always telling me how to fix his vegetables." She sighed, and her ample bosom rose and fell. "What that Carole sees in him I don't know. For my money he's a snot."

"Funny he's coming on the bus," Eddie said. "You'd think the guy would have a car."

"Oh, he's got a car all right—one of those little foreign things but he can't drive it. He ran down a little boy last year and they took his license away. Lucky for him he had big insurance on the car and the boy wasn't killed."

"He'll probably get sued."

Mary shrugged.

"That's his worry."

Eddie finished his coffee and lit a cigarette, trying to remember some place at Goose Lake where he might hide and watch Carole and this Roger when they went swimming. Of course he wasn't interested in Roger, but he did want to see that hot little number stripped down.

Eddie was just getting ready to leave the kitchen when Jennings came in, bare above the waist and the muscles of his arms and shoulders bulging as he pushed the wheel chair.

"Got a job for you," Jennings said.

"Okay."

"Take the Bentley and meet the morning bus for Roger Swingle."

"What about my traps?"

"To hell with your traps. If you've got anything in them let the little bastards suffer."

Eddie didn't argue. When you argued with the boss, right or wrong, you were sometimes out of a job. Anyway it wouldn't take long to meet the bus and he could make his rounds after he got back.

"Kitty will ride in with you," Jennings said. "She knows Roger and you don't. All I could tell you about him is that he's the homeliest thing this side of a zoo."

"Why doesn't Mrs. Jennings pick him up herself?"

"Because she twisted her arm getting me out of bed this morning and it hurts her. I thought Carole would drive in, but she's got a headache and she's still in bed." Jennings cursed. "She gets those headaches right along and the god-damned doctors can't do anything about them, any more than they could about my back. Sometimes I think you could take a shoemaker and put a black bag in his hand and he'd be just as good as some of the doctors running loose."

Jennings was still cursing doctors when he left, and Eddie lit another cigarette. He could just see Kitty horsing that slob in and out of bed. It was little wonder she had

hurt herself. A man of his wealth should have a male nurse to help him, not push everything off onto his wife. But perhaps it was some form of sadistic punishment for her, dictated by the fact that she was so much woman and he was so little man.

He didn't know where he was supposed to wait for her but he went out to wait in the Bentley, smoking a couple of cigarettes and sorry that he wasn't out in the woods. There had been a brief rain the night before, hardly more than a shower without the usual thunder and lightning, and animals would run on a night like that. Rain also washed away any human scent around the traps. Of course he never went right up to the sets, unless something was caught, but some of the animals had sharp noses and they were afraid of any strange odor.

Pretty soon she came toward the car, wearing black shorts and halter, black as her hair. The halter was modest enough, but her shorts were brief and very tight, pulling up high on her thighs and swinging from left to right as she walked.

"Nice day," she said as she got in. "You want me to drive?"

"I thought there was something wrong with your arm."

"There isn't anything wrong with my arm. I just wanted to get away from here for a little while, and I wanted to talk to you." She smiled and stretched her legs. "I haven't been seeing much of you lately, Eddie."

He started the car and guided it out the drive.

"You've been seeing Carole," Kitty said as they reached the main road.

"Well, it's pretty hard to live on the grounds and not see her."

"No, I mean the other day. I thought she was up to something and I followed her. She met you at Goose Lake."

"An accident," Eddie said.

"Was the kiss an accident?"

"You took it all in, didn't you?"

"Well, I'm fighting for what's mine, Eddie. I know she wants me out of Frank's life and I don't want out. I don't want out until——"

"He's in the ground?"

"You said that. I didn't."

"But I'm reading your mind."

"I don't believe you can. Sometimes I can't even read it myself. You don't know what it's like being married to a cripple, to a man who can't be a husband. You pray that something will happen, that something will make him a man again, but it never happens. You go from day to day, doing the same things, seeing the same things, living each day as though it's only a repeat of the day before. For him it's fine. He gets himself slopped up and then Wilson pushes him down into the woods and he bangs away with his gun. Yesterday he killed a robin, a poor damned robin, and you'd have thought he had shot a lion in the jungle."

"If he wasn't the way he is I wouldn't have a job," Eddie pointed out.

"No, I guess not."

"But I don't agree with him. I don't think what we're doing makes any sense at all. He's got two lakes and some streams and two thousand acres of land, and if he used his head he'd have the finest estate for game in the county."

"He doesn't want that," Kitty said. "He even shoots deer if he sees them. You have to be mighty heartless to kill such a pretty animal. Sometimes—well, sometimes I think he'd like to kill me, too, if he had a chance of getting away with it. He doesn't say so, but I know that he holds me responsible for his fall. It wasn't my fault at all. He told me he wanted the wildest horse they had in the stable, drunk as he was, but when it came time to mount I changed with him and he didn't know the difference. His horse was gentle, real gentle, but he was

too drunk to sit in the saddle. I begged him not to try it, to wait until the next day, but I could have talked to the horse for all the good it did."

Eddie remembered what Carole had told him and he didn't know whether or not he should believe Kitty. It hardly mattered. Jennings was in a wheel chair and that couldn't be changed now.

"He's dreamed up a new gimmick last night," Kitty went on. "He says as long as I'm not doing anything in the afternoons I can go down there in the woods and flush game for him."

"Why doesn't he get a dog for that?"

"He won't have one around. You know how he hates animals. It's—well, it's got me worried. Mr. Wilson won't move away from him while he's down there, saying that Frank shoots at anything that moves, and I keep thinking that he might shoot me. Accidents like that have happened before."

Eddie burned inside about Jennings. Jennings might be rich but he was carrying things too far.

"I wouldn't do it," Eddie said, shaking his head.

"You don't know Frank. Nobody tells Frank no. You do as he says or he's finished with you, like some old shoe that he's worn out."

"Nothing is worth risking your life for, Kitty. Booze and a gun are as bad a mixture as booze and gasoline."

She was silent for a moment.

"I guess I'll have to do it," she said.

"That's up to you."

"But I wanted you to know in case anything happened. I wanted somebody to know. How can I tell what Carole has been saying to him about me? Maybe she's turned his love for me to hate and I'm not even aware of it."

Eddie didn't know what Carole had been saying to her father, but it was a cinch she wasn't doing a public-relations job for kids. Carole had made it clear that she

didn't intend to share the Jennings estate with anybody else, especially a step-mother whom she hated.

"I can't help you," Eddie said, finally swinging around the truck. "I'm just a guy who works for three hundred a month and my keep, and I'm lucky to have that."

Without having realized it she had moved closer to him and her bare thigh brushed against his leg, moving away once and then coming back again, the pressure there, stirring him.

"How would you like to be rich?" she asked.

"I've never thought about it."

"But wouldn't it be nice?"

"It would be nice not to have to worry about money. On the other hand your husband is rich, and he isn't happy. He's a bitter old man and I'd never want to be that way."

"No one in his right mind would. He's disgusted with the world and everything in it. We had a long talk last night. I tried to tell him that what we needed was a family, maybe just one baby, that it would give him a different outlook on life. But that started him raving about his injury and how he couldn't enjoy living the way other men did. Then he made me undress and parade around the room for him. I felt like a common whore with a dirty old man's eyes on me. He just sat there in bed, staring at me, propped up with pillows. It gave me the creeps."

"He's a hard one to figure," Eddie said.

"We talked for a long time, Eddie, about me trying an artificial insemination. Maybe it was the booze and maybe it was the real Frank, the Frank that's buried underneath, but he finally saw things my way. He said I could if I wanted to, if it would make me feel better, but there's no telling if he'll stick to that."

Eddie could see that a child would give her a stronger hold on Jennings and that after Jennings died, when he did die, she would share in a larger portion of the estate.

"I think you married him for his money," Eddie said suddenly.

She moved her leg up and down and yawned.

"You're wrong, Eddie. I loved him then. He was a different Frank when I met him, and he was normal enough. Oh, I know why he dated me in that club. He thought he could have a little fun and that that would be the end of it. But the only way he could get me was to marry me and we were happy enough at the start—for those few short days. Then when he had that horse shot for something the poor animal couldn't help I saw the brute in him. It's no wonder that he was able to start out with nothing and end up with millions. I often think of the people he must have ruined along the way."

They reached town and Eddie parked the Bentley near the bus station. The heat of the morning pushed into the car and he thought about how good it would be to be swimming in one of the lakes, to soak up the water and then relax in the shade with an interesting book.

He reached into his pocket with his right hand for his cigarettes and his elbow brushed against her left breast. She didn't move or comment, accepting it for the accident it had been.

"You got cheated last night," she said, taking one of the cigarettes. This surprised him because she had always refused his brand before. "Didn't you, Eddie?"

He held a match for them.

"What do you mean?" he asked, puzzled.

"Joan spent the night in town."

"Isn't that rather personal?"

"It wouldn't be if Frank knew about it. He'd most likely run you off the place on a rail. Or maybe he'd run her off. You're doing one hell of a fine job and he knows it. Last night he said you were the best trapper that ever worked for him."

"I thought Jim was the only other."

"No, there were others—two or three—but they lied

to get the job and they couldn't keep it. He's only satisfied as long as you keep killing for him. He gets a cheap thrill out of seeing a dead animal."

She was wearing some kind of perfume that smelled like a woman's boudoir and it gave him ideas, ideas that belonged in a bedroom. When he moved his leg away from her, her own leg followed, the shorts pulling up even farther on her thigh.

"What's the matter?" she inquired. "Don't you like my leg?"

He examined it carefully, the full thigh, the rounded calf and the knee with the hint of a dimple in it.

"You've got very good legs," he declared.

"But not as good as Carole's?"

"I didn't say that."

"Or Joan?"

"Better than Joan's."

The bus came in just then but the only passenger who got off was an old woman. Kitty swore softly.

"Wouldn't you know it?" she snapped. "That Roger is never on time. I certainly hope he's on time for his funeral."

"When is the next bus?"

"Two hours."

"We might as well go back. I can check some traps in the meantime."

"What do you do?" she demanded. "Breathe and eat and sleep work?"

"It isn't that. I feel sorry for anything in the traps. If the animals have to die why not kill them fast? If somebody was going to shoot me I'd want him to do it and get it over with."

"Let me drive," she said.

"Whatever you say."

They didn't get out of the car to change places but they simply slid over on the wide seat and she lifted herself to crawl across him. She was on his lap momentarily in

the process, and for just a second she took his hands and pressed them to her breasts. He could feel the warmth of her flesh underneath, the rising swells and the hint of large centers that were now sleeping.

"You shouldn't have done that," he said as she got behind the wheel.

She laughed at him.

"Excite you, Eddie?"

"Well, I'm human."

Her face became instantly grave.

"And so am I. I'm as human as any woman in the world. I take care of a cripple day and night and all I want is a man. Haven't you ever felt that way about a girl? Wanting her? Wanting her so much that you feel like you've got vinegar in your mouth and your jaw clamps shut?"

He could understand that she was ready, willing and terribly desperate to be taken and the blood thundered through his body, the gathering hollow in his stomach like a furnace. She was one hell of a woman, make no mistake about that. And she was worth five thousand dollars to him if he wanted to go along with Carole. If he didn't, little harm could be done. He would be making Kitty and himself happy at the same time, and he would find out if she was as good as she looked.

"Where's Tremper Park?" she asked. "I've heard about it."

"Next left and then straight ahead."

"Ever been there, Eddie?"

"Sure."

"With girls?"

"You think I would go to some park alone? Yeah, with girls. Almost everybody goes there. Nobody bothers you."

They were silent during the drive and he supposed that he shouldn't be doing this. Only once, not counting Joan, had he ever been with a married woman. It hadn't been

any good—she'd had guilt feelings or something—and the whole thing had ended in frustration for both of them.

Tremper Park wasn't big, but it was away from Twenty Mile River, on top of a hill. The roads in and around the park were gutted with chuck holes and the town wouldn't fix them, saying that it was county work. And the county officials just sat on their hands, ignoring every petition sent to the board of supervisors. As a result, the only people who went there were couples seeking privacy.

They toured the area once and there were no other cars, which wasn't at all strange. Most people were working during the day and they didn't make love in the morning, not in a park anyway.

She parked the car under some trees, back off the road, and cut the motor. There was a breeze up on the hill and it came in through the open windows of the car, feeling cold as it hit the sweat on his forehead.

"Your husband would kill us both if he knew," Eddie said.

"He doesn't have to know. You aren't going to tell him and I'm sure I'm not. What we do doesn't concern anybody else. If I want to stop somewhere and talk to you I'm going to do it. The conversation I get from Frank I could stick in my ear. Last night is the first time we've really talked in months and then he had to spoil it by making me run around naked."

"You shouldn't mind that. He's your husband."

"A girl minds anything that isn't natural. Why should he torment himself so? He can't do anything about me." She leaned toward him. "Not the way you can, Eddie. He'll never be able to do for me what you can. Even on our wedding night he wasn't much good."

"You don't have to talk about it, Kitty."

"Maybe I want to."

"And maybe I don't want to hear. You have your problems and I have mine but that doesn't mean I'm going to cry on your shoulder."

"Don't act so tough."

"I'm not tough. I'm just saying, that's all. You're a married woman and I've got no right being here with you."

She came across the seat to him.

"Don't you want to be with me, Eddie?" she whispered, tossing her head so her hair fluffed out.

He looked at her legs, at the rest of her body. That big hollow returned to his belly and he sucked in his breath. Just what in hell was he waiting for?

"Damn," he said as he bent to kiss her.

She was ready for him, her lips red and wet, her tongue a thing of raging desire. He felt her arms come around his neck, crushing him closer, heard the strangled sob that rose and died in her throat. With numb, shaking hands he fumbled for the tie on her halter. And then, suddenly, her breasts were free. They were ripe and swollen, the nipples hard and red.

He swallowed a couple of times.

She laughed at him, her face flushed.

"I think they like you, Eddie."

There wasn't enough room in front with the steering wheel, so they moved to the back seat. She lost no time, fiercely pulling him down to her.

He almost died in the wonders of her kiss, of her surging body, and as he came to her she let out a long, contented cry, rising to him in the fury of her passion.

"Make me happy," she pleaded, clinging to him.

And he made her happy, time after time. Each time better than the time before, each experience a plunge into untold beauty.

They missed the next bus.

EVERYTHING WORKED out all right. Roger Swingle never did arrive that day, and the next day Jennings was still swearing.

"Let the crumb walk from town," he stormed. "If he was going to get married he'd have to start a week early to get to the wedding on time. Probably he was a ten-month baby and he's been a month late ever since."

Eddie checked his traps and he had a very big day, not having visited them the day before. He felt badly about that. In one of the traps he found a mangled foot of a raccoon. The trap had been too strong, had broken the leg bone and the animal had twisted loose, limping off to live the rest of its life on three feet. That made him feel even worse.

He was in a daze most of the time he was working. The memory of the day before still hung heavy over him, the memory of her wonderful love and the final, raging climax.

"I don't know how we're going to get together again," she had said. "But we will. We'll find a way. Now that we've had each other I can't let you go, Eddie."

Joan had stayed away from him that night, too, and he had been glad of that. He'd had a lot to think about, but so far he hadn't decided anything. He had five thousand bucks in his hands if he wanted to take it, if he wanted to make a statement against her morals, but he wasn't sure that he could do such a thing. There in her arms he had found something that he had never known before, the male lust mixed with the feeling of tenderness.

"I meant for it to happen," she had said on the drive back. "Sooner or later I knew I had to sleep with you, that I'd give you more than you could ever hope to get from Joan."

"The same as you gave to Jim?"

That had hurt her.

"I never did anything with Jim, Eddie. I give you my word about that. He certainly wanted to but I couldn't see him that way. You have to feel something for somebody to give yourself away. I didn't feel that way about Jim. Jim was a funny guy, a quiet one, and you couldn't get close to him. There were times when he was nice but most of the time he wasn't. He lived alone and he read those dirty magazines and I think he got most of his sex down at The Ferns."

On the way back to the house they had stopped again, far off the road behind a pile of crushed stone, and it had been just as good then as before, their mutual wildness mounting with each touch, every kiss a searing lash of tormented fire.

"I hope I get that way," she had said.

"Your husband might not like it."

"I'd tell him I got the baby from a doctor. I'd tell him I didn't know who the father was."

He was hot when he returned from his traps, showing his catch to Jennings on the lawn, then burying the animals and the turtles. It felt fine to get upstairs and step in under the cold shower, to soap his body until the floor of the shower turned white, and then to feel the needle spray as he rinsed off the soap.

Back in his room he stretched out on the bed and decided that he wouldn't go to supper. Mary had told him that morning there would be roast beef, and while he liked roast beef he wasn't hungry. That is, except for one thing.

He lit a cigarette and thought about Kitty. She was married, he was the hired help, he shouldn't be falling in love

with her—but that's just what he was doing. With Carole it was something else, something entirely different. With Carole it was her body and nothing else. But with Kitty it went far deeper. Yet his feelings for her weren't totally unexpected. He had liked her from the start, felt sorry for her, and when they had spent those lovely hours on the beach he had wanted to be her man. It crossed his mind that she was married to a wealthy man, that she wouldn't give all that up to marry some poor slob, but he had read of such things happening. Love, he knew, was the strongest power on earth, even stronger than money or fame. Love made and ruined lives, and to fight against it was to fight a losing battle.

"I love you," she had whispered to him the previous day.

Had she meant it, or had it just been something for her to say, without either honesty or dishonesty, which had poured forth from her in the heat of passion?

"I love you," Joan had said a lot of times.

Well, he believed Joan, he was sure she was sincere in what she said, and if she hadn't been married he might well have married her somewhere along the way. She was the kind of a girl who wanted a home and babies and the normal things in life. Living on a farm, he knew, would be all right with Joan and she wouldn't complain. And she was good at managing money, far better than he would ever be.

"I love you," Kitty had said.

It kept coming back to him, pounding him right between the eyes, the fact that she might love him pushing his need for her to greater height, a physical need which was easy to understand and difficult to endure. And the strange part was that she had thanked him for having been nice to her. Thanked him!

"It was a pleasure," he had said. "You're all woman."

Yes, she was all woman. Every sweet inch of her.

He finally got up from the bed and walked to the win-

dow, watching the shadows gather over the lawn and the fields and the lake. He would, he told himself, be smart if he packed his things and ran like a fool. Maybe he didn't have another job and maybe he wouldn't find one right away, but if he stayed on here at the estate he was bound to get into trouble. He would have to sneak off to be with Kitty and somebody was certain to catch them. What then? Of course he could pick up five thousand dollars if he worked it right, but he had an idea that five thousand dollars wouldn't last long with a girl like Kitty—if they had to go away together. It would buy a lot of liquor, but it wouldn't stay with him forever. And what could he offer a girl like Kitty? Some house with outside plumbing on a stinking farm and two hundred bucks a month? He laughed, thinking about it. She would go for that, like hell. Her life with Jennings had spoiled her and she would have to have money, more than he would be capable of counting in an eight-hour day. Maybe he would be able to please her physically, but he would never be able to meet her financial demands with a fast dollar.

He prowled the room, smoking and thinking. To run was to be weak and, to be honest about it, he didn't want to run. He wanted to stay and have her for his own, taking any chances that he had to. If he got fired he could move on. Just why he had stayed in Twenty Mile River so long he didn't know. It was a poor part of the county and few of the farms were modern. Once you got over near the county seat the farms were better and the wages were higher.

Stretching out on the bed again he guessed he would stick it out. If it was love between them, if it was the real thing, not just the thrill of sex, he might be able to convince her that their love was all that was needed, and that they could somehow make a go of it. She hadn't said much about her past, and he strongly suspected that she had at one time been poor. Poor people, he assured

himself, could be happy. Some of the happiest people he had known had been barely able to pay their bills, their kids wearing seconds and thirds that had been handed down from friends or relatives.

He was still thinking about her, how they could work it, when he fell asleep.

"Wake up," somebody said later.

He stirred, thinking that the voice was part of a dream, but when it came again he opened his eyes and blinked at the light.

It was Joan.

"You've made yourself scarce," he said, sitting up, wishing that she had left him alone.

She walked over to the window and lowered the shade.

"I thought you were amusing yourself with somebody else," she said, her voice edged with bitterness.

"What gave you that idea?"

"Well, you went toward Goose Lake the other day and you didn't have any of your equipment with you. A few minutes after that Carole followed. Both of you were gone quite a long time." Joan's lips formed a pout. "Was she as good as me, Eddie? Did you have as much fun with her?"

He reached for a cigarette.

"You've got a rotten mind," he said.

"No, just the mind of a girl in love. And you should have seen her at dinner that night. She was almost nice to Mrs. Jennings. She had the glow of a girl who had been with a man who had satisfied her."

"Oh, cut it out, for Christ's sake. If you must know, I did see her at the lake, but we only talked."

"Talked? What about?"

He was getting annoyed with her.

"Things," he said.

Joan laughed shortly.

"She isn't built for conversation. I've seen lots of girls with nice bodies but nothing like that one. I have to admit

it. Any man might go a little nuts for her. But she isn't your kind, Eddie. She's rich, and you haven't got a dime."

He got up, thinking that he shouldn't sit there naked, even though she had often seen him that way, and put on a robe.

"You've got me all wrong," Eddie said. "I know what Jennings thinks of his daughter, and I wouldn't take the chance of sleeping with her."

Joan gave him a dim smile.

"What about his wife?"

"Or her," he lied. "You think I want to make every girl who crosses my path?"

"I don't think you'd turn it down."

"Thanks. What kind of trust is that? And what about the night you spent in town? What did you do?"

"I took a room at the hotel and saw a movie and then I cried myself to sleep."

"In whose bed?"

Her lower lip trembled.

"Eddie," she said, "Eddie, that isn't fair."

"Why not? You accuse me, so I've got the right to do the same thing to you. Or is it a one-way street?"

Wearily, she walked to the bed and sat down, the uniform pulling tight around her bust and hips.

"You just don't understand, Eddie," she argued. "It's different with a girl. A man, no matter who he is, seeks sex as a form of emotional release. But to a girl in love, it is far more than that."

"Don't tell me you don't enjoy it."

"Of course I enjoy it. When the job was open here I thought if you took it that we could be together every night. I didn't care if you gave me a baby or not. I'm not afraid of disgrace. But something has happened to us, Eddie—something is happening. I don't know what it is, but I can tell. A girl can always tell. You men may be very clever, but you can't fool a girl, not if she loves you.

You've been acting as though you don't care whether or not you ever have me again, Eddie, and that hurts."

He crushed the cigarette out in an ash tray and remained silent. She was lots smarter than he had given her credit for, but, in a way, he was glad she felt the way she did.

"Eddie, you haven't been listening to me," she said.

"I've been listening."

"Can't you say anything?"

"What is there to say? You're off onto some crazy kick and you're going to believe what you want to. And as for us being together every night, it's too dangerous. You need your job and I need mine. Why don't we take it easy for a little bit, and let things work themselves out? Wilson is pretty close to Jennings and he's seen you leaving here. If he shot off his mouth it could be tough on both of us."

With the shade down it became hotter in the room, and she pulled her uniform up so that her legs would be cooler, rising slightly as she did so and lifting the uniform so high that he could see where her garter belt hooked onto her stockings. A month earlier—yes, just a week earlier—he would have been after her right away but in that moment he felt no overpowering urge.

"Roger Swingle got here," she offered.

"Oh, he did, huh?"

She made a face.

"He's a crumb, Eddie. He didn't even know me but the first chance he got he gave me a pinch on the rump. I told him to keep his hands to himself."

"He must be hard up."

"Why? Because I'm not attractive?"

"Sure, you're attractive. Christ, you're twisting everything I say to suit your own purpose."

Joan ignored his remark.

"Mary says that Carole isn't that kind of a girl and that Roger is always chasing the maid. Mary says Carole knows about it but that she doesn't care. Sometimes I think the

more money people have the more batty they are. I know I don't want to share you and I don't see how any girl could share her man. If you love a man enough you try to be nice to him and he tries to be nice to you."

"What about your divorce?" Eddie asked suddenly.

"I saw the lawyer the other day and there won't be any problems. It has to be advertised in the paper first and then there's a hearing before a judge. By Christmas I'll be rid of Paul. I wonder what he's going to do when he's finally released. He did a horrible thing, a terrible thing, and not many people will want to hire him."

"That's his tough luck."

"Come over and sit down beside me," Joan said, patting the mattress. "Don't just stand there."

He strode over and sat down.

"Okay," he agreed.

"Our marriage won't be that way, will it, Eddie?" Her voice was almost pleading. "Tell me that it's going to be everything I want it to be."

"Well—"

"Or aren't you sure, Eddie? Aren't you sure?"

He had to be honest with her. It might hurt for a while, but it was the only decent thing to do.

"I don't know, Joan," he replied. "I honestly don't. It's quite a long time before you'll be free, and a lot of things can happen. I've thought about it a lot lately, more than you can possibly know. If we go on sleeping together something can go wrong, and you'd be showing it when you go up before the judge. That might not have anything to do with the divorce, but I don't think it would be good. It would make you little better than your husband and you don't want that, do you?"

She started to cry, softly but with feeling, her shoulders lifting and falling as she tried to struggle with the tears.

"You've just used me," she sobbed after a while.

"That isn't true."

"You used me like some cheap prostitute and that's all it meant to you. I remember the first time—do you remember the first time? I didn't want to but you did and we did it. After that it became part of my life, part of my thoughts, and then we broke up with that stupid argument. After that I met Paul and while he was nice I wouldn't let him touch me, afraid that it never could be the same with somebody else. When I married him I was scared, all the way through, and it wasn't the same. It was almost—dirty. It got so that when he left me nights for other girls I was glad, not jealous the way a wife should have been. You know the rest. We got back together again and it was better than it had ever been. Better because I loved you and I needed you and I wanted you, and I knew that you would marry me as soon as I was finished with Paul. But now, Eddie—now it hurts, the thing you just said, and it hurts bad. It—"

She couldn't continue, and he didn't know what to say. What did a man say to a girl when love had ceased to exist, when dreams were shattered too much and hopes were gone?

"I'm going," she managed after several minutes.

"All right."

"And I won't come back until you want me, Eddie. I won't ever make a nuisance of myself. I don't know all that's going on inside of you, but it must be something you can't control. It isn't enough to tell yourself that you ought to love somebody. I know that. I tried it with Paul, but it didn't work. You either love or you don't, and there's nothing that can be done about it. It isn't your fault and it isn't mine."

After she had gone he turned out the light and lit another cigarette. He felt his eyes getting wet, something that hadn't happened to him since his father died. Joan was a good girl, one of the best, and she would make a good wife, a wife who would work with her husband and never complain about what she didn't have. If she had children

they would never want for love, for the gentle care that every child should have.

Well, if he didn't love her it was better for her to know now than later. He wished desperately that he could return her love, but he couldn't find that feeling within himself. When he had been living in town, when she had come to him on her nights off, it had been enough but now it no longer was enough. There had to be something more to love than sex, a deeper, finer meaning, a willingness to be happy or to suffer together and to build a future that was sound and secure. He had never known the love of a mother, and he suspected this might have something to do with his attitude toward women. But it wasn't, he was sure, that he was looking for the mother love he had missed.

He twisted on the bed, the sweat sticky against his body, and he thought of Carole Jennings and her five thousand dollars. Maybe he should take the money and get away while the getting was good. How many men at twenty-three had a chance for that kind of money? Not many, from his kind of background. On five thousand dollars he could travel far alone. Given enough liquor and enough women he would forget Kitty and eventually he would find somebody else. Yet he knew, somehow, that he would walk alone and that he would wake up from a deep sleep and feel Kitty's arms around him, her body responding to him as he made love to her, her body lifting to his, her lips moving furiously against his mouth.

After a while he heard someone coming up the stairs, quick, hurried steps. He wondered if Joan was returning, and what he would do with her if she were. He grinned up into the darkness. He knew what he would do. Well, why not? She was pretty good in bed and just because he didn't love her that didn't have to stop him.

The door opened and he smelled perfume.

"Are—are you awake, Eddie?"

It was Kitty, and the burning hollow that had been in

his stomach the first time he had known her came back again.

"Yes, I'm awake." He sat up quickly. "I was just thinking about you."

Her laugh was soft and filled with music.

"About how easy I was? Is that it?"

"No, not that." It wasn't exactly true; she had been easy, like picking up some slut in a bar and giving her the mad rush. "No, not that," he repeated. "I was thinking that it probably didn't mean as much to you as it meant to me."

It was a long time before she replied, and he knew that she was getting out of her clothes. Presently she joined him on the bed.

"You're wrong," she told him. "It meant more than you can imagine."

He swallowed. "Aren't you taking a chance coming here, Kitty?"

"Not much. Frank is so drunk he can't possibly wake up until morning."

"What about the others? Carole and that guy?"

"They're to bed."

He felt a strange pang of jealousy.

"Together?"

"Oh, no. She wouldn't dare, not in the house, where I would know and could tell her father. And she isn't that kind, Eddie. She's saving it for her old age." Kitty laughed. "It won't do her much good then. Nobody will want it."

"Maybe they will. People just don't quit because they get old."

She fumbled for a cigarette, found one and lit it. He could see her body in the glow from the match, the wonderful mounds that pointed toward the ceiling and the red, red lips that could kiss so searchingly.

"I checked to see that Joan was in her room," Kitty

said. "She was crying. You two have a fight or something?"

"We agreed to disagree."

"Any special reason?"

"No."

"She's a nice girl, Eddie."

"Yeah, but you're nicer."

She leaned over and kissed him in the darkness.

"I'm also married," she reminded him, resuming her former position.

"If there isn't love there isn't much sense to marriage, is there?"

"Money could be one reason," she replied. "I've nursed that guy and cared for his wants, even to his personal needs. I'm determined to get my share when he goes."

"That might be years yet."

The tip of her cigarette burned brightly as she filled her lungs with smoke.

"He could have an accident," she breathed.

"You hate him, don't you?"

"Hate his guts."

"What if I had five thousand dollars? What then?"

She kissed him again, her lips lingering this time, her tongue a wild and searching thing.

"It wouldn't be enough," she said, gently. "One day we would be living in a hotel and the next night we'd be sleeping in a dump. Why settle for that? There are millions here, Eddie. Millions! Have you ever thought how much a million dollars really is?"

"I never had cause to," he said, but he was thinking about it now. "It must be a hell of a lot of money."

"You'd never have to work again, Eddie. And we could take trips and do things like that."

"I guess we could."

"If we had kids they could go to the best schools. There isn't an advantage in life that they couldn't have."

Eddie took the cigarette from her, sucked on it, tasting her lipstick, and gave it back to her.

"He's a long way from being dead," Eddie said. "Of course he could kill himself with the booze, but I doubt it. That kind never die."

She turned to put the cigarette out and he kissed the back of her neck, letting the kiss trail down to the warm spot between her shoulders.

"There has to be some way," she said, spreading herself out beside him. "He made me go down into the woods with him this afternoon, running myself into the ground trying to chase a rabbit toward him. There were a couple of boys there. I asked him about it, and he said they came almost every day and he didn't mind. They both had guns, and it would be easy for one of them to shoot him by mistake."

"It's not very likely."

"Well, it's happened, hasn't it? Read the papers in the fall and see how many people get killed that way."

"Yes, it happens."

"And it would be called an accident. Nobody would get in any trouble over it."

"He might not get killed."

"Most likely he would if he was hit in the head. And when I talked to the boys today I told them to bring other boys with them. They said they would. That makes the chances greater."

Although it was hot in the room, Eddie shuddered. There was something here that he didn't understand, a hard and savage something that spoke of death.

"What's the matter with you?" she asked.

"Nothing."

"You're shaking the bed."

"Am I?"

"You know it as well as I do." She rolled over on her side to face him, her breast touching his arm. He could feel the breast, the nipple sleeping just like a peaceful

child, waiting to be aroused into sudden life. "Eddie," Kitty murmured urgently, "we have to do something. This can't go on, Eddie. I can't want you so much, need you so much, and remain sane. And after being with you I can't stand the sight of him, can't bear to think of doing some of the things for him that he'll want me to. Tonight I almost threw up when I saw him naked on the bed, a drunken slob with no thought of anybody but himself. Yet—Eddie, I can't just walk off and throw everything away. I married him, and part of what he has belongs to me. I don't want Carole's share, but I've earned my share and I want it. I want it for us, Eddie. I want to see you in nice clothes and a nice car, and I want to love you and love you and love you. I want your babies inside me, getting fat with them, my belly so big you wouldn't be able to put your arms around it."

She kissed him several times on the chest, then pressed her lips briefly against his mouth.

"You have to believe me," she cried, clinging to him. "It hasn't always been easy for me. You dance and sing in clubs, and every man thinks you're an easy touch, to be made for a few drinks. You fight them off, and then you eat at some rotten soda fountain to save what few dollars you have. Clothes cost money, but the people who run the clubs don't care about that. If they do care they want you to sleep with them, so you tell them to go to hell and you do the best you can. Then you marry a man older than you are, thinking that it's love at last, wanting so terribly for it to be love, but you find out on your honeymoon that the man is a beast and that a woman's body is only the tool of his desire. That's bad enough, but then he becomes a cripple and he isn't a man any more, not even half a man. He—"

"Don't carry on so," Eddie warned her. "You'll only wreck your nerves and it won't do any good. There has to be a way, some way, and we've got to find it."

She smothered him with a kiss.

"It's all that'll ever count, Eddie. Together. The two of us. That," she added, "and the money. There isn't anything for anybody without money. The poets say there is, but poets don't pay their bills. The poets dream and life isn't a dream. Life can be wonderful but it can also be cruel."

The shudder passed through him again, causing his heart to pump rapidly, the blood in his veins first hot and then cold. He returned her kiss, but he had a vision of Jennings in the woods, his body slumped in the wheel chair, a bullet through his head, several million dollars piled at his feet.

He wasn't much of a man that night and he knew that she was disappointed.

"I'm sorry," he said afterward.

She kissed him tenderly.

"That's all right. It can't always be the best."

He tried to go to sleep after she had gone but he couldn't.

EDDIE DIDN'T like Roger Swingle and tried to avoid him. But Roger was like the itch; you attempted to ignore it but it was always there.

"You're another stump-jumper," Roger said to Eddie who, at the time, was watching the movements of Carole's body as she undulated across the lawn toward them. "Just make sure you don't try to jump the wrong stump."

"Since when have you been my boss?"

"Maybe I'm not your boss but I've got eyes. You'd like to, wouldn't you?"

That much was true. Eddie still wanted Carole, but not exactly in the way he had before. He only wanted to see that fantastic body, and he doubted very much if he would touch her. Sex came to him around midnight in the form of Kitty Jennings and she was all one man could handle. Nor would she let him take the usual precautions.

"Not with me you don't," Kitty said. "I want your kid and I want it fast. Frank thinks I'm seeing a doctor and he asks me every day if I'm going to spring in about nine months."

"It's good he doesn't object."

"How could he? He can't do anything about it. He even asks me if I get a cheap thrill when the doctor does it to me. The bastard."

Eddie found out a lot about Kitty during the nights that she came to him. She knew a lot of four-letter words and she used them freely. But he overlooked it. She had

been brought up in a tough world of poverty and struggle, and some of it had rubbed off on her. She was an excellent love partner, constantly demanding, and when she exploded it was like throwing a stick of dynamite into an empty barrel. All of her flying apart at once, her moans breaking into sharp cries of ecstasy.

Sometimes before their love-making, and always afterward, they talked about Frank Jennings. The two boys she had talked to that first day had brought more boys around, and the chances for an accident were greater than before. Wilson objected to so many boys being in the woods with twenty-twos, but Jennings insisted it was all right. One day Jennings killed a young deer and he got drunk all over again because he had been successful.

"I chased it out for him," Kitty said.

"Wear something red when you go in the woods," he advised.

"Oh, I do. I wear red shorts and a red halter. The halter that you like. The one that hardly covers me upstairs."

"I like you better this way. Naked."

"Aren't I always naked when I'm with you?" She giggled. "If I weren't you'd soon have me that way."

Eddie didn't see much of Joan and she spoke to him almost as though he were a stranger. She kept pretty much to herself, going to town to see her lawyer on her day off, and sometimes staying over for the night. Jennings had told her that she could have Wilson or Eddie drive her in, but she always hired a taxi.

One morning she followed him outside. "I've got to see you," she said anxiously.

"So you're seeing me."

"No. Alone. Get the station wagon and we'll go down to The Ferns tonight."

"What do we have to talk about?"

Her face colored slightly. "You'd be surprised, Eddie."

"Some other time, huh?"

"No, tonight." She lowered her voice. "I followed Mrs. Jennings one night and I know where she went—right where I thought she was going. I could cause you trouble, Eddie."

He had a hell of a time on his traps that day. Nothing went right and the catch was poor. Even the turtles were down to two.

"You get those days," Jennings said when he reported. "Jim had a lot of them."

"I haven't had many."

Jennings had a bottle in his lap, but he didn't offer Eddie a drink.

"What are you doing about hawks and owls?" he asked.

"Nothing yet."

"You know how to trap them?"

"Sure. You put up a pole in the middle of a field and you fasten a trap to the top of it. You don't need any bait. They land there to look things over."

"Then get with it, will you?"

"Right."

But he went over to Goose Lake that afternoon and set traps in the swamp, most of them for foxes but a couple of them for otter. There were plenty of otter signs around.

He had no special motive for coming back by way of the beach but he did. He had been thinking about Joan, of the concern in her face when he had talked to her that morning, of the obvious necessity for meeting her that night. He didn't like it one bit that she had followed Kitty. He was only fortunate that it hadn't been Carole. He hadn't talked with her in days. He guessed she had been looking for him but he had avoided her, putting her off as long as he could, not knowing what he could say to her. He couldn't sell Kitty out for five thousand dollars—or for any amount of money. She was too much a part of him now, her kisses imprinted on his lips, her body a tactile memory along his nerve ends.

He reached the beach before he realized it, was

practically on top of them before he knew. He stood still, hardly breathing, not sure what to do.

They were in intimate embrace, and intimately arguing.

"Hurt me," Carole was begging. "Hurt me the way I want to be hurt. Hurt me, Roger. Hurt me the way you've never been able to hurt me before."

"You know I can't."

"What the hell is the matter with you?" she flung at him. "Aren't you a man?"

"Maybe you need somebody like that big trapper, huh?"

"Shut up."

"Don't tell me you haven't. Don't tell me he wouldn't. He'd rock you in a second if you gave him a chance. He'd—"

"Oh, stop talking, won't you? Talk is for when you have nothing better to do."

Feeling his belly crawl, Eddie turned and sneaked away, hardly able to keep himself from breaking into a run.

Once in the woods he felt better and he walked slower. Carole had lied to him on the beach, lied about her purity, and that made him mad. She had held herself up to be a real lady and she was nothing but a cheap tramp. Probably the men really hung around her when she went to that nudist camp, and he was inclined to believe that most of them had their fun. He was willing to bet that it was nothing but a sex party for her, and that she didn't turn many down.

He hadn't been able to see much of her a few minutes before, most of her was hidden by Roger's bare back, but what he had seen had been good, her legs moving like a couple of wounded snakes, her whole body heaving and twisting. From what she had said Eddie knew that Roger didn't please her very much. That was fine. Eddie was sure that he could please her. He would hurt her if she wanted to be hurt, hurt her until she screamed. One night he had made Kitty scream, and she had been like a thing possessed by some almost impossible desire.

He found the trail leading to the house and walked on. He shouldn't be thinking of Carole that way, not for a second, but he couldn't help himself. He had never been with a girl built like Carole, and he wanted to experience the thrill of it just once. It didn't have to mean that any of his feelings for Kitty would change. Nights when they just stretched out on his bed, tired from love-making, it was wonderful to be with her, to know that he could reach out and touch her, to know that her lips would accept his mouth. She was his woman and she belonged to him, and there wasn't anything that he wouldn't do for her. He only wished that she wasn't so crazy over the money that Jennings would someday leave her. But when she talked about it he could see her point of view. Jennings had used her as his slave, not as a wife, and she had a right to some compensation. He was sixty now but he might well live another ten, twenty, even thirty years. Neither the fact that Jennings couldn't walk, nor his constant drinking, had anything to do with it. A lot of drunks seemed to live forever.

As he neared the house he heard shooting from the woods to the right of the field, high-pitched reports followed by the heavy boom of a shotgun. That would be Jennings, drunk and mean, every nerve in him crying out to kill something, anything at all. There were some ducks around the lake, both young and old, and it was odd that he didn't go after them but he didn't. Eddie guessed that the only thing Jennings liked was the ducks.

Eddie thought of Kitty down there in the woods with him, and he turned cold all over. Jennings treated her like a dog most of the time, although in his own peculiar way he seemed to love her, and if he ever found out that she was cheating on him it was hard to tell what he might do. He could kill her in the woods and it would be called an accident and he could get away with it. Eddie felt even colder as he crossed the field.

After he showered he changed his clothes and went

outside. Kitty was just crossing the lawn and Jennings was nowhere in sight. She saw him and waited.

"I can't keep on flushing birds and animals out for him," she said as he came up to her. "Frank just screams and hollers and blasts away. He doesn't care where he shoots. Even the kids are getting scared."

"He's nuts," Eddie said.

She smiled up at him.

"And I'm nuts, too, Eddie. I happen to be nuts about a guy named Eddie Boyd."

"You can double that." Then, "Can I use the station wagon tonight?"

She frowned.

"I don't think I can get away very early."

"No, I don't mean that. Joan says she has to talk to me and she won't do it here. I think it's just an excuse for her to get away from here and go down to The Ferns and get a load on."

"Or make love with you?"

"I doubt it."

"She hadn't better. And you hadn't better. We've got something good, Eddie, and we're going to keep it. All I have to do is think about you and I see that bed, feel what you do to me. If it isn't love I don't know what love is. I never felt this way about Frank or any other man."

Together they walked toward the house and separated near the back porch.

"I'll be a good girl tonight," she said. "I'll sleep alone."

"Okay."

"And hate every second of it."

Mary had a good supper waiting for him but he didn't eat much of it. He pawed through the meat and potatoes, fried potatoes which he usually loved, and he made a mess of his plate. As he was lighting a cigarette with one hand and stirring his iced coffee with the other, Clark Wilson came in.

Wilson's blue work shirt was stained with sweat, and he walked with a pronounced limp.

"Damned day," he said, sitting down at the table.

Eddie tasted the coffee.

"Rough, huh?"

"It's no fun pushing a wheel chair through the woods. And those kids aren't any help. They're all over. I keep telling the boss that somebody is going to get killed down there, but he won't listen. If I had my way I'd kick every kid off the property. They just shoot to shoot, and who can tell where the bullets are going to go?"

"Jennings get anything?"

"Well, Mrs. Jennings cut a woodchuck off from his hole and chased it out, but the boss missed it. Missed it with a shotgun—isn't that something? But I tell him you can't drink and hope to shoot straight." Wilson sighed. "I guess I shouldn't complain but I'll be glad when I can retire."

Eddie got out of the kitchen before Mary could scold him for not eating more. He walked down to the beach, sitting on the sand and smoking. Joan wouldn't be free until nine or later, and this was as good a place to wait as any.

About half an hour later he heard someone coming up behind him. When he turned he saw that it was Carole. She was alone and she was wearing that two-piece black bathing suit that hugged every line of her body.

"You look lonesome," she said, sitting down on the sand beside him.

He studied her legs and thought of the power in them, legs that could close around a man like a vise.

"Not very," he said. "Sometimes you want to be alone."

"Sorry if I intruded."

"Oh, I didn't mean it that way."

"You've been avoiding me, Eddie."

"Have I?"

"You know you have. You see me coming and you go the other way. I don't like that, Eddie."

"You've been busy with Roger."

"Not that busy."

He grinned at her. She had been busy that afternoon on the beach, real busy.

"How are you making out with Kitty?" she inquired.

"I'm working on it."

"But I want results. I want her nailed for what she is, a no-good she-dog. And it's up to you, Eddie. Keep me waiting much longer and you won't have a job."

There it was again, the thing that he feared. He could stall her just so long. If, after lying to Carole, Joan should tip his hand both he and Kitty would be out and there wouldn't be any five thousand dollars. There wouldn't be anything at all. The dreams of millions would be gone.

"It isn't easy to make her," Eddie said carefully. "She may look easy, but she isn't going to go down flat on her back for the first man that makes a pass at her."

"That's your problem."

"I know it. I'm just telling you."

There was a slight breeze blowing across the lake—perhaps it was a warning of a coming storm and the water lapped steadily against the shore. Far off in one of the swamps a fox barked.

"You never take a full day off," Carole said, apparently satisfied that he was doing his best with Kitty. "Why is that?"

"I don't want to see the animals suffer more than need be. I asked your father about showing Wilson where my traps were set, so he could check them when I was off, but Wilson wouldn't have any part of it. That means I'm stuck and stuck good."

"Perhaps I could help," she suggested.

"I don't see how."

"You could show me where the traps are and when you're off I could look at them. I could shoot anything

that you had caught but I wouldn't be able to take the things out of the traps. You'd have to do that the next day."

"Roger might not like it."

"I don't see why not. It would be only one day a week and it would give us something to do."

"It's up to you," Eddie said. "I'd be grateful."

She moved her legs back and forth and adjusted the top part of the suit, cupping her hands beneath her breasts and pushing the material upward.

"I could go with you tomorrow," she said. "Roger is going away early in the morning for a couple of days, maybe a week, and I think it might be fun. We could pack a lunch—I guess you do that, anyway, don't you?—and we could have a picnic along the way."

The thought of being alone with her for most of the day was exciting. He knew a place where the grass was deep and thick, soft as an expensive carpet. They could eat there. Now that he knew what she was, the urge inside of him to have her became an overpowering force. He assured himself that it had nothing to do with his love for Kitty. It was simply the male animal in him searching for the female. Lots of men who were married did a little playing on the side and it didn't break up their marriages.

"I'll have Mary pack a big lunch," he said.

"You don't mind?"

"Not at all. If you're willing to do the work I'd like to get away for a day."

Mary came out and rang the bell for supper and Carole left him, promising to meet him in the morning. He sat on the sand, smoking, and considered the situation. She didn't seem to be a bad sort, really. Not many girls would have offered to do such a thing for him. Of course she didn't have much to do, and it might be fun for her. Eddie doubted that Roger would appreciate the idea, but he didn't care about Roger. He was getting his, and he would go with Carole wherever he could get it.

After dark he moved up to the back steps and sat down, still waiting. Once Joan came out to dump some garbage into one of the cans.

"Half an hour," she said. "Did they say you could have the station wagon?"

"She didn't say I couldn't."

"You asked Mrs. Jennings?"

"Yeah, Mrs. Jennings."

"That figures."

Joan re-entered the house. He was sorry now that he had to have anything to do with her. They had been lovers for a long time, but now it was gone and the relationship was finished, buried. He didn't have the faintest idea why she wanted to see him. Probably she had been without a man too long and she was getting anxious. Well, it wouldn't do her any good. They would have a few beers and talk, and that would be the end of it.

Somewhat more than a half an hour later she came out, smelling fresh and clean, the odor of her bath powder swirling around her.

They walked toward the station wagon and she breathed deeply of the night air.

"My God, Jennings was drunk," she said. "He couldn't even eat his dinner. He was complaining about missing a woodchuck with his shotgun this afternoon and he seemed to blame everybody sitting at the table."

"That's our employer."

They got into the station wagon and Eddie started it. She said nothing as he guided the car along the driveway, the headlights knifing through the darkness.

"We don't have to go to The Ferns," she said when they reached the highway.

He shrugged.

"It's as good a place as any. And it's close."

It didn't take long to get to The Ferns. The usual crowd was there, girls down from the hills and the college boys who were home for vacation dating them. They

found a table away from the juke box and had a few beers. He tried to talk to her, asking her about her work and how she liked it, but she didn't have much to say. She seemed lost within herself, as though she had grown a shell and pulled into it, hiding from the world.

"You've got something on your mind," Eddie said finally, forcing the issue. "What the hell is it?"

She toyed with her glass and then lifted her eyes to his face. They were wet with tears and the tear streaks ran down either cheek.

"Us," she replied simply. "It's us that's bothering me."

"You know about us. We talked about it before. I thought we had settled it and we'd just let the matter drop."

"Because you've lost your head over a married woman?"

"Maybe I love her," Eddie defended himself.

"Maybe you think you do but how could she love you? A woman with everything and a man with nothing? You don't think she's going to give up the life she has, just because she likes to go to bed with you, do you?"

"Let me run my own life, won't you?"

She leaned forward, her elbows on the top of the table.

"Not if it's going to hurt you. I love you, Eddie. I loved you when I was in school and I still do."

"Yet you got married, didn't you?"

"You know about that. It was a mistake. There isn't one of us who doesn't make a mistake now and then, even to such an important thing as marriage. Look around you and you'll see that a lot of marriages are mistakes."

"What makes you think it would be different for us?"

"Because it would be. Because I would want you and need you and love you. Because I can see why you do the things you do and I can forgive you for them. Because—" she hesitated. "Eddie, I think I'm that way. I think—"

He gulped the beer and his hand shook. His guts felt

as though they had been ripped open by a knife, as though some giant hand was in there twisting hard, pushing up so hard that he couldn't get the air down into his lungs, the air just catching in his throat and being forced outside again.

Stunned, he picked up their glasses and walked to the bar for more beer. When you sat at a table in The Ferns you had to wait on yourself. Before he hadn't liked the idea much but now he thought it was a good thing. It gave him a few moments alone, a chance to think—if he could think. His mind seemed to be a wall, a dense wall through which nothing could penetrate.

"Two beers," he told the bartender. He dropped a quarter on the bar and rubbed his forehead with one hand. His forehead was numb, as though he had been slugged with a club, and his skin was beaded with sweat.

Eddie carried the beer back to the table and sat down heavily. He opened his mouth to say something, but the words died before he could find them.

"You heard me, didn't you?" Joan asked him.

He sipped the beer and nodded. Christ, yes, he had heard her.

"Say something, Eddie," she begged.

"I was thinking," he mumbled.

"That it might not have been you?"

"No, not that. If you're pregnant I'm sure it was me."

He tried to tell himself that he had to face this sensibly, that he had to accept it, that no matter what you did there was always a price that had to be paid.

"We've got to think this thing over," Eddie said.

"There isn't much to think about, Eddie. I'll get my divorce and we'll get married. The baby may come a little soon after marriage, but we can go away where we aren't known and it won't matter."

"You want this kid?" he asked, seriously.

"I want any baby of yours, Eddie. I felt that way before

and I mean it more now than ever. I guess we shouldn't have gone as far as we did, but what's done is done."

"I've heard of some pills that you can take."

"I'd never take them, Eddie. Did you ask to be born? Did I? Does anybody? No. A girl gets pregnant and it's her duty to bear the child. I know about the pills, but I don't think anyone has a right to use them, unless it's because her health doesn't permit her to give a safe birth. I'm not afraid of that. I'm healthy. What I'm afraid of right now is you, Eddie."

"Me?"

"Yes. Of you doing the right thing by me. I think the first thing we should do is to quit working for the Jennings family and get other jobs. I can work for a few months yet and that'll pay for my divorce. If you get down near the county seat you'll get more on a farm than you would here, and you can save. We won't have much to start off with but we'll have each other."

Eddie felt a wave of despair sweep through him. Here he was, in love with Kitty Jennings. It was a hell of a mess. If he married Joan he would have to give up Kitty and a possible fortune. The more he thought about the money that would come Kitty's way the more it appealed to him. The money also presented a means of solving his most immediate difficulty. If he told Kitty the truth about Joan he felt that she would overlook it, and when the money was in her hands she would give him enough to take care of Joan. It wasn't the most honorable thing in the world, but it was more than some men would do. In time Joan would find somebody else, someone who would love both her and the baby. The only trouble was that Kitty didn't have the money, and it might be a long time before she did.

"I'll think of something," Eddie said.

"It's serious, Eddie."

"You don't have to tell me that. I know it."

"We've done wrong. It's up to us to make it as right as we can."

"We'll work it out."

"Don't lie to me, Eddie."

"You think I'd lie to you at a time like this?" he demanded furiously. "What do you take me for, anyway? If you're going to have a kid you're going to have a kid, and it's our job to make the best of it."

"I wish I had my divorce."

"Well, you don't."

"We'll only be married two or three months when the baby is born."

"That can't be helped."

They stayed at the bar until after midnight. On the way back to the estate she wanted to park. He didn't, not that she was any less appealing but only because he couldn't think of her in that way just then. He wanted to stretch out on his bed, to lose himself in the darkness, to make believe that nothing was wrong and that everything was just as it should be.

But after he left her and crawled into his bed he couldn't forget.

He had made a mess of his life.

HE OVERSLEPT the next morning—not that he had gotten much sleep—and he was awakened by pounding on his door.

“Come in,” he called. He assumed it was Wilson, who had called him once before when he had been late.

The door opened and it was Carole Jennings.

He was lying naked on the bed.

“Golly, you could have warned me,” she said, retreating into the hall and closing the door behind her. “It’s eight-thirty.”

He dressed in a hurry, not bothering to shave, and found her waiting at the foot of the stairs.

“I’m sorry,” he apologized. “I had no idea it was you. But you must see more than that in a nudist camp.”

“Yes, but it’s different.”

“How different?”

“I don’t know, but there’s nothing more embarrassing than seeing a person stripped and having your own clothes on.”

That wasn’t the way Eddie felt, but he didn’t pursue the issue. Together they walked to the main house and entered the kitchen.

“No breakfast,” Mary told Eddie sternly. “This isn’t a hotel. You can have coffee though.”

“Thanks but I don’t even want that. I’m not hungry.”

Mary had packed a big lunch for them, and Eddie carried the basket. The first stop was the shed, to pick up the pack basket, hatchet, rifle and extra traps. He

handled the traps with gloves and put everything, lunch included, in the pack basket, then swung into the harness. It rode high and comfortably on his broad shoulders.

"Going to be a scorcher," Carole said as they approached the woods.

She was walking beside him and he glanced at her. Today she wore white shorts and a white halter that contrasted sharply with her tanned skin. The halter was the full type, concealing all of her breasts, but he could see them bounce up and down as she walked.

"What did your father say about your going with me?" he wanted to know.

"I didn't tell him."

"Do you think that was wise?"

"He won't care. I usually sleep half the morning, and in the afternoon he's drunk. It's too bad that he drinks so much, don't you think?"

"It can't do him any good," Eddie replied evasively.

"I think Kitty drives him to it. I think he knows what he married, but he won't admit it."

"People who drink heavily usually blame somebody else. I think your father just can't seem to meet life as it is, and he uses the liquor as an escape. It's the same as his wanting to have every animal and bird in sight killed. If you ask me—and you haven't—I think he needs help, not from a medical doctor but one of those doctors who deals with the mind."

"Don't you dare say my father is crazy!" Carole flared.

Well, he thought, she has a temper.

"I didn't say that, and I don't think that he is crazy, but I do think he has a twisted sense of values. And—at the risk of offending you—I will say that he isn't normal. Not by a long shot."

"Let's not talk about it, Eddie."

"Suits me."

He was sorry to leave the field. The flies didn't bother you much in the field, but they were fierce in the woods.

"Joan was sick this morning," Carole said. "I heard her in the bathroom."

Eddie thought he would have to sit down, he was so weak.

"Was she?"

"Right away I thought she might be going to have a baby."

"Why don't you ask her?"

"Because I can ask you. If she is going to have one you're probably the father."

A fly bit him on the back of the neck and he brushed it away, digging with the ends of his fingers at the spot where his skin stung. The night before had been carved out of hell. He had tossed fitfully on the bed and cursed himself and their lousy luck. It was little wonder he had overslept.

"Have you heard the latest?" Carole inquired. "Kitty wants a baby."

"She may have trouble getting one."

"She can get one from a doctor. And the worst part of it is that my father says it's all right. He says every woman wants to have a child of her own, even if half of it doesn't belong to her husband."

"I'd think that's his business. And hers."

"But don't you see what she's trying to do? She's trying to tie him tight, and a baby would help her. If something happened to him, her baby would get just as much as I would, even if they were divorced. Kitty wouldn't have to work again for the rest of her life."

"Don't you think of anything besides money?"

"Yes, but you have to be practical. If I thought she loved him I wouldn't object, but I'm sure that she doesn't. She married for money and she's hanging on for money. She doesn't deserve anything at all. That's why I'm willing to pay five thousand dollars to show him what she is. You have to get with it, Eddie. I don't care if you get her drunk and rape her, but I want the proof."

"It isn't easy to get."

"She gave it to Jim and there's no reason why she won't give it to you. The only difficulty was that Jim wouldn't work with me. So he lost his job. You want that to happen to you?"

The first set was in a small stream that ran down to the lake, but there wasn't anything in it. Eddie scratched his head and frowned. The set was a good one, but so far it had produced nothing. The moss was still on the pan of the trap, right where he had placed it, and any foxes crossing the stream would have used it so that they didn't have to get their feet wet. But it just went to show that what might look right to a man didn't always appear in the same light to an animal.

"How are you going to remember where all the traps are?" Eddie asked her. "There are about two hundred."

"I've got a good memory."

"Either that or you aren't going to look at them. If I thought you weren't going to keep your word I wouldn't even think of taking a day off."

"Let your mind rest easy. I told you I would."

They moved on and he taught her how to approach the sets, going just close enough to tell if anything was in the trap.

"You know how to use a gun, Carole?"

"Very well. I went with a boy in college who was a bug on target practice. I learned from him."

He decided that the boy had probably scored on another target, but he didn't say anything. What he had seen at the beach at Goose Lake the previous afternoon was still fresh in his mind. He was glad he hadn't been seen, because it hadn't been deliberate on his part. That was one time when a man and a girl should be left alone.

The sun grew higher in the sky as they continued through the woods, and the day grew hotter. He had some luck, a couple of foxes and an otter that had wandered into a trap not meant for him, and he let her shoot the

animals. She was a good shot, all right As the pack basket began to fill up, he had to carry the lunch.

"Too bad you can't skin them right out here in the woods," she said. "Then you wouldn't have so much to lug."

"It takes the better part of three hours to skin an otter."

"Honest?"

"Unless your father would settle for the skin without the tail. Down around the rump, another skin is glued on. It's bad enough on the rest of the body, because there are muscles going in all directions and you have to cut them loose."

"Jim used to skin his animals, and he'd bring the same skins back two or three days in a row. He was lazy. All he wanted was his pay and Kitty. He got both while it lasted."

They continued on, crossing a hill and then moving up a small valley. He added two more foxes to his catch and he was beginning to feel the weight of the pack basket. In one set he had a beaver.

"I can't kill that," Eddie said.

"Why not? You've never brought one in."

"Not because I didn't have them in my traps. I let them go." He began searching for a couple of strong sticks. "Go ahead and tell your father. I don't care. The beavers put up dams, flooding land— I grant you that—but in case there's a forest fire their ponds are about the only decent water supply. If you'd ever carried an Indian tank on your back in a forest fire you'd know what I mean. Most of the time trucks can't get to you, and the streams are too low."

He didn't have much trouble letting the beaver out, pressing the springs of the trap down with the sticks he had found, and the animal swam away, slapping its tail once and then disappearing under the water.

"I won't say anything to my father," Carole assured him.

"Thanks, but I'd have done the same thing if I had known that you would."

"I believe you."

"I don't believe in this senseless killing. That's why I say, there's some wheel inside him that's going in the wrong direction. Killing some things, turtles and the like, is all right. But when you want to slaughter off the whole animal population you're pretty mixed up. When I was a kid, trapping so I could buy clothes for myself, if I found a den, say for raccoon, I never trapped them all out. I always left enough to breed for the next year. There can't be any little animals if there aren't any big animals."

"My father doesn't want any at all."

"I'm well aware of that."

"What's the difference if you kill animals in the summer or in the winter when the fur is good?"

"None, I suppose. But I can't say I ever liked it, even when I had to do it to buy pants or a pair of shoes. If we hadn't been so poor I wouldn't have killed anything. And if I had money I certainly wouldn't hire somebody else to do it. I'd plow up the fields and plant grain, and in the winter when the snow is deep I'd put out feed. If somebody wanted to hunt I might let him but I'd hope he didn't get anything."

"You've got a kind heart," she said as they moved on, away from the beaver dam. "For a big man who looks brutal you're very kind."

"Not kind. Sensible."

He picked up two more foxes in the valley, both in dry sets on land, and when he reset the traps in other locations she asked a lot of questions. He answered her as well as he could.

"They won't produce anything for almost a week now," he said of the new sets. "There's fox smell about the traps but there's human smell, too, and you have to wait until it goes away. Once in a while you'll come across a fox

that doesn't seem to care, but not often. Any human odor drives them away."

"There's a lot to it," she said. "It's obvious that you know what you're doing. I don't think Jim did. But my father put up with him because it isn't easy to get a trapper. You'd think every kid born and raised on a farm would know how to trap but they don't."

"You have to have the knack," he admitted. "Some people couldn't catch daylight in a bag."

At the extreme end of the valley there was a cliff they had to climb to reach the ridge and he got behind her in case she should fall.

"Take it easy," he said, as she started up the rocks.

"You do this every day?"

"Yes. I could go back a quarter of a mile, but it means a lot of extra walking. In the winter you'd have to do that—the rocks would be covered with ice."

"I—I think you have to push me some, Eddie."

Her hips were right in front of him, and he shoved against one with his free hand, almost lifting her up into the air. He could feel the softness of her flesh beneath his hand, the warmth of it through the thin material of her shorts, and the sweat came out of him worse than ever. He saw her again as she had been on the beach with Roger, and he wanted her that way with him. He wanted to put her down on the ground and show her what a man could do to a girl, how he could make her cry and moan and really live. His feelings had nothing to do with love. It was sex, raw sex, the powerful urge of the ages welling up in him.

"Made it," she said as she scrambled over the top. As she stood up she turned her head to smile at him. "God, you're strong. I'll bet you don't know how strong you are."

The patch of grass was up ahead, and he suggested that they eat. She was all for it, and when they got to the grass she sank down upon it, breathing heavily from the climb

up the rocks, the action of her lungs thrusting her breasts far forward, the twin cones straining against the fabric.

"Mary makes a good lunch," he said as he slid out of the pack basket harness and sat down beside her. "The trouble is she always puts in too much."

"Better than not enough."

"Sure, but why waste it? I can remember a time when I didn't have enough to eat."

He unpacked the basket, spreading the wrapped sandwiches on the grass, and he was surprised to find a fifth of rye lying on the bottom.

"Who put that in there?" he wanted to know.

She smiled at him.

"I did, Eddie. I thought you might like a drink."

"I seldom drink whiskey."

"How was I to know? Anyway beer wouldn't have stayed cold."

They ate slowly. The food was good, and there was more than enough. She finished eating before he did, lit a cigarette and lay down on the grass, closing her eyes. He looked at her, his teeth locking tightly together. Her body was incredible, all breasts and hips, her little belly hardly anything at all, and the urge to take her was almost overpowering. Even if she screamed, nobody would hear her.

"Why don't you go to sleep?" he asked her. "I always rest here a while."

She didn't open her eyes.

"Maybe I will. I'm not used to this sort of thing. You cover a lot of territory, don't you?"

"Have to."

"And I doubt if you need the rest. I sort of think that you could go for hours, no matter what you were doing."

He knew what he wanted to do, and the sweat ran down into his eyes. He also knew that it was wrong. More an excuse for his feelings than anything else, he assured himself that any normal man would want to take care of her,

their mutual desire mounting into a towering flame of delight.

He opened the fifth of rye, his hands shaking, and took a drink. The whiskey burned going down his throat, but the second drink didn't burn quite so much, the warmth of it flooding through him. He continued to look at her, wanting her, but he was afraid to try. All he had to do was to make her sore at him and everything would be ruined. Not that it wasn't almost ruined already. The probability of Joan being pregnant was going to hurt them all. Kitty would probably raise hell when he told her—at first he had thought she would forgive him, taking it for granted, but now he wasn't so sure.

"It's nice here on the grass," Carole said.

He realized then that she hadn't been asleep.

"Must have been an old farm here at one time and this is what's left of it," he said. "You see lots of stone foundations in the woods and you wonder what the people ever did for a living. How could they exist?"

She rolled over on her side and lifted herself on her elbow. The halter wasn't so high now, and he saw the hint of a warm deep cleavage.

"You want a drink, Carole?"

"No. I brought it for you."

He put the cap back on the bottle and returned it to the basket, along with the food which they hadn't eaten.

"How many more traps do you have to look at, Eddie?"

"About thirty, I guess. We follow this ridge to Goose Lake and cover the swamp there. The ridge isn't much good in summer, only in the fall when the nuts come off the trees."

"Then there isn't any hurry."

"No."

A small hawk came darting through the woods and she turned her head to follow its flight.

"You have to do something about Kitty," she said. "And you have to do it fast." She was now looking into

his face. "Hitch a ride into town with her and get her drunk. You'll be able to park with her on the way back, and then all you'll have to do is give me a statement."

"I thought you wanted pictures."

"It would be nice—there's always the chance that my father wouldn't believe you, and he'd have to believe a picture. But you have to get next to her first. Once you've done that she'll come to your room." She paused. "If she hasn't already."

"What makes you say that?"

She shrugged.

"I don't know. It's just a feeling I have. She's been acting differently lately, like she had some secret that pleased her. And I can think of only one thing that would please her. A man."

"I'm not the only man in the world."

"No, but you're the kind she would want. Big. She likes them big. Although Jim wasn't big. I couldn't figure that. I guess her sex must have got the better of her."

He hated to think of Kitty ever having been with another man, but he knew it was foolish to feel that way. She could have the same feeling about him for having been with other girls. Almost any man or girl who had gone over the age of twenty had some sort of a past.

"I'm even more baffled about you and that Roger," he said suddenly.

"We're just friends."

In view of what Eddie had seen on the beach, he thought they were pretty good friends.

"He doesn't seem to be your type."

"And what would my type be?"

"I haven't thought a great deal about it."

"Somebody like you perhaps? Strong. Rugged. A horse of a man?"

"No, not me. You've got money and I'm lucky to manage from one pay day to the next."

"That doesn't mean anything."

"It puts us rather far apart, don't you think? How many rich girls run around with penniless guys? The other way around might be true, though. Plenty of guys with dough go for girls without anything."

She sat up straight and rubbed the palms of her hands across her breasts. The sweat was all over him now, as though he had been caught in a rain.

"You're going to help me," she said. "Aren't you?"

"Yeah." He had to lie to her.

"Make it so that as soon as Roger gets back we can arrange to get a picture. A picture would be better. I want her naked and I want her on the bed and I want you doing something to her."

"That'll be the end of the job for me."

"It might not. I'll do what I can for you. And, if it is, you'll have the money." She leaned toward him. "Eddie, you can do a lot with five thousand dollars." She came closer, sliding across the grass.

Her face was right there, right up close, her lips parted and her teeth white and even, not a trace of her bright red lipstick on them. She was breathing deeply, heavily, each breath matching his own.

"I know what you want," she murmured softly.

He wiped the sweat from his forehead.

"Quit teasing me, will you?"

She reached behind her with her hands and hesitated.

"Maybe I'm not teasing you, Eddie. Maybe, when I look at you, I see a real man, a man who knows what a woman needs."

"You're rich," he said, unable to think of anything else to say, unable to think of anything but this girl and the woods and the utter loneliness that surrounded them.

"Money hasn't anything to do with it, Eddie." She was breathing harder now, her hands still behind her, her breasts tilted and thrusting. "This is basic. This is animal. This is man and woman. This is wanting what you want, not ashamed of wanting it."

He wished he had another drink.

"You can't think very much of Roger," he said.

"Forget Roger. I can." She did something with her hands.

He couldn't keep the sweat out of his eyes, couldn't fight the raging turmoil that seized him. He had thought of being there on the grass with her, of Carole wanting him as much as he wanted her, but now that the moment had nearly arrived he was scared, afraid that he was going too far and too quickly.

The halter came away from her and his eyes grew wide, his mouth thick and dry. They were just as he had imagined. Soft fullness tipped with red, the area around the red shading into brown, the full, lifting beauty of her a stunning vision to behold.

"Take a look, Eddie. Take a good, long look."

"You think I'm blind?" he demanded huskily.

She was only inches away from him and she didn't mind when he touched her, his fingers clumsy and unsure, the pounding in his head like a machine gun. Slowly, she sank back to the grass and he followed her.

"You wanted this," he said.

"Do you think I'd be with you if I didn't?"

"And you lied to me before. You said—"

"Shut up. Does a girl always tell the truth? I wanted you to want me as much as I wanted you and I think you do now. I—"

Her lips were soft, and of the flavor of crushed strawberries, and he mashed them, grinding down, his mouth forcing hers open, all the joy of being a male on the verge of conquering the female driving into his guts like an iron wedge.

"I shouldn't," he said desperately.

"Why not?"

"Because." He gulped, almost choking, staring at her blonde beauty. "Because—"

And then she came to him, with her terrible and wonderful need, clutching him and crying out as he hurt her, hurt her as she had begged Roger to hurt her, hurt her as a savage would.

"You're all man," she said later as she dressed. "And it's the first time that I ever—well, you know. The first time, Eddie. Nobody else could ever do it."

They visited the rest of the traps, but they stopped three times on the way.

THE NEXT couple of days were tough on Eddie, as though he were living in another world and finding it difficult to keep up the pace. Roger Swingle phoned and said he would be gone at least ten days, and Carole went to the traps with Eddie, telling her father she was learning the locations of the sets and winning a grudging approval.

"If Father only knew," she would say as they stretched out on the grass.

Eddie had pretty good luck with his traps, but he didn't pay much attention to putting out new ones. It was frantic making love to Carole in the woods, frantic and wonderful, and he gave of himself until he thought there was no longer anything left to give. But he was wrong—when Kitty came to him late at night, sneaking upstairs into the darkness of his room, he was able to meet her demands.

"I don't know," Carole told him as she lay on the grass. "I always told myself that when I fell in love it would be with a man who had money. But when I'm with you, Eddie, I just think of the two of us being together always and never parting."

He said nothing to her, knowing that this wasn't love, only sex. She had an exciting body, all wild and eager, but he couldn't see anything beyond that for them. There wasn't a time that he touched her, no matter how good she was, that he didn't wish she were Kitty. He had wanted Carole the first time he had seen her, as she got off the bus in Twenty Mile River, but now that he had ac-

accomplished his purpose he would rather have left her alone. But she was finding complete physical pleasure for the first time, and she wasn't willing to let go any part of it.

"I'm hungry for you," she would tell him as they walked through the woods.

"You'd be hungry for any man."

"No, Eddie. You."

"And what's in it for us?"

"I don't know what's in it for us. I'm not asking myself a question like that. What do I care? I'm living for today and tomorrow can take care of itself. Nights I dream about you, Eddie. I wake up needing you so much that I could scream my lungs out."

He tried to reason with her, pointing out the difference in their social standing, but it didn't do any good. She said that lots of rich girls married poor men and that they got along all right.

"That would make your father happy," Eddie observed.

"He wouldn't stand in my way. He never stood in the way of my happiness. He doesn't like Roger, but he puts up with him because Roger is a friend of mine."

"Don't tell me you never did this with Roger."

"I won't lie to you. Of course I have. I did it with several boys, Eddie. The first was when I was sixteen, but it scared me so much that it was almost a whole year before I did it again. The boy worked for us and we used to go swimming together. One night we went swimming after dark without suits, and when we came out of the water he pulled me off into the weeds and forced himself on me. It was the next thing to rape, because I didn't want to, but I didn't cause him any trouble. I just wondered why I couldn't feel the same thing that the other girls said they felt when they were with a boy. So I tried several boys, including Roger, and I always had the same luck—nothing—until I met you. Now I know what the girls were talking about, and how glorious it can be."

They spent long hours in the woods together, tending the traps, talking or making love. Eddie was thoroughly confused. He was in love with one girl, Kitty, had another girl pregnant, Joan, and now Carole was so set on him that he couldn't shake her loose.

"You have to do something about Kitty," Carole kept telling him. "You have to show her up for what she is."

"I'm doing the best I can."

"I heard her leave the house last night. She must have gone somewhere."

"Probably for a walk."

"Alone? A girl like Kitty? Don't make me laugh."

Each day he felt that he was coming closer to something terrible. He was safe enough in the woods with Carole, but he certainly wasn't safe when he was with Kitty. He saw very little of Joan, only in the morning or at supper. He couldn't be sure of what she might do. If she was carrying his baby, and if she loved him as she said she did, she was going to fight to keep him. He couldn't blame her for that. It was bad enough for her to be stuck for paying for her divorce by herself, but it would even be worse if she had to bring a kid up alone. It would be just as wrong to marry her if he didn't love her, and he told himself that he couldn't be in love with Joan and Kitty at the same time. And it was Kitty he loved. The short hours he spent with her were the best hours of the day or night, and whenever he saw Jennings he seemed to hate the man more and more. Every afternoon Jennings made Kitty go down and chase game for him, as though she were a dog, and those crazy kids were always there shooting at anything they saw. Kitty kept hoping and praying that one of the kids would put a bullet through her husband's head. Jennings gave a cash prize to the kid who shot the most birds or animals, and in the afternoon, as far away as Goose Lake, it sounded like Fourth of July down in the woods.

On the third afternoon Eddie and Carole were stretched

out on the patch of grass up above the valley. She kissed him on the cheek and he twisted his head so that he could meet her mouth with his lips. It was a short kiss, their passion drained from them for the moment, and she lay back on the grass again.

"Some people would say this is wrong, wouldn't they, Eddie?"

"You could bet your last dollar on that."

"I don't think it's wrong. I think it's only wrong when you fight down what you feel inside of you. You could marry me six times in the same day and I wouldn't feel any better than I do right now. Just because you have a scrap of paper that says you're man and wife doesn't change it."

"Maybe not but the law says you should have one."

"But how do you know that you're physically suited to each other if you don't try first?"

"That's a chance you take."

"Many countries have a trial marriage for engaged couples, and they have a lower divorce rate than we do. When people get divorced they give a lot of different reasons, but I think most of it starts right in the bedroom, don't you?"

"Perhaps. It could."

"Take me, for instance. Supposing I married Roger and lived with him? It would be a sexless marriage for me, and although I might have babies I'd never know all of the thrills of creating them. I—well, I couldn't be like Kitty, going to a doctor and having him make me pregnant. It's—I think it's dirty, even dirtier than if you went out and found a man you like and told him to give you a child. And how does my father know that isn't what Kitty is doing?"

"I suppose he doesn't."

"That's why we have to stop her before it's too late, Eddie. I—well, I don't guess you even have to sleep with her. You could say that you did and she couldn't prove

that you hadn't. You could go to my father tomorrow and tell him that you'd had your way with her. We could only hope that he would believe you. If he didn't I could always say that I'd found you with her. We—"

"I won't lie about it," Eddie said. "You may hate Kitty, but she doesn't deserve that."

"Sometimes I think you like her, Eddie."

"She never hurt me."

Finally they dressed and moved on toward Goose Lake, luckily getting a fox in one of the traps on the ridge and picking up two mink in sets in the swamp at the head of the lake. The swamp was good territory and a lot of mink lived in it, dark-furred animals that would have brought decent money during the winter. It seemed such a waste to Eddie to kill them and throw the hides away.

"I'll go with you tomorrow," she said as they parted.

Jennings was down in the woods, and Eddie left his catch near the little shack so that he could show Jennings his take before he buried it. The day before he had buried the game first, merely reporting to Jennings before supper, and the man had been furious.

"Godammit, I'm paying you," Jennings had roared drunkenly. "How can I tell that you aren't lying to me unless I see what you've got?"

"I won't do it again."

"You know what's good for you, you won't."

Upstairs in the garage, Eddie took a cold shower and then lay down on the bed. He ought to be out setting hawk and owl traps but he didn't feel like it. He felt drained and spent.

He was almost asleep when he heard someone coming up the stairs. He was sure it wasn't Kitty—she was down in the woods running her fanny off—and Carole wouldn't venture up to his room.

It had to be Joan.

She closed the door after her as she came into the room, and he made no effort to cover himself.

"You shouldn't be here," he said.

"How else can I talk to you?"

"What's there to talk about? You know what the trouble is and so do I. Things have to work themselves out."

"Nothing works itself out if you don't do anything about it."

"It's a cinch I can't marry you, can I?"

"No, but you can give me something to hope for, something to believe in." She sat down on the edge of the bed. "I'm all alone in this, Eddie, and I don't like it. If you were the one who was sick every morning you wouldn't take it so lightly."

He reached for his cigarettes, his elbow brushing against the side of one of her breasts.

"Who says I'm taking it lightly?"

"I do. Nights you could see me but you don't. There are other times that you could see me, talk to me, but you don't. You're off all day long with that Carole, and I can guess what the two of you do together."

"Now your mind is in the gutter."

"No, it isn't. She's a pretty girl and I know you, Eddie. I know you almost better than you know yourself. You're playing around with Kitty and you're playing around with Carole. I don't like it. You belong to me and to nobody else. You've got no right to belong to anybody else. After a man gives a girl a baby they're in it together. I'm not an old shoe that you can throw away, Eddie. I'm your girl and you can't change it. You should be closer to me than ever, but instead of that you're drifting away. Nights I think about it and I can't help but cry. I hear Kitty go out at night and I hear her come in. Don't lie to me, Eddie. I know where she's been. She's been up here with you when she should be with her husband. She married him, didn't she?"

Eddie sat up, rolling around her, and got to his feet, standing naked and big in front of her. "Why do you have to make it complicated?" he demanded. "I know you're

going to have a kid, and I'm not going to let you down. You think I'd do that?"

"See that you don't, Eddie."

"Okay. Okay. Your number came up one night and I was there to punch your card. You aren't the only girl who ever got in a family way. It happens every day, and people work things out. But you have to give me a little time."

"Promise me you'll marry me." There were tears in her eyes.

"Don't worry so much," he said, not making any promise. "You go back to the house and do your work and leave it up to me. It was a bad break for us, but something can be done."

"Kitty saw me when I was sick this morning," she confided. That was bad.

"I see," he murmured.

"She didn't say anything, but I know she was thinking a lot."

"Probably."

"Later she had a fight with her husband in his bedroom. They were shouting at each other. As soon as he came out he started right in on scotch."

"He's a drunken slob."

"He's our boss and he pays us. We both need our jobs, Eddie. Let's not do anything to ruin what we have."

She didn't stay long after that, and he was glad when she left. He moved to the window and watched her as she rounded the building. It seemed almost impossible that she was pregnant, and that they were in such a mess.

Eddie returned to the bed, sitting down. He knew that the easiest way, abortion, wasn't any answer for Joan's trouble. She was in love with him, and she wanted his child.

Dinner time came and went, but he didn't go down to eat. Kitty had brought over a fifth of rye one night, and

he got it out, making a face with the first drink but feeling better on the second one.

There wasn't much liquor in the bottle and it didn't take him long to finish it. He wished that he had some beer, good and cold, and that he could just sit there in the room alone and get so drunk he wouldn't know what was going on. He had told Joan that she complicated things, but he guessed he had complicated them for himself and that they would become more complicated before they got better. It wasn't possible to lead the life he had been leading and not make a mistake. He was making love to Kitty and Carole every day and every night, and it was wearing him down.

He had to tell Kitty the truth about Joan and the quicker he did it the better it would be for him. He didn't expect her to be pleased—what woman would be?—but he did hope she would forgive him. After all, it happened before he met her.

Kitty came about the usual time, and she slid into his arms immediately. He could feel in the darkness that she was wearing a dress and that wasn't usual.

"I was dying for you," she breathed as she kissed him. "God, what a day."

"He run you ragged?"

"He did more than that."

"What?"

"Later. I'll tell you later."

He melted against her and his hand slid between them to find her breasts. She pulled away from him for a second, her breath uneven.

"Don't, Eddie."

He took his hand away from her. She was funny that way sometimes, and her request didn't surprise him. He reached behind her with his hand, his palm flat against her back, and he strained toward her, their lips pressing together wildly, their mouths open and eager for each other.

"Let's get out of here," he said, breaking off the kiss. She was silent for a moment.

"What do you mean, Eddie?"

"Just what I said. This sneaking around to be together at night isn't any good. We're in love with each other and we can get along. You may not be able to drive a Bentley but we'll get a car of some kind. There are some jobs opening up around the county seat, and I could land one of them."

"I think you're trying to run from something, Eddie."

"Does it have to be that?"

"Most generally it does." She gave him a long, lingering kiss. "It's Joan, isn't it?"

"What makes you think that?"

"Because she was sick this morning—I've heard her other mornings, too—and she's probably pregnant. My guess is that it's your baby."

"Well—"

"It's yours, isn't it?"

He licked his lips with his tongue.

"Yes, it's mine."

"What are you going to do about it?"

"What can I do?"

Kitty stirred in his arms.

"Are you in love with her?"

"I'm in love with you."

"And she's carrying your baby?"

"That's about the size of it."

"I wish I were."

Her lips found his mouth again. "I hope I am. I want it that way. If I am I'll go to a doctor, real quick, and let him take care of me once. That way, Frank can't ever have any doubts."

He found one of her breasts again but she took his hand away.

"Nuts to Frank," he said desperately. "If you love me

we don't belong here. As for Joan, I'll do something for her. I don't know what, but I'll do it."

"We might be able to adopt the baby."

"You'd be willing to do that for me?"

"Yes, I'd be willing to do that for you and your child."

He wanted to make love to her then but he felt her resist him, her head back on the pillow and her lips barely returning his kisses.

"Turn the light on," she said.

"Why?"

"There's something you should see."

"You haven't got anything I haven't seen before."

"I have now."

He crawled across her and pulled the light chain.

She was on her feet and she was getting out of the dress, pulling it over her head.

"You're going to see why I didn't want you to touch me," she said, something very dark and serious about her eyes. "You don't know what I went through this morning."

She was out of the dress, casting it aside, and her graceful body was naked in front of him.

"Christ Almighty!" he said as he stepped near her.

The light wasn't very strong, but he could see all that was necessary. Her breasts were a mass of bruises, and in several places, up high, it looked as though she had been bitten.

"Who did that?" he managed to ask.

"Frank. This morning."

"The bastard!"

How, he asked himself, could a man do that to such a lovely creature? Sure he had kissed them, maybe he had hurt her a couple of times, but he had never hurt her this way. Those were the marks of some beast, not of a man. A man had to be a sadist to do a thing like that, a form of animal that should be locked up in a cage.

"I have to get away from him after this," Kitty said,

touching her breasts lightly with the tips of her fingers, even the light touch bringing anguish into her eyes. "I can't go on, Eddie."

He wanted to take them in his big hands, to bring them relief from pain, but he couldn't do that.

"I wouldn't think so. I don't know how you've lived with him as long as you have."

"He doesn't deserve to live, Eddie."

"Why did he do it?"

"Because he heard me coming in late the other night—I guess he wasn't as drunk as I thought he was—and he accused me of going to bed with someone. We had an awful row this morning, and then he did this. He said he would mark me up so that no man would want me."

Eddie felt his blood running cold, the coldness of the sweat all over him matching the coldness in his blood. All his hate for Jennings came to a head in a wave of fury. He found himself wishing that the no-good slob were planted six feet under the ground. No, not under the ground. Leave him out in the woods for the buzzards to pick over, the same buzzards that were always hanging around the field where he buried the animals.

"We have to get out of here," Eddie said tightly.

"On what?"

"What difference does it make?"

"A lot," she said patiently. "If you'd only calm down you'd see that. We can't go out of here with just the clothes on our backs. When I leave with you I'm leaving with a couple of million dollars. Make no mistake about that. I've earned every damned cent of it, caring for him, putting up with stuff like this—oh, it isn't the first time. Think of it, Eddie. A couple of million just for the two of us. There wouldn't be anything that we couldn't do, any place we couldn't go. And our babies—your babies and mine—would have all of the things that neither one of us ever had."

"I know how we can get some money," Eddie said.

"How? And how much?"

"Five thousand."

"Where—off the trees?"

"No. From Carole. She'd pay that if he divorced you. All I have to do is say we've been playing house together and she'll pay it to me."

"The little bitch!"

"Well, it's no fortune but it's five thousand. And I might be able to get her up to ten. We wouldn't be able to live the way you live now, but we'd be able to get along."

"Until the money was gone, yes."

"All right. Your husband could live for years. Look how long we'd have to wait."

Kitty found a cigarette and lit it. She breathed deeply and those bruised and bitten breasts of hers rose to their fullest.

"Now I know why Carole has been going into the woods with you every day."

"She's going to look at my traps for me when I'm off. I won't take a day off unless somebody does. All she has to do is take a long walk and shoot whatever is in the traps."

Kitty's lips curled.

"Don't tell me you haven't had her."

"What do you think I am anyhow? You're enough woman for any two men."

"I think she is, too."

"Have it your own way."

The curl on Kitty's lips turned into a smile.

"I don't care, Eddie. If you did I don't blame you—but I do blame her. There hasn't been anything that I've had since my marriage to Frank that she hasn't tried to ruin."

"This is getting us nowhere fast," Eddie said, his head feeling like a hollow drum when he looked at where she had been hurt by Jennings. "We're only talking and that solves nothing."

She thought about that for a moment and nodded her head.

"We don't have to just talk," she agreed. "We can do something about it."

"Yeah, go away together. Forget the past. Start over again."

"With a couple of million bucks, Eddie. A couple of million bucks in the bank. Rich. Filthy rich."

"Hell, you're dreaming."

She sat down on the bed and rubbed her breasts with her free hand.

"Not as much as you think. It's dangerous down there in the woods where he goes every afternoon. Even Wilson says it's dangerous with all those kids around, shooting just to shoot and aiming anywhere they feel like."

"They won't kill him," Eddie said. "A bastard like that has got nine lives."

She moved her legs wide apart and leaned down to look at the bottle on the floor beside the bed. When she saw that it was empty she put it down again.

"I wasn't thinking of them killing him," she said finally. "There would be too much luck for a thing like that to happen."

"Well, you were thinking of something, weren't you?"

Her glance lifted to his face and their eyes locked, held for a long moment.

"One of us could do it," she said simply.

Eddie almost threw up. He guessed he had seen it all along, right in front of him, and yet he hadn't had the sense really to see it. She was a beautiful girl, married to a cripple. She wanted his dough, as much of it as she could get, and she wasn't willing to settle for less. In a way he couldn't blame her. Life belonged to those who were worthy of it, and certainly Jennings wasn't worthy of taking another breath. Weakly, Eddie walked to the bed and sat down beside her.

"God," he said, feeling a chill although the room was hot.

"It would be easy, Eddie. I've thought about it a lot."

"Yeah."

"The kids coming in helped. They all use twenty-twos."

"Yeah."

"You're a good shot. There's a ridge that overlooks the woods—you could get him from there, right in the head. You shoot him any other place with a twenty-two and you might as well scratch his back for all the good it'd do you."

There was a pain in Eddie's guts and he bent over, holding his arms around his stomach and pressing in.

"I never killed anybody in my life," he said.

"I didn't think you had, Eddie."

"You could go to the chair for a thing like that."

"Not if you don't get caught, and you wouldn't. Once he's hit, the kids will run like rabbits, thinking one of them did it. Some of them will throw their guns away. If they get the bullet out of his skull they'll try to match it, but they won't be able to match it if they don't find all the guns."

"What about my gun?"

"I bought a new one for you, same make and model, and you can bury it in the swamp. The police will end up calling it an accident and we'll end up a couple of million dollars richer. I'll wait a discreet length of time before I marry you, and then we'll share it, as well as our love for each other."

He tried to think but it was almost impossible. He wanted her, wanted her badly, and a couple of million dollars was a lot of money. Jennings wasn't any better than some of the animals he caught in his traps, not as good, and he had been asking for this a long, long time.

"I have to think about it," Eddie said after a while.

"There's nothing to think about."

"There is for me."

"It's perfect."

"No killing is perfect. I read that in some magazine."

"Don't believe everything you read, silly."

"I'd still have to live with myself."

"And I'll live with you. We'll get a nice house in some town and we'll spend every moment that we can in bed. You can give me a kid every year, and I'll love it. Just do this one thing for me. The kids will be here tomorrow. Wilson has to go into town in the afternoon and it would be ideal."

"Don't rush me."

"There's no time for fooling around. You want him to do the same thing to me again?"

"Oh, no."

"Then be on the ridge tomorrow afternoon. And don't miss." She crept in close to him. "The hell with it," she said. "We both know what's going on. Let's make a little love."

He turned out the light and they made love, but it wasn't as good as it had been before.

Most likely, he guessed, he was running out of steam.

IT WAS raining the next morning, and Eddie met Carole in the kitchen.

"I'll beg off today," she said.

"Okay." It was a break he had been hoping for.

"No use in getting soaked."

Mary returned to the kitchen and he watched Carole's legs as she moved toward the swinging door. They were very good legs indeed, and he knew what they could do.

"Morning," Wilson said when he came in.

"Hi, Clark." Eddie sat down at the table opposite the older man. "Little rain, huh?"

"Hell, it would rain when I had to drop into town."

"You seldom go to town. Must be important."

"To Mr. Jennings it is. Tax day."

"Tax day?"

"Yeah. You get one day a year when you can put in a bitch about your assessment."

"I see."

"They put up his taxes every year and it makes him furious. Can't say I blame him none. Just because a man has money you shouldn't tax the hell out of him. He owns one-fifth of the land and pays one-third of the school taxes in this township."

"Think they'll listen to you?"

"Oh, they'll listen but they won't do anything about it. They just hold tax day because of the law."

Eddie ate his bacon and eggs. The food set heavy in his stomach.

"How will Mr. Jennings get down to the woods?" Eddie asked.

"He won't go if it keeps raining. If it clears, Mrs. Jennings can help him. The chair doesn't push hard. All he needs is some help over the rough spots."

Eddie got out of the kitchen a little before eight, picked up his basket and things at the shack, and struck off for the woods. He hoped it would rain all day, so hard you couldn't see fifty feet ahead. All night he had twisted on his bed, thinking of what Jennings had done to Kitty and hating him, then telling himself that the man should pay with his life. Twice he had been sick, throwing up in the bathroom. He wasn't a killer, he just wasn't, but the lure of having Kitty for his wife and sharing in a couple of million dollars was almost too much.

"I'll leave the gun near that big pine tree on the ridge," Kitty had told him the night before. "You won't have any trouble finding it. And it's ready to go. I sighted it in myself. You could drive tacks with it as far as you can see them."

The rain had almost stopped by the time he reached the woods, the sun fighting to burst through the clouds, but he didn't care if he got wet. All he had to do was to think about shooting Jennings and he felt as though his breakfast was going to come up. Twice he stopped and gagged, but the food stayed down.

He walked fast in the woods, checking the traps quickly, glad that the night hadn't been a good one. The sun was out now, burning brightly against the damp leaves, and he knew he would have to be on the ridge that afternoon, with a gun in his hand and murder in his heart. The kids would be in the woods, horsing around, and he would lay one into Jennings. It would be an accident, pure and simple. Kitty would be free of a monster and she would be a rich widow.

It got hot in the woods, the flies savage, but he hardly noticed. He told himself that there ought to be another

way of doing this. Yet when he thought of Kitty's breasts, of what Jennings had done, he wasn't so sure. Jennings wasn't any good for anybody. He had a warped mind, twisted and inhuman, and death for him seemed to be the only answer.

He got a couple of foxes in the valley and continued on toward Goose Lake, passing the grass spot where he had known Carole so many times. It hadn't been right, taking her the way he had. She would soon tire of him, if she hadn't already, and she would find somebody else, somebody in her own class. She had spoken of love—he guessed he had, too, holding her hard and tight—but it hadn't been love, just infatuation.

There was a mink in one of his swamp traps. He shot the animal in the head just as he would Jennings. The comparison made him shudder, and his hands shook so much he could hardly take the animal from the trap. Killing the mink wasn't legal and it carried a fine with it if he got caught. But if he got caught killing Jennings it meant the chair.

Kitty was a good shot. Why didn't she do the job herself if she was so anxious to get rid of her husband? Why was she putting the gun in his hands? This, more than anything else, bothered him. Perhaps the plan she had outlined was a good one, but every plan had at least one hole in it, through which the law could poke a probe. Still, the kids being in the woods, just shooting off their guns, meant a lot. Accidents happened all the time. Jennings wouldn't be the first man to be corked by a stray bullet.

Eddie rounded the lake and took the path through the woods to the house. The sun was now high in the sky. It was noon or a little after. His feet were wet—he still hadn't bought new shoes—and the rest of him was wet, too. He felt uncomfortable and his nerves were taut.

"I'll get him to park his chair where you'll get a good shot," Kitty had said. "But do it fast when you've got

the chance. He moves around when he can and he might get behind some bushes."

As he neared the house he heard the kids shooting down in the woods. He didn't know how many kids there were but there seemed to be at least half a dozen. That was good. Once Jennings was dead the kids would get excited, and they wouldn't know what they were talking about. Even if the cops found all of the kids and questioned them, they wouldn't make sense. If some of them threw their guns away, and they might, that would be all the better.

Jennings was on the lawn, just starting to drink, and Eddie showed him what he had. Jennings wasn't too pleased. Eddie's take had dropped off during the last few days, because of fooling around with Carole so much.

"Don't tell me all the animals have left the county," Jennings growled.

"I'm not that foolish."

"Well, you've got to bear down harder. You're getting three hundred a month and your room and board. I expect you to earn it."

He didn't go in for lunch—how could he eat? He took the foxes and mink over to the field to bury them. It didn't take long.

On the way back he met Carole. He didn't like that. He couldn't afford to get mixed up with her just then. If she wanted a little fun for the afternoon she would have to get it from someone else. All she had to do was to drive down to Twenty Mile River and she'd be able to find any number of guys who would be willing to take care of her. Then he looked at the way the shorts and halter fit her and he wished he had the time. If he had, he could show her a couple of things he hadn't shown her before.

"You didn't have a very good day," she said, as he came up to her.

He gave her a grin.

"Been playing too much and not working enough. You can't make love and set traps at the same time."

She adjusted her halter.

"Joan was sick again this morning," she said, evenly. "I went into her room to see if there was anything I could do and she passed out. When she came out of it she was asking for you."

"Me?"

"Yes, you. She didn't say so, but I gathered that you're the father of her baby. Aren't you, Eddie?"

There was no point in lying.

"I guess I am," he admitted.

"What are you going to do for her?"

"I don't know yet."

"Just forget the whole thing?"

"I can't do that. But she doesn't have her divorce yet—I couldn't marry her if I wanted to."

"If you wanted to?"

"Well."

She kicked the toe of a sneaker into some wet leaves.

"You aren't much of a man," she said finally. "I thought you were but you aren't. You give a girl a baby and then you make love to me. That's a hell of a thing."

"I didn't see anything wrong with it."

She laughed at him.

"Because you were after something you thought you had to have?"

"It was pretty good," he retorted.

She kicked at the leaves again, disgust filling her face.

"You're like a lot of men," she sneered. "You want your fun but you don't want the responsibility. Well, that's all right with me, but you aren't having me again. You're going to do what you said you would do about Kitty. I—Eddie, I'm giving you a week to do it. If you don't do something by the end of that time I'm going to see that you don't have a job."

"Going to tell your father about us, huh?"

She shook her head.

"No, I'm not going to confess I've been your private whore. There are other ways."

"Like you did to Jim?"

"Don't worry. I'll think of something."

He walked on, leaving her standing there. He didn't have to worry about a week from now. All he had to worry about was the afternoon, about holding the gun steady and straight and putting the bullet where it had to go.

Upstairs he showered and changed into fresh clothes. He looked for cigarettes, couldn't find any and began to swear. He needed a cigarette or a drink, bad.

He walked to his window and looked out. He could see the far corner of the patch of woods and the higher ridge that overlooked it. He shuddered and turned away.

Kitty had left a fairly large butt in the ash tray and he tore off the crushed end and lit it, sucking the smoke down into his lungs. How much money was two million dollars anyway? It was, he decided, enough to last two people forever.

He walked into one of the rooms on the other side of the narrow hall and stood at the window, watching the house, waiting for Jennings to appear and start down to the woods—a journey from which he would never return alive. As soon as Jennings was in the woods Eddie would get up onto that ridge and find the gun. He would blast Jennings right in the head and then he would disappear, hiding the gun in the swamp where nobody would ever find it. After that would come the cops and the suspense of waiting, the terrible agony of not knowing just what was going on. Following this there would be a longer wait, the weeks or months until he could marry Kitty and they could settle down to a life together.

The sun was hot outside, blazing, and Eddie wiped tears from his eyes. He was on the verge of crying, but there wasn't anything to cry about. In a few short hours it would be finished. Jennings would be dead and Kitty

would be free. Wasn't that what he wanted? Money or no money, hadn't he wanted her to be free? Nights when he had been with her he had thought of it being legal, of it being right for them.

He brushed aside more tears and then he knew who they were for. Joan. Joan was in a fix up to her pretty neck, and he would have to do something to help her. Kitty had been very understanding about that, more than most girls would have been. A lot of girls would have dropped him right then and there. Carole had. Carole of the lovely body and the beautiful face had made her feelings very plain.

It seemed like hours before Eddie saw the wheel chair moving across the lawn. Kitty was with Jennings but she didn't have to help him very much. He could go almost anywhere, even with that shotgun lying on his lap. Eddie was just turning away from the window when he saw Joan coming across the lawn.

He wanted to get out of there before Joan caught up with him, but that was next to impossible. What she might have on her mind he couldn't imagine but it probably wouldn't take long to talk to her. He didn't have much time and he had to move fast. He had to do it while he had the guts to kill a man in cold blood.

Once downstairs he waited for her outside. She walked slowly, her head down, her shoulders slumped forward.

"Hot," he said as she approached.

She looked up and he could see that she had been crying.

"I hoped you'd be here," she sobbed.

"I was just leaving. I've got things to do."

"Tomorrow you'll be able to pick up your traps."

"Huh? I don't follow you."

"Because you're getting fired, the same as me."

"Tell me more," he said.

"I fainted this morning."

"So I heard."

"Carole went to her father about it, telling him that I

shouldn't have to lift things or do anything strenuous. She didn't want me fired, but he said he wasn't going to have any girl carrying a baby on his place. She didn't say anything about you, but when he talked to me, telling me I was through after today, I thought she had, and I let it slip." She almost choked on the words. "I'm so sorry, Eddie. Carole was furious with me because I gave you away, but I didn't mean to. I was just trying to tell Mr. Jennings that I wanted to marry you as soon as I could—if you'd have me. I—well, I guess he can't have sex and he doesn't want anybody else to."

Eddie was furious and he was sure that he showed it. Yet, he consoled himself, Jennings would be dead and a dead man couldn't fire anybody.

"It's all right," Eddie told her.

"What are you going to do now?"

"I have to think about it."

"There are some farm jobs advertised in the paper, over near the county seat. A couple of them have houses thrown in—one house is furnished—and if we told the people the truth about us they might go along."

"Maybe." For Eddie it was a pointless discussion.

"It's worth trying, isn't it?"

"We'll see."

Her face filled with pain.

"You don't love me, Eddie. Do you?"

Looking at her, he honestly didn't know. He thought of all of the beauty they had known together, of the moments they had shared, and emptiness welled up inside of him. Then he thought of Kitty, of the passion of her body, and his head spun.

"Don't go getting upset," he said, not answering her question.

"You'd be upset if you were me. I put my hands on my belly and I feel the baby in there. It's going to get bigger and bigger and bigger. There isn't much of a job I can get

and keep for very long. I need help, Eddie, and you're the only one who can help me."

"I'll help you."

"How?"

"I'll find a way. When my father died I had to get money, and I guess I can get money for you. The finance company told me I could borrow again whenever I wanted to."

The pain was still in her face.

"I want more than money, Eddie," she said. "I want you. We may have been wrong in what we did, but we can make part of it right by working together and loving each other."

"We'll see," he said.

"Don't let me down, Eddie. Stick with me for at least a little while."

"I won't let you down."

She turned and walked away, and he felt sorry for her. He would be able to get money from Kitty but money alone wouldn't satisfy Joan. Joan wanted a home and a husband and all that went with it. She was used to living on a small amount of money. She could stretch a dollar until she made two out of it, getting change in return. A man could do a lot worse than being married to a girl like Joan Kelder. She would forgive him his faults, and when things went wrong she would be with him a hundred per cent.

Joan disappeared inside the house and he walked toward the woods, trying not to hurry too much. A lump rose into his throat, getting bigger with almost every step. From a hired trapper he was turning into a killer. He wondered if he would ever forget this day, these moments during which he would cease to be a normal human being. He hoped that he could lose himself in Kitty's body, making love to her until he was exhausted, and the money would always be there, a huge cornucopia of money that could never be emptied.

He thought of a dozen things as he continued along the ridge toward the big pine tree. He thought of the day his father had died, of the picture of his mother that he had lost, of the first time he had been with Joan, making her cry out in the pain of first love. He thought of other girls, of girls who had been good and girls who had been bad, and he thought of Mrs. Norton yelling at him about his room rent. It was crazy the things he thought about, things that had been buried deep in the back of his mind, things that seemed cloudy and unreal now.

He saw the pine, standing tall and straight, and he dropped down behind the ridge to keep out of sight. Some of the boys were shooting and he heard one of them yell happily.

It wasn't too late to run, he told himself; it wasn't too late to stop before he went too far. But it was too late. In his own mind Jennings was already long dead and he was married to Kitty, spending the days with her on some beach in Florida and the nights in a big double bed.

There was some brush on the opposite slope of the ridge, and he walked around it. Every day had been hot lately but this one seemed to be hotter than any of the others. Sweat poured down his face and he could feel it on his arms and legs. He put one hand to the front of his T-shirt and it was wet, just as though he had worn it out in the rain that morning. But this was something he had never dreamed of doing before, and he was bound to be nervous. Once he stopped, standing very still, and he thought he could see his heart hammering against his chest wall, pumping the blood through his veins like an engine gone mad.

He stood there, doubt racing through his mind. What if he missed Jennings? Jesus, he simply couldn't miss. He had been brought up with a gun. They had had a rifle club in high school and he'd always been on the top of the scoring heap. He had been told that he ought

to be able to get a job with a firearms company, demonstrating.

"Damn," he muttered.

He had to get hold of himself, had to control his emotions. This was the most serious thing he had ever done. He couldn't botch it. A twenty-two wasn't a very big bullet, and it had to hit Jennings just right to do the trick. It had to be a brain shot. He had to drill Jennings good, just the way he would an animal or a snake, and then he had to run. The rest would be up to Kitty, the phoning for the police, the false tears, the dirty job of pointing a finger at the kids who were just fooling around.

There were, though, some things that he didn't like about it. Carole's knowledge that he had slept with Kitty, or her suspicion that he had, was one of them. And Joan's condition didn't help matters any. If the police looked far enough, if Carole and Joan talked, the police might become curious.

"I was in the woods," he would tell them. "Trapping. That's my job."

Could they prove differently? Eddie didn't think so. He would stay behind that big pine and nobody would see him, either when he fired the fatal shot or when he departed. The woods to the north were thick and he would soon lose himself. Then he would get rid of the gun in the swamp, hiding it in the mud, and when he got back to the house he would act surprised that Jennings was dead. He'd drift over to the county seat and hit into one of those jobs Joan had been talking about. Kitty had a car and they could meet nights, making love in some motel room or perhaps the car itself. It wasn't important where, as long as they were together.

A crow drifted out of the pine tree and the shotgun blasted. The crow changed course and continued flying. The shotgun blasted again. The crow sailed on. He could imagine Jennings cursing, reloading the shotgun, his sadistic mind in turmoil.

Eddie approached the pine tree. He could see the gun leaning up against the trunk even before he got there. He wiped the sweat from his forehead with a shaking hand. The murder weapon, he thought. Death. Death for Frank Jennings. Freedom for Kitty. Money for Kitty. Freedom and money for both Kitty and Eddie. Freedom and money and a whole damned future of glitter and gold.

He hid behind the huge tree and fingered the gun to see if it was loaded. He didn't have any shells with him and it would be hell if she hadn't loaded it. But she had. The clip was full, the death bullet in the chamber.

Carefully he peered from behind the tree. Jennings was down there all right, not more than a hundred and twenty-five feet away, just sitting there in his wheel chair, holding the shotgun.

"Run through that patch of laurel," Jennings shouted to his wife. "There's a rabbit in there and I want to blast his guts out."

Eddie could see Kitty on the other side of the laurel. She was looking toward the pine tree and when she saw him she sort of waved her hand.

"It's only a little rabbit," she called back.

"Did I ask you how big it was? I don't care if it's a day old. Just get it out here."

Eddie didn't like the idea of shooting downhill. When you shot downhill you were apt to hit higher on the target than you expected.

She came through the laurel, probably scratching her legs in the process, and the kids were having a ball just behind her. No doubt they were shooting deeper into the woods but nobody would ever be able to prove that. Nobody believed kids. Kids, when they were excited, were never quite sure what they did.

Eddie released the safety on the gun, then put it back on again. He had a clear view of Jennings and the shot would be a simple one. Jennings was sitting perfectly still,

intent on killing the rabbit. But no rabbit came out. Just Kitty.

"Let's move on," Jennings said. "The rabbit probably went into a hole."

Kitty glanced toward the tree again.

"I saw something on the ridge," she said. "You stay here. Let me circle around and see if I can drive it down here."

"What did it look like?"

"It might have been a deer."

"I don't care what it is. Just chase it out."

Kitty went back through the laurel bushes and Eddie lost sight of her. Jennings remained a perfect target and still he did nothing about it. It was too easy to send a death bullet down there and, once sent, impossible to take it back. Death was such a final thing, and even for a man like Jennings it seemed terrible to Eddie. Maybe Jennings had it coming, but it didn't mean that he, Eddie, had to do it. And yet . . .

Slowly the gun came up to his shoulders and he steadied it against the tree, his breath a streak of fire as he sucked air into his lungs. Jennings' side was toward him, the right side, and he got the ear riding on top of the front sight, moved the sight ahead about a couple of inches and down an inch. The bullet should strike Jennings exactly in the temple, the lead slamming itself into his brain.

Eddie's legs were weak, as though there were no bone beneath his knees at all. Each time his heart beat, the front sight of the gun went up and down a little, and the sweat that was gathering in his eyes didn't help matters.

He hadn't shot yet, but he could hear the explosion of the gun, and he could see Jennings slumping forward, falling face down on the ground. He could feel himself running, a killer on the loose, his only desire in life to escape the consequences of his act. But could he escape in the arms of a woman or with a bottle of booze? Even

killing animals bothered him. What would it be like to have another man's blood on his hands?

Quickly the gun came down and he got all the way behind the tree, leaning against the rough bark. He couldn't do it.

"Eddie!"

She was below the crest of the ridge, watching him. With a great deal of effort he walked down to her.

"What the hell is the matter with you?" she demanded in a husky whisper. "You waiting for him to die of a heart attack or something?"

"I had the gun on him but—"

"But what?"

"I couldn't." With his free hand he grabbed one of her arms. "This is insane, Kitty. There has to be another way."

Her dark eyes flashed.

"There isn't any other way, Eddie, and you know it. Here we've got it made—the kids here, Wilson in town—and you haven't got the guts of a fish worm that's been dead for a week."

"Listen to me," he pleaded. "For Christ's sake, listen! We kill him and it'll be with us the rest of our lives. We won't be able to look at each other without seeing him, remembering what we did."

"A couple of million dollars—"

"It isn't worth it. Can't you see that, Kitty? There isn't a life, no matter how bad, that's worth it. If you'd only—"

Cursing, she broke loose and grabbed the gun from his hand.

"I'll get him," she promised, plunging to the top of the ridge. "I'll get him myself, you weak-brained infant."

He reached her just as she got the gun to her shoulder, just in time to ruin her aim. Even so, the bullet came close to Jennings and he glanced toward the big pine tree in alarm.

"What's going on?" he shouted.

"You're going to get yours, you slob," she screamed,

fighting with Eddie for the gun, biting and kicking and scratching with her sharp fingernails.

Jennings must have sensed the danger because he threw the shotgun away and, like a wounded crab, began to wheel himself out of the woods, the muscles of his powerful arms corded in the sunlight.

"Help me!" Jennings hollered. "Somebody help me!"

But Eddie couldn't help him. He was having all he could do to control Kitty. She fought like two cats in a barrel and the words she uttered came from the depths of the sewer, words that Eddie had seldom heard hardened men use.

"Let me go, you bastard," she gasped. "Give me the gun and let me finish him off."

"No. Use your head. You want to die for murder?"

"I want his money. I have to have his money. I married him for his money and neither you nor anyone else is going to stop me from getting it."

"You'll never get it, baby. You ran your race and you lost."

When at last she knew it was no use she sank to the ground, sobbing. She wasn't a pretty sight, her halter ripped from her body in the struggle for the gun, her shorts high and tight on her legs that had been scratched by the laurel bushes.

"Oh, you bastard," she kept saying over and over again. "You rotten bastard, Eddie."

He unloaded the gun and threw the shells away. The gun followed the shells into the undergrowth.

"Let's get up to the house," Eddie said gently. "We'd better talk to him."

"Shut up."

"Well, you just can't lie there. The bullet was close and he knows what you were trying to do. We better see him before he calls the police."

She sat up.

"You're in it with me, Eddie."

"I didn't say I wasn't."

"And I'll tell him it was your idea. I'll fix you just as I fixed Jim. He wouldn't go through with it either. He was just as yellow as you are. All he wanted to do was give me a kid and I can't have any kids."

"But I thought—"

"Oh, that was a stall, you stupid fool, you big clod of a farmer boy. I had an abortion when I was twenty and the woman did a miserable job. They had to take me to a hospital and they had to take out what I needed to have brats. It didn't bother me. I didn't want any, anyway. Brats just scream in your ears and you have to wipe their filthy noses."

She had called him a clod and he guessed he had been one but, strangely enough, it didn't bother him. She had given him her body and in exchange for that she had wanted the death of her husband. He saw it all now, as clearly as he saw the sun in the sky, a red and angry sun that spoke of more hot weather to come.

"You weren't going to marry me," he whispered, more to himself than to her.

She got to her feet and brushed herself off.

"You nuts or something, Eddie?"

"You'd have left me holding the bag, wouldn't you?"

"If there was one to hold. But I'd have given you money. I could have afforded to. You take a few thousand out of a couple of million and you don't even miss it."

"How do you know? You never had a couple of million."

He swung around, turning his back to her, and walked away. He saw his love for her for what it had been—nothing. Like a lot of men, he supposed, he had been thinking in terms of money, but there was more to life. There was the feeling of being wanted, of being needed, of sharing your days and nights with somebody who cared as much as you did. Of course there was sex, but sex was the expression of love and not the whole of it. Some nights you might not even think about it, but love was

there just the same, the warmth and the tender goodness of it.

Eddie didn't expect to find Jennings on the lawn but he was there all right. The only thing missing was the bottle.

"Thanks," Jennings said. "I think I know what you did."

"I was in on it from the start."

"Were you?"

"Yes. Unfortunately."

"What changed your mind?"

"Maybe the risk. I don't know. How do you answer a question like that? You just seem to slide into these things and they seem so right at the time."

Jennings dug a cigar out of his pocket.

"I won't be needing a trapper," he said as he held a match to the cigar.

"Sorry to hear that. I could use the job."

"With the expenses you have coming up?"

"That's it."

"You never enjoyed your work, did you?"

"No. I thought it was wrong from the start. There are a few animals that should be killed, but not all of them."

"None of them," Jennings said.

"Suit yourself."

"I saw it down there in the woods, wheeling myself out of there. I was trapped and I was frightened. I didn't like it. If it hadn't been for you she would have killed me, just the way I've killed animals." Jennings puffed on the cigar. "It all started with the horse, the one that threw me. Maybe the horse wasn't even to blame. Kitty was in back of me at the time, riding close, and she may have done something that caused the horse to buck. But I blamed the horse and I bought it and I had it killed. My injury made me want to kill everything that was a stupid, unreasoning animal and that's what I've been doing ever since. I'm not physically able to do it very well myself, so I hired others. But today, when I was trapped

between that gun and death, I realized how the animals must feel. I thought animals were cruel—I kept telling myself that—but I found out that the human animal can be more cruel.”

“Cruel?” Eddie countered. “I saw her breasts. I saw the teeth marks and the bruises. I’d say you were cruel, Jennings.”

“I never touched her,” Jennings said. “She did the same thing when Jim was here. She did it to herself. I saw her then, and after I fired Jim I felt sure that he hadn’t done it. She was simply trying to arouse him as she aroused you.”

“What are you going to do?”

“I’m not going to the police, if that’s what you mean. I’ll settle a couple of hundred thousand dollars on her and she can get a divorce in another state. Maybe someday she’ll find herself and maybe she won’t. It isn’t my worry. In some ways she’s been a good wife to me, taking care of me because she insisted on doing it, but I can always hire a nurse.”

A few minutes later Eddie excused himself and walked toward his room over the garage.

He didn’t walk fast. It had been some day.

THE BUS to the county seat was old, and the seats hard as bare boards. Not many people rode the bus and everyone wondered how the operator stayed in business.

"I'm glad to get away from Wildwood Acres," Eddie said, sitting down beside Joan. "I've done a lot of crazy things in my life but what I did out there—or almost did—was crazier than any of them."

"We all wander once in a while," Joan said. "I guess it's human nature."

He glanced at Joan. She was a good kid, a nice girl, and she would make a fine wife. They had just come from her lawyer, and it wouldn't be too long before she had her divorce from Paul. As soon as she was free Eddie would marry her, and he would never ask for another girl for the rest of his life.

"Mr. Jennings was nice about it," she said. "I think he really loved Kitty, but he was glad to find out what kind of a girl she is. Wonder what she'll do with all the money he's giving her?"

"Squander it and go broke. Or maybe she'll find another man. I don't think I'll worry about her. A girl like Kitty will always get along—by hook or crook. But I guess she was lucky and so was I. Jennings had enough on both of us to have us arrested."

"Yes, he did."

"But it took what happened to change him, and he's glad of that. He won't want to kill everything in sight

anymore, and in a few years there'll be more game on Wildwood Acres than any other place in the country."

The ancient bus groaned as the driver pulled out into the street.

"I'm glad you didn't take that five thousand dollars from Carole," Joan said.

"I couldn't. She knew what Kitty was, but I couldn't touch the money. I didn't earn it, really, and it was pretty dirty money. The five hundred dollar bonus Jennings gave to me is another story. I like to think I did earn that."

"Well, it'll help. And I thought it was very decent for Mr. Jennings to get you the job on the farm."

"Yeah, he turned out okay."

The farm was near the county seat, a dairy farm, and Jennings knew the owner. Eddie's job would be in the barn, running the milking machines and caring for the cows, and Joan was to help out around the house as long as she could. There would be separate rooms for them, but after they were married they could move into a little furnished cottage on the farm. The pay was two seventy-five a month and their keep. It wasn't a fortune, but it wasn't bad. The manager of the farm was retiring in another year, and Eddie had a chance of working up into that.

"Know something?" Eddie asked as he lit a cigarette. "I didn't think you'd forgive me."

There was just the faint trace of hurt in her eyes.

"But I love you, Eddie," she said. "I had to forgive you."

"I love you, Joan."

No one paid any attention when they kissed. They wouldn't have cared. They were in love and they wanted the world to know.

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THRILL HUNTERS

WILDWOOD ACRES was a civilized wilderness up-state, playground of crippled, uppercrust Frank Jennings—a man of untamed lusts . . . of strange, untrammelled passions . . . of urges to hurt and kill anything and anybody defenseless enough! For his pleasure he collected not only helpless animals, but an assortment of beautiful women. . . .

THERE was summer-hot Kitty, his simmering young wife. There was radiantly blonde Carole, as twisted as Jennings himself. There was jet-haired Joan Keider, who refused to starve for thrills while a guy like Eddie Boyd was in the neighborhood.

EDDIE dallied with Joan, and toyed with pretty Kitty. Then even Carole was driven into his arms by Jennings' brutalities. Like the rest of them, Eddie was getting the message—

*"You only live once — but you
can love plenty of times!"*

TRAPPED BY LUXURY, WARPED BY HATE,
COULD THESE BRUTALIZED LUST-MONGERS
ATTAIN A SECOND CHANCE? A PAINFULLY
FRANK, PAINFULLY REAL NOVEL BY

ORRIE HITT