

A Novel

LOWER THAN ANGELS



WALTER KARIG

"Mr. Karig is the first new writer of 1945 for whom it is worth while to send up a Roman candle."

—Harrison Smith

Saturday Review of Literature

LOWER THAN ANGELS

by

Walter Karig

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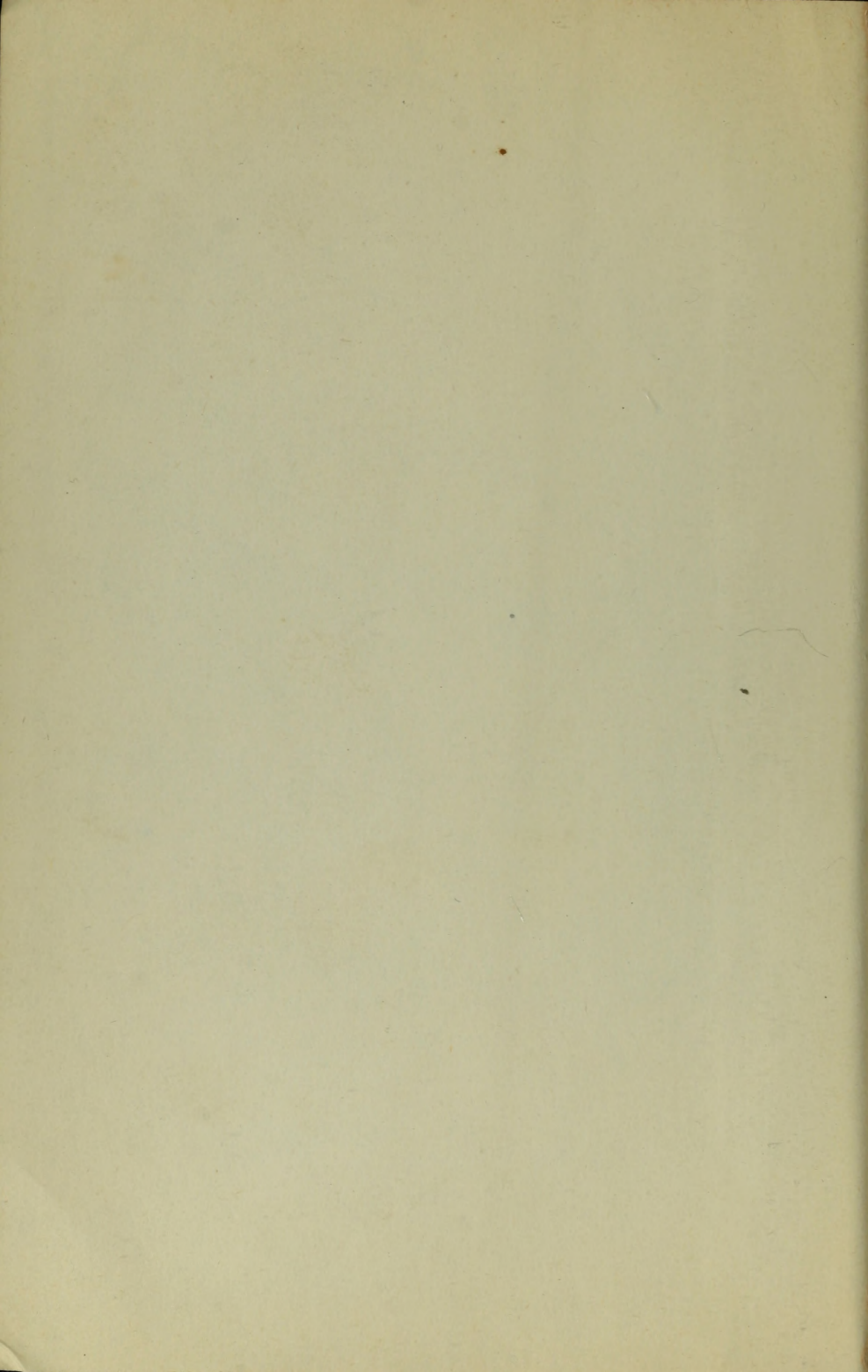
"Without doubt a major achievement as a caustic and revealing record of one man's petty existence and forceful storytelling."

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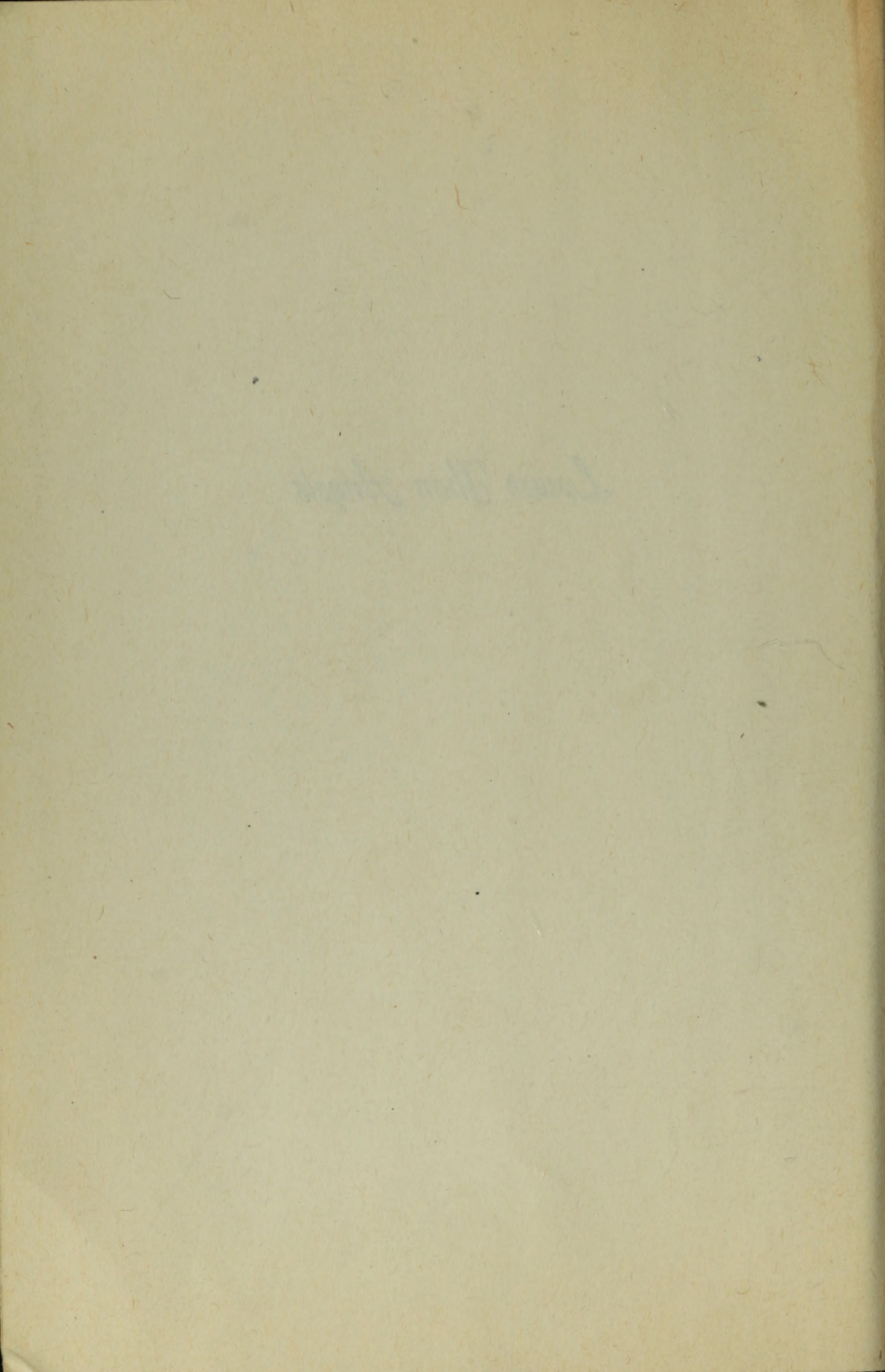
Chicago Daily News

(Continued on back flap)

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Lower Than Angels



Lower Than Angels

by Walter Karig

"What is man that thou art
mindful of him . . . for thou
hast made him a little lower than
the angels."

PSALM VIII



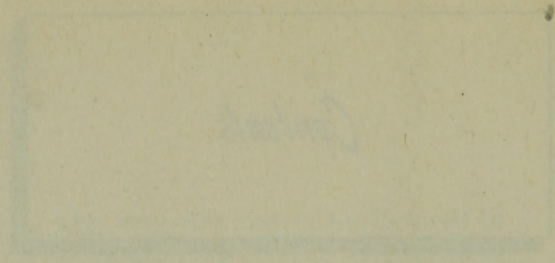
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Lower Than Angels

James John Taylor

1900

IT WAS NOT that he gave much thought to such things, but childhood memories troubled Marvin. *His mother's wedding*, now; not his father's. It was Mother's wedding. The minister had stood on the square of bright carpet, unfaded and unworn because protected eight months in the year by the sheet of embossed zinc on which the base-burner stood. After the wedding everybody had thrown rice at his mother. The pulpy white grains, smelling of cinnamon, clung soggily to her like April snow.

He remembered, but it could not be true. He had not existed at all, then. He was Nothing. Besides, he knew that it was not boiled rice people threw at brides. It was just that he had heard the story of the wedding so many times, had heard it when so small that rice to him meant only breakfast cereal.

The first time he had been allowed to cross the street alone; that was certainly a true memory. He remembered how very large it made him feel, to be able to see the house all in one glance. Before that the front of the house was a stoop and three windows on a background of gray clapboard, but from across the street he could see the second floor, which had four windows, and the sucked-in third floor which looked like a fish. Mansard roof and scalloped shingles the cause of that impression.

Grandpa and Grandma Lang lived on the ground floor.

When Marvin went to New York with his mother to visit Grandma McAneny, Mother would tell strangers who came in to drink tea that Grandpa and Grandma lived on the ground floor. It puzzled Marvin when she also explained that the Old Folks lived on Grandpa's pension.

"They make it stretch and bank the rents . . ."

Marvin decided that the pension was the matting on Grandpa's floors, which gaped at the seams and did not quite meet the base-

board; obviously stretched. Grown people talked too much about things that did not make pictures.

Grandma McAneny lived by herself and Mother brought her things to eat. Little bags of tea and the ends of bacon, with a loop of whiskery brown cord through them. The toilet was in the hall and was very dark, and often Marvin danced outside the door until a fat man came out, looping his suspenders over his undershirt. Grandma McAneny cried a great deal; she had a funny smell, and roaches. For some reason it was not nice to notice the roaches when other people were there.

Usually there were other old ladies there, waiting to drink the tea. They always said what nice manners Marvin had. Mother would smile a special smile and say she prided herself that Marvin was as well-behaved as the next.

"My father was in service to a belted earl," Grandma McAneny explained. "He was very particular about manners, and I guess it was passed on."

"And what a nelegant name, 'Marvin,'" the visitors would say.

"The Old Folks wanted to call him Martin—Martin Luther," was Mother's reply. "But I put my foot down. I won my point. I was determined."

"You was always a determined one," Grandma McAneny said.

Marvin was glad when they stopped talking about him.

From Grandma McAneny's windows one looked out on a giant spider's web of washlines, forever hung with gray underwear. Sometimes the wind swelled the shirts and drawers, so handless arms reached passionately for trunkless, footless legs that leaped coily away. That was fun; about the only fun one had at Grandma McAneny's, but he was never allowed to watch very long. Grandma or Mother would pull him away from the window.

"Twill be giving him dirty thoughts. . . ."

He did not know why clean-washed clothes should be able to give him dirty thoughts.

From Grandma Lang's kitchen windows one looked out on the back yard, all snug behind the whitewashed fence. The yard was one big flower garden, with round beds and crescent-shaped ones, long narrow beds and a star-shaped one. The oleander and the rubber plant sat out in the garden all summer; in the winter the oleander was put in the cellar, where its leaves fell off, and the rubber plant was moved into the front room. All between the flower beds were paths made of ashes, sifted. In the beds were pansies and four-o'clocks and marigolds that stunk.

Marvin was not allowed in the garden alone.

For a long time Father did not count. He was an entity on Sundays only, surrounded by the New York *Journal* in sections. After dinner he put his collar on and took Marvin for a walk. Beyond Sixth Avenue it was "country," and one had to walk carefully because cows had been pastured there.

When he was four he began to go to Sunday school. Annie Schroeder, who waited on customers in her father's delicatessen on Fifth Avenue, was his teacher.

"And what did the Projjical Son's father do when he came home again?"

"He fell on his neck and said to kill the fatted calf."

Did the Prodigal Son's father fall on his own neck or on the son's? Marvin visualized the scene first one way and then the other as he walked home, the blue, pink and gold motto card in the pocket of his blouse.

"Step on a crack, you'll break your mother's back."

Six years old and Marvin went to kindergarten. His mother took him every morning and was waiting for him at noon, because school was five blocks away and trolley tracks had to be crossed. On rainy days he sat at home, because he was delicate.

Winter was when Marvin wore a flannel cloth soaked in camphor oil pinned around his neck.

Marvin's parents lived on the second floor. The stairs were covered in brown linoleum with shiny brass binding.

On the third floor lived the Tenants. Every spring the old tenants were replaced by new ones. Sometimes they had children, whom Marvin passed shyly on the stairs, hugging the wall and walking sideways. He was not allowed to play with them. The third-floor dwellers probably all had names of their own, but for years Marvin knew them only as the Tenants.

There was an exception. For one winter the people upstairs were the Catholics, and Marvin's warnings to flee the company of the Catholic kids were more pointedly administered than when just Tenants occupied the third floor. Marvin gathered that the Catholics had sneaked in as mere Tenants, but once safely ensconced had revealed their true classification.

"Momma, what are Catholics?"

"Hush! They are idolaters. And dont say Momma!"

That did not help any at all. It was a harder word to say, idolaters, and didnt mean anything, either.

But the Catholics paid their rent. That gave them a certain

dark immunity, so Marvin was not allowed to mention "Catholic" where he might be overheard, any more than he was allowed to name roaches.

Grandpa Lang was the landlord. Even Father paid him money to live in the gray house. God was a lord, too; and one had to pay money to enter His House too.

When Father visited with Grandpa and Grandma he spoke German. It sounded to Marvin as if they were constantly clearing their throats. He learned to say "kuchen" with a slice of caraway cake as reward for not pronouncing the word "koo-ken," but Mother was not pleased.

"You shut your ears to that Dutch gabble and talk English like a proper American should.

("Now dont run and tell your father and the Old Folks what I said, do you hear me?")

Sometimes when Father came upstairs from a visit with the Old Folks he and Mother would have an Argument.

"Why did you marry me, then?"

"Now, be reasonable, Margaret. Did I say anything to make you talk like that?"

"Why dont you go back and live with them, then? All I do is waste your money. I throw it away. Ha-ha!"

"You're getting hysterical. You must be overtired."

"Overtired? Me? With nothing to do all day except waste your money?"

Sometimes Mother cried and then Father would stamp around the flat and then kiss her, and give Marvin a penny to go down to the store and buy himself an apple-on-a-stick.

"But eat it on the stoop. You'll get everything all sticky." Usually when he went back inside they were having a Nap.

Sometimes Mother did not cry, and then Father would put on his collar and go out for a walk. He would be back for supper, only he and Mother didnt talk to each other. The next day everything would be all right again.

Father was a superintendent in Bohan's, on Fulton Street. Marvin had been to see him several times with Mother. Father walked up and down the aisles in the basement, where washtubs, flowerpots, wallpaper and shovels were sold.

"Number Sev-vun! Sev-vun? This lady wants to see a child's chamber.

"Oilcloth? Two aisles over, madam.

"Hello, Margaret. Well, Marvin! Come to help your father?"

Dont spin on the stools. A granite No. 2 saucepan, Miss Spitz, employees' discount."

If one got on the trolley going the opposite way from Bohan's one came to Coney Island.

There Marvin rode the merry-go-round and dug in the sand with a broken aluminum spoon Mother or Father brought along in a pocket. He was allowed to eat molasses popcorn and to have a strawberry milkshake, which a man drew from the udder of a plaster cow that moved her head jerkily from side to side, all day long. There was a scramble to get into the front seats of the open trolley on the trip home.

1903

MARVIN NEVER deliberately probed the past. Memories came to him in this wise: the salty-rotten smell of salt marshes brought fleetingly to mind the trolley rides home from Coney Island; golden oak recalled the pews in the Lutheran church. A noon whistle reminiscent of ferryboat sirens brought back to mind series of childhood episodes, unrelated, a set of mental magic lantern slides projected without order on the backs of his eyelids.

The time a man gave him a celluloid button with the picture of a man on it and "For Mayor, Seth Low" lettered around the rim; a much bigger boy whose lapels were covered with dozens of other celluloid badges took Marvin's away from him on the stoop of his own house.

The time the boy in the seat in front of his at school could not get permission to go to the basement because it was nearly lunchtime; and wet his pants.

The time he was given a handful of lichee nuts by the Chinese laundryman; and Marvin was warned by his mother never to go near the place again because the Chinese were heathen and did dark and wicked deeds.

The time he first dared yell "Get a horse!" at a passing automobile.

The time . . .

Marvin was just seven years old and in the first grade. His mother still took him to and from school, four times a day now. Arithmetic and reading.

"If John has six apples and William has two apples, how many apples have they together?"

"Aye-bee Ab; aye-dee Ad. I see the cat. The cat can run. Go on from there, Marvin Lang."

Meaningless black wriggles on the paper suddenly become words.

"Now you can read the funny paper yourself."

School that smelled of dust and rubber; Miss Cooper making him blackboard monitor.

Fire drills, and Miss-Slocum-the-principal waddling up and down the shuffling lines, cutting at the sluggish ones with a long, rubber-tipped pointer.

"This school must be emptied in two minutes!"

Snow, head-high, piled along the gutters.

Flannel and camphorated oil.

Warm rains, puddles and Grandma Lang's cough syrup; an onion and a lemon boiled in sugar-water. Violets in the vacant lots. New houses being built, and the smell of pine shavings and fresh mortar.

Grandma Lang in the middle of the street with a peach basket and a coal shovel, scraping up horse manure for her garden.

The ceremony of putting out the oleander. Hot days, and thundershowers coming up across the bay.

"Keep away from the stove, Marvin. Keep away from the bed. You may get a shock."

Father putting in the screens on Sunday. Sudden gusts of wind sending the gas mantles showering on the supper table like hot snow. The gorgeous torch ceremony of "burning off" a new mantle.

Summer and vacation.

Summer gone, and school again. The dignity of being in the second grade. New shoes, new blouses, pants with three buttons in a row on either knee.

"When can I have pants that button down the front like Father's?"

"Hi-yi, Marvin's stable door is open!"

Shorter afternoons and homework.

Marvin called upon to recite multiplication tables whenever there were visitors to Miss Whalen's room.

"An three times twelves thurrysix!"

"John had five marbles and Lewis had two, that makes seven marbles, and Jack had eight, that makes fifteen. Three into fifteen goes five times."

Reading was silly and singing was worse. History was all about dead people.

Winter again.

"Ya-ah! Marvy blieves in Sandy Claws! Marvy blieves in Sandy Claws! Baby! Baby!"

"Mother, aint there a Sandy Claws?"

"Yes, there is, and theres a Brownie in the chimney this minute writing down everything you say."

Bohan's Santa Claus listening abstractedly to a list of desires. Christmas, and all faith in Santa Claus justified because of the set of soldiers with guns, and cannons that shot split peas.

"I think Sandy Claws left something downstairs with Grandma for you."

Winter and spring and summer.

Marvin, the delicate child. Onion cough syrup and cod-liver emulsion.

Swollen glands, earache, second teeth, rotten teeth. German measles, chickenpox, "bronicle trouble."

1906

NOTHING MUCH TO remember, because one day was so like the next.

Then Grandpa died.

When Grandpa died, Marvin began to live.

One morning Marvin was not awakened for school. He was allowed to open his eyes of his own accord. He blinked, yawned, dozed again.

The room was unusually sunny, like a Saturday or Sunday morning. It was very quiet in the flat.

Marvin jumped out of bed. He slept in the hall bedroom. He walked into the sunny front room, parted the cold, noisy bead curtains that hung in the frame of the double doorway which led into his parents' room. Their bed was not made. The blankets were not even thrown over the tortured brass footrail. Marvin did not stop to wonder, because it was cold in the house. He trotted into the next room, where the never-opened folding bed and trunks stood in perpetual gloom. The dining room was tidy.

Marvin did not look into the kitchen, but darted through the right-hand door into the bathroom, dropping the lower part of his flannelet pajamas as he reached his goal.

He flushed the toilet and washed his hands like a little gentleman ("Always be a gentleman, Marvin!") and then entered the kitchen. It was delightfully warm, and his clothes were laid out on the chair that could be metamorphosed into a stepladder with one flip of the hand.

There were no dishes on the tubs or in the sink.

Marvin began to feel alarmed. He shook a little with nervousness but thought it was because of the cold. He put on his stockings, black except at knees, toes and heels where they were sort of greenish. Then he pulled on his underwear as far as he could

without removing the top half of his pajamas, pulled on shoes and pants.

Just then Mother entered the room.

She carried the pajama pants Marvin had forgotten to retrieve. Her eyelids were puffy and red and her nose was swollen and red.

Marvin guessed at once there had been an "argument" and wondered. Usually his parents "argued" at night or on Sunday afternoons.

"Mu-mu-mu—" his mother said. "Mu-mu-marvin. Gu-gu-gu—"

Marvin began to cry himself.

His mother wiped her eyes on the pajama half she still clutched.

"Gu-granpa died last night, Marvin. He's dead."

Marvin sat down on the floor and howled.

He did not weep for grief. He wept to be sociable.

Some time later Father came up from downstairs. He had been crying too. That surprised Marvin so much he stopped weeping.

"I'll make some coffee, and you take a cup down to your mother," Mother said.

"All right," answered Father, staring out the kitchen window.

While the coffee water was boiling Marvin had his breakfast; a soft-boiled egg, bread with the crust trimmed off, warm milk.

"Can I see Granpa?"

"Later."

It was funny to be out on the streets with no other kids around. A peddler came walking up the gutter, yodeling; behind him plodded his horse, pulling a very small cart. It was the horseradish man, Marvin remembered. He had not seen the horseradish man since he had started school.

When the 12-o'clock whistle blew the kids came home from school.

"Hey, Marvy! Your granpas dead."

"I know it, dont I?"

After lunch Father took Marvin for a long walk. They went down to the Shore Drive and looked across the water. Marvin saw a dead fish. On the way home Father bought him a waffle covered with powdered sugar from a man in a red wagon with a stove in it.

When they reached the house Marvin twisted his hand from Father's grip and retreated to the curb.

"Marvin! What's the matter?"

"I dowanna! I dowanna!"

He pointed to the doorway, where a huge rosetted black crape quivered in the breeze.

"Dont be silly! Come along, now. That's only the crape."

"It—they hung Grandpa up on the door."

"Marvin, you're a little fool! Come along!"

Jerk, jerk, up the steps, feet scarcely touching them.

"Here, look at it. Feel it!"

Marvin screamed. He screamed and stiffened his spine, his arms, his legs. He shut his eyes.

Mother came running to the door, Grandma behind her.

"The neighbors are all gawking out of the windows. What is the matter?"

"Your son thinks the crape is my father."

"Marvin! Shame on you, baby! And the undertaker inside too."

Upstairs at last, and alone again. Marvin played with his soldiers.

The next day Father went to work, but Marvin stayed home from school. Mother was constantly downstairs. She came up from time to time, her head wrapped in a dustcloth, her skirts pinned up.

"I'm trusting you to keep away from the stove, now. And dont play with matches. There are buns in the cupboard."

No red eyes, no grief. Just bustle and a strong smell of yellow soap.

In the afternoon he was taken to Bohan's, and Father bought him a black tie, employee's discount.

"He looks so natural."

"Is he laid out already?"

"They just finished when I came down. The Tenants sent a real nice wreath. I guess you'll have to ask them down for the services."

Home again.

"Now you can see Granpa."

He was pushed into the transformed front room in the downstairs flat. All the chairs had been pushed back against the wall, and the dining room chairs brought in to make the line solid. The center table was gone. Between the windows was a long, black box with silver handles. Grandpa was in it, lying on his back, his long nose in the air, his beard trimmed, a calla lily in his breast-clasped hands.

Flowers were banked all around on the floor, and two big potted palms stood behind the coffin.

"Isn't it pretty!" Marvin exclaimed.

"Du kleiner Engel, du!" Grandma said, kissing him.

The doorbell rang, and a man came in with the dresses that had been dyed black for Grandma and Mother. Before he had gone a boy arrived with another wreath.

"Can Freddie come in and see Granpa?"

"Certainly not!"

"Can't he just come in the hall so he can smell how nice it smells?"

"No!"

The services were held after supper, a sketchy supper served off the washtubs in the kitchen upstairs. People started coming in before Marvin had finished his prunes. When he was led into the front room the beds were piled high with hats and coats. Mr. Schlegel, the Lutheran minister, was in the dining room with Father, sipping a glass of Grandma's dandelion wine. Downstairs the front room was filled. Nearest the coffin four empty chairs were reserved "for the immediate family." Two old men from the G.A.R. post, canes between their knees, sat on either side of the empty chairs. The air was thick with the smell of roses, carnations and mothballs.

Everybody talked in whispers. When Father came in, with Grandma holding to his arm, everyone hushed. As soon as Grandma and Father were seated, Mr. Schlegel came in. He walked up to the coffin and looked down at Grandpa, his bulging brown eyes all moist.

Mr. Schlegel parted his brown mustache and Marvin saw his chin for the first time. Then he started speaking in German. Grandma just sat looking straight ahead, and Marvin occupied himself with watching the tears that oozed from her unblinking eyes choose the wrinkle down which they coursed to her chin.

After a while Mr. Schlegel began speaking in English and shortly Mother began to sob. Marvin wondered whom Mr. Schlegel was talking about. It seemed to be a brother of his who was the most wonderful man in the world. It was very tiresome, so he began to sob too.

Soon the sobs came louder and faster than he could help, and the man from the Tenants got up and took him by the hand. He led him out on the stoop, where the man emitted a gusty sigh and lit a cigar. He fished in his pockets and pulled out a lump of sugar, blew on it, rubbed it on his sleeve, gave it to Marvin.

They stayed out there until the people began to leave. They trickled out in ones and twos, Mr. Schlegel among the first.

Then Father came out, thanked the Tenant, and took Marvin upstairs. Marvin was so tired his father undressed him, and Marvin did not remember beyond his shoes being taken off.

He was awakened early the next morning. Mother and Father were all dressed up again, and Grandma was in the kitchen too. In his best clothes and new black Buster Brown tie Marvin was sent out to the street with strict orders not to turn the corner.

Pretty soon a long black wagon with glass sides drove up and stopped in front of the door. Two coaches pulled in behind it. The drivers got down, looked at the house critically, and filled pipes.

The two old men from the G.A.R. post arrived, and the undertaker's wagon.

"Marvin, come in and take a last look at Granpa."

Obediently Marvin went into the front room. Grandma was sitting next to the coffin, still oozing big round tears and chewing on her false teeth. The two old soldiers and Father were standing in the middle of the room, uncomfortably erect.

"Yes, sir, he was a good man," one of the old soldiers said.

"A fine man," the other seconded.

"A better father never lived," Father said.

Mother led Marvin up to the coffin. He had no choice but to stare at the corpse. It *didn't* look much like Grandpa.

"Are we all ready?" asked the undertaker, sticking his head into the room.

Mother started to cry out loud, and Grandma began rocking back and forth, calling out:

"Gottfried! Gottfried!"

And Father put his hands up to his face and made strange noises.

Marvin fled the room. He ran outside and one of the coachmen picked him up by the elbows and popped him into the first carriage. It smelled horsey.

Marvin saw that all the children on the block too small to be in school, and a few delivery boys in white aprons, four or five strange men and old Mrs. Polack were standing in a double line, facing each other across an imaginary path that led from the stoop to the long, black, glass-sided wagon.

The undertaker signaled from the door and the drivers went into the house, leaving their hats on the seats of their vehicles. Very soon after that they came out, carrying the coffin on their

shoulders, the undertaker and Father assisting. Behind came one of the old soldiers, leading Grandma. She had a black veil over her face. Behind them came the other old soldier, leading Mother. She had a black veil over her face, and was leaning away back as she walked.

The coffin was shoved into the long wagon. Grandma and Mother climbed into the carriage with Father close behind. The two old soldiers got into the other coach and began smoking. The undertaker went into the house and came back with the flowers that had not found room on top of the coffin.

They drove to Evergreen Cemetery.

It was the first time Marvin had ever been to a cemetery. It was as big a treat as Coney Island. There were gravel roads between all sorts of fancy statues and stone vases.

At last they got out of the coaches and walked over the mushy ground to where a pile of yellow mud made an ugly mess on the baby grass. Two men in overalls were standing next to a neat hole, and from nowhere Mr. Schlegel came up and joined them.

"I'm afraid it is too damp here for Marvin," Mother said.

"He shoudt see his grossvater undergroundt," Grandma said.

"I'm afraid," Mother said with a sideways jerk of her head.

"It's too damp. Marvin, go back to the coach like a good boy."

Marvin went, dodging past the men carrying the coffin. He got into the wrong coach, as the smell of tobacco warned him, but a folded newspaper on the seat proved to have funny pictures in it. After he looked at them all twice he amused himself picturing Grandpa with long white wings sticking out through the back of his brown vest. Then the folks came back from the graveside, Mother and Grandma crying harder than ever, Father looking at his fat silver watch.

The procession trotted away briskly and soon after leaving the cemetery it stopped again. Everybody got out and went into a big, white frame building with a wide porch all around it. Inside it smelled sort of queer, sort of sweet and yet sort of sour. Everybody sat down, with a loud scraping of chairs, at round tables and a man in a white apron like a butcher's came up and wiped off the tables.

Everybody had coffee and knockwurst and fat rolls, but the coffee did not taste like it did at home. The coach drivers gobbled their food and then went into another room through a door that had a little window in it. The funeral party had to wait awhile until they came out again, laughing and quite jolly, wiping

their mouths on the backs of their hands. One of them gave Marvin a pretzel.

Marvin always remembered every detail of the funeral because it was the beginning of things happening. From then on everything was different.

When he returned to school proudly conscious of the black badge of sorrow at his throat he found himself become a personality. Even fourth-grade girls plied him with questions about the corpse and listened respectfully to his answers.

The Sunday after the funeral it rained. Marvin was excused from going to Sunday school; read, instead, from his *Little Folks' Bible Tales*, profusely illustrated with line drawings in which the artist had sapped his talent concentrating on flowing draperies. Marvin thought the halos on Christ and the saints were the brims of straw hats cocked overmuch on one side, and wondered at the toughness of the celestial ones.

Marvin loved the Old Testament stories best; the Queen who was thrown out of a window to be eaten by dogs; Samson getting his eyes poked out and finally gloriously crushing himself in one burst of wrath, strength and humiliation.

He lay on his belly under the dining-room table, David hiding from Saul. His buttocks twitched with delicious alarm whenever Father or Mother walked past, he- and she-Goliaths fruitlessly seeking to devour him.

They were talking about the funeral, of course.

"It's going to be hard on my mother."

"Easier, I should say. Your Father was always bossy."

"He was head of his house."

"Well, at their age living together just gets to be a habit. It don't mean much, except harking back to when they was younger."

"She'll be lonesome, though."

"She's got her garden, and birds."

"I think you're hard."

Marvin sensed that an "argument" was brewing, the way his mother's voice grew higher, and his father's lower.

"I think the sensible way to do would be to ask my mother to come up here and live with us."

"You're just saying that to mad me."

"No, I aint. Look, be reasonable. She could have the hall-room, and Marvin could sleep in the spare room."

"She can do your cookin and cleanin and darnin, then, and

what else you need a woman for you can get from that red-haired Jezebel in crockery."

"Now you're talking like a fool—"

"I wont stay."

"For God's sakes, be reasonable! Lissen! If my mother comes upstairs she wont charge us no rent. That'll be \$12 a month. And she can rent the ground floor."

"She'll moren eat up the twelve, and what good is it to us if the ground floors rented?"

"We'll get it in the end—not soon, please God."

"You've asked her already?"

"Well, I talked it over."

"It was her idea, wasnt it?"

"N-no, no, it wasnt."

"When is she moving up?"

"Whenever you say."

"She can come tomorrow."

"I knew youd be sensible."

"I'll start packing at once."

"Dont be a damn fool."

"I wont take anything dont belong to me."

"For God's sakes—!"

"I didnt bring my widowed mother in on top of you, did I?"

"That's different. This is my mother's house."

"She can have it. I wont be in her way. All I ask is that you let me see my Marvin once in a while."

At this point Marvin set up a roar from his hiding place. He scuttled out from under the table and clutched his mother's knees.

"Dont go away, mother! Take me with you!"

"See, even your son doesnt want to stay."

"I *do* wanna stay. I *dowanna* go away!"

"Hush, Marvin!"

"Marvin, shut up!"

Mother picked up the sobbing Marvin, dragged him to her lap as she sat down in the Boston rocker. He put his arms around her neck, stuck his nose under her ear and sobbed.

The grown folks didnt say anything at all. Father paced the room awhile and then picked up the papers and went into the front room.

Nothing was said at supper beyond "butter, please!" or "any more coffee?"

They must have talked after he went to bed, Marvin reasoned, because the next night Father carried up bundles from downstairs wrapped in sheets. He brought up bed linens, bolsters, vases and chinaware. Mother cleaned out his hallroom noisily.

"Do I have to sleep on the folding bed? Cant I have my own bed?"

"No!"

"I want my *own* bed, mother."

"Stubborn Dutch, like your father. Go play in the kitchen."

Marvin did get to sleep in his own bed, however. Grandma wouldn't part from her rosewood double bed, with its towering, carved headpiece on which pine cones, cabbage roses and what might have been celery tops twined. On that bed, on that identical hair mattress she had lost her maidenhood, conceived and given birth to her two sons. The "lost" son should have died on that bed, as Grandpa had, to make perfect its hallowed part in the Lang life; he had chosen the less expensive death of being blown into uncollectable atoms in a quarry over on the Palisades.

So Father lugged the huge bed upstairs in sections, panting, groaning, scraping the paper off the hall walls.

Grandma sat in her own rocker in the front room, directing operations.

"If dere is anything you vant, help yourself," she told Mother. "All else I selling."

For the first few days of Grandma's tenancy she stayed in the hallroom, except around mealtimes when she peeled potatoes and set the table, and wiped dishes afterward. She did not exchange many words with Mother, or with Father either for that matter. The ground floor was locked.

Then a man from Atlantic Avenue came and bartered for the unwanted furnishings.

They talked about his coming.

"The Jew," they said, would bear watching. So that's what Jews were.

Marvin helped watch him.

Grandma's flat was very cold; and with the rugs rolled up and the front bedroom empty, voices and footsteps sound extraordinarily loud. Marvin discovered that when he said "Hello!" in the front room a voice in the bedroom adjoining replied "'lo!" Maybe it was Grandpa's ghost! He ducked behind Mother.

Grandma and the Jew talked in German. They argued, shook their heads. The Jew talked to Mother in German.

"Talk United States," she told him. "I'm not Dutch."

"I tell you mother these pictures aint no good to me. It costs me good money to move em away. Nobody wants colored angravings no more."

"That dont interest *me*, I'm sure," Mother said.

"Tell the old woman she should be reasonable," the man begged. "I give her thoidy-five dollars for everything, cash money, and clean up so could you rent the place five minutes after."

"It's none of my concern," said Mother.

The Jew resumed his debate with Grandma. He called her grossmutter. Finally a bargain was struck. He counted out money on the marble top of the bureau, and went away promising to move the stuff in the afternoon.

"I denk he sheats me," Grandma said. "Lets carry op die lamp mit die red globe unt dot liddle table."

The sun never reached the room where Marvin slept now. He complained of that one day, and said the light from the dining room hurt his eyes after he went to bed. Grandma said he should sleep with her.

Grandma let him sleep on the outside edge of the bed. The high bolster hurt his neck at first, and the feather bed suffocated him. But it was good to have somebody to warm his feet against.

Saturday afternoon a man and a woman came to look at the ground-floor flat.

"It will be repapered in the front room, of course, and the floors will be varnished," Mother said.

"Any bugs?" asked the man.

"Certainly not," Mother snapped.

"Look on the bedroom walls," the woman told the man.

"Look all youve a mind to!" said Mother.

"It's pretty clean," the man reported. "What do you say to \$15?"

"I say good-bye," Mother replied. "The price is \$20."

"Too high for way off in the dumps, like this," the man said. "We aint got no kids, remember. Ideal tenants."

"My mother-in-law says if your wife will keep the downstairs hall clean and the sidewalk swept she'll knock off \$2."

"But we got to shovel the snow in the winter, bein ground-floorers," the man objected. "Make it \$17."

"I'll ask my mother-in-law," Mother said.

While she was gone the man pulled Marvin's ears.

"How old are you, son?"

"Nine-going-on-ten."

"Well, a man already, eh? Do you have the top-floor flat?"

Marvin laughed at the joke.

"I sleep with Granma," he giggled.

"So you sleep with Granma, hey?" laughed the man. "Well, tell your old man he cant object to you sleeping with his mother. He sleeps with yours, dont he?"

The man leaned back against the wall and roared.

The woman laughed too, but not so heartily. "Chester!" she said, her voice sort of angry.

"That's a good one," the man said.

Marvin thought they must be crazy.

Then Mother came down and said that \$17 was all right if the lady would polish the mailboxes, and the man said they would move in on the first.

Now there were two Tenants.

Father came home from Bohan's with rolls of wallpaper, big red roses climbing up a gold lattice on a creamy background. He brought home cans of varnish and every night after supper he worked in the downstairs rooms. Marvin watched him a little while the first night, but the smell made him sick.

Grandma congratulated herself. Neither tenants had children. The wallpaper would last for years.

From the money that would have gone to Grandma for rent Mother bought Marvin two sailor suits. One was white and had long pants; that was for Sundays. The other was blue and had short pants. That was for warm days at school.

School was out a few weeks after the New Tenants moved in. Marvin was promoted. His report card showed him excellent in arithmetic, fair in reading, passing in history, drawing and writing.

"Suits me," Father said. "Arithmetic—that's what you need to know to get on in the world. The rest is junk."

May had brought new faces to the block, and Marvin, now that he heard himself to be "old enough to look out for Number One," looked forward to days of play with the new children.

There was a boy next door with a name almost the same as his, Martin; only his last name was Larsen, and his folks were called the Swedes. Martin Larsen said phlegmatically that he was

Danish, which would have been interesting had he not possessed two other sterling attributes. He could call on his mother for unlimited supplies of thin, hard, crisp, dimpled bread spread with sweet butter, and he had an extra little thumb, nail and all, on his left hand.

The same old kids lived in the house next to where the Larsens lived. But on the other side, the house next to the corner, a family had moved in with eight children, the four oldest boys, the four youngest girls. All were apple-cheeked and flaxen-haired, and they were the Grubbs.

"I'm English."

"I'm Amurrican."

"So are we but real Amerrycans are Indians. You have to be something else if you aint Indian."

"Marty Larsens Danish."

Marvin's introduction to geography had widened his comprehension of the world to all of the United States of America. Beyond groups of states—Middle Atlantic, New England, Southern, and so on—his knowledge of the planet was vague.

"Mother, what are we?"

"Hard up."

"I mean, are we Dutch?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Well, Amy Grubb is English and Marty Larsen's Danish and what are we?"

"Amurrican."

"But only Indians are Amurricans, mother."

"Good grief! Well, I'm English and your father is German."

"What am I, then? English or German?"

"I fear me German, but there's hopes."

"Shall I say I'm English-German?"

"Run around to Schroeder's and get me half a pound of loose butter and a quarter's worth of eggs."

Marvin strutted his new knowledge.

"I'm two things. I'm English *and* German."

He wished he was Danish. The Larsen house always smelled of food. Mr. Larsen came home with parcels wrapped in newspaper transparent with oil. Opened, they birthed exciting fishes with heads and tails, brown and fat and delectable.

Mrs. Larsen always gave him buttered cartwheels of crisp rye cracker. She cut him chunks of butter-yellow cheese. Coffee cake,

a half-inch deep with cinnamon-flavored crumbs, was the Saturday treat.

The Grubb flat smelled of cabbage and diapers. Marvin visited it but once. He went up with Amy and came down alone, Amy having been pressed into active service as a baby-minder.

Martin Larsen was called Mart or Marty. With Marvin he played cops and robbers, pirates, Robinson Crusoe.

Amy was a good playmate. Unlike most girls she did not want to play house. Amy had enough of housekeeping in reality. She was a good pirate, a grisly cannibal for all her blondness.

"The vacant lot" at Sixth Avenue was the chosen playground. Actually some ten city lots in area, it was waist-high in weeds. Two abandoned foundation excavations were tawny lakes after rains, lairs and caves in dry weather. The ground was dotted with trash piles from which the children retrieved legless chairs, bottles, leaky saucepans, moldy quilts, a baby carriage chassis, to play with.

Amy found a cardboard box.

"Let's make windows and doors in it and set it on fire!"

Mart had a knife, but Marvin hung back.

"I'm not allowed to play with matches."

"Did your mother say you wasn't to play with a make-believe house out of cardboard, burning?"

"No, she said I dasn't play with matches or the stove."

"Well, what are you scared of? I'll light it. You don't have to."

The logic convinced Marvin and the fire fascinated him.

Mart Larsen cut windows on the four sides of the box; he made a door, and contrived a chimney. The children set the house in a corner of an excavation and made a pathway of pebbles leading to the door.

Amy went home and returned in jubilant haste, having succeeded in sneaking a match without being put to work hushing the youngest.

The conflagration was most satisfactory. Smoke poured through the windows, ruddied by flame. The roof swelled, fire burst through, and sparks whirled high.

Marvin, Amy and Mart; fire worshipers, cave people exulting in the bondage of the sun. They danced around the flames.

"We ought to have fire engines."

"I know!" This from Amy enthusiastically.

"Let's play I'm a lady and this is my house burning up and you be the firemen and you come and put it out and rescue me."

"All right!"

"But how we gonna put it out?"

"You boys can do wee-wee on it, and make believe it's the water tower!"

A moment's pause for Danish Mart to comprehend. Marvin waited on his decision.

"Sure, that's a swell idea. Come on, Marvin. Amy, you yell!"

The boys scrambled to the top of the embankment. Presently Amy began to cry for help in shrill falsetto.

"Clang! Clang! Whoo-oo-oo!"

"Giddup, there! Clang, clang!"

The fire department wheeled into action. The fire was low, the paper walls of the house mere heat-bloated black shells. The embers expired with a satisfactory hissing and steam, Amy watching so fascinated she forgot the need for rescue.

"I know, lets play doctor. Not It!"

"Not It!"

Marvin was "it," and his duties were explained to him by the practiced playmates.

"This'll be the operating table."

Amy spread a gunnysack and a moldy quilt on the ground in a corner of the abandoned cellar.

"I'll make some knives."

Marty broke off twigs, stripped them of their leaves. Marvin's blood was a little chilled by the sinister preparations.

"Let's play store," he suggested hopelessly.

"No. Now you must ring the bell and say you are awfly sick. You must call us doctor."

Marvin obeyed.

The doctors went into a hurried consultation. They thumped the patient's chest, took his temperature, examined his tongue.

"Youll have to have a noproration."

"Now you lay down here."

Except for bursts of giggles, some from embarrassment, some from plain ticklishness, the patient bore the operation very well. To make sure of its success the doctors did it over again.

"Now let Marvin be a doctor and you be sick, Amy."

Amy was most willing. She turned her knives of twig over to Marvin, who rearranged his clothing and donned professional profundity.

A few minutes later he was backing away, horror and shock twisting his mouth.

"She—she—"

"What's the matter? Didn't you ever see a *girl* before?"

The patient sat up and stared at the retreating surgeon with vexation, amusement, surprise.

"That's the way girls *are*."

"My mo-mother aint like that."

Shock, horror, changed sides.

"How do you know? Did you ever see her naked?"

"Yes," Marvin lied bravely.

"Gee, Marvins mothers made like a man! Marvins mothers a ma-yan!"

The Langs lived in a "railroad flat."

You mounted the steps and came to the second-floor hall, which ran lengthwise on the left to the front of the house, where it turned and another stairs led to the third floor.

There were three doors that gave entrance to the flat, but two were never opened. One could not be opened. It was the hallroom door, and Grandma's big bed blocked it. The other was the front-room door. The door that served as general entry opened upon a narrow, dark little hallway, off which was the bathroom. Then one turned right into the dining room. The floor was covered with green Brussels carpet. There was a round walnut veneer table beneath a gaslight shaded by a huge glass morning-glory in clouded white and green. Six chairs with claw feet and red leather seats were ranged around the table. Two windows looked out upon the back yard and the neighbors' yards. Now there hung between them a brass cage with Grandma's birds, a pair of chaste and unproductive canaries. The walls were covered up to the plate rail in green leatherette paper embossed with fleurs-de-lys, and above that in brown-and-gold oatmeal paper. The base-burner was put in the coalbin, down in the cellar, in warm weather, and the hole for the pipe in the wall was covered with a metal plate bound in brass, with a decalcomania bunch of flowers in the center. There was a Boston rocker in the room, in which Mrs. Lang sat to do her mending. On the walls above the plate rail were two pictures, both on the same side of the room. One was "Pharaoh's Horses" and the other Landseer's "Dog as Chief Mourner." Both were wedding presents. The plate rail had little brass hooks underneath on which hung the fancy cups whose saucers were balanced above.

From the dining room one went into Marvin's room, although

he had occupied it for but a few nights it was now so named. Before it had been the spare room. In it was a white-enamel folding cot, two trunks and a dressmaking form covered with old sheets. There was one window in the room, opening upon the airshaft.

Next was Mother's room, although Father used it as much as she did. In it was an oak bureau with an oval swinging mirror, two cane-bottomed chairs and a brass double bed, covered with a white spread. Over the head of the bed hung an embroidered motto: "God Never Sleeps" and under the bed was a white china pot with a lid. Father's neckties hung on the gas bracket. There were two rag rugs on the floor.

A double doorway, hung with a bead curtain, led from Mother's room to the front room. There was another round center table with a lace doily on it, and a Bible and a blue vase with gold flowers on it. The floor was covered to the walls with an 8 by 10 rug, roses on a blue background. Grandma's rocker was an addition to the room. It was a spring rocker with a sagging seat, upholstered in green corduroy. Besides, there was a Morris chair, a fragile gilt wooden chair of imitation bamboo, with a cane seat, a shiny mahogany chair with a ferocious face carved on the back and arms terminating in clenched fists, hand carved. The sofa was against the hall-side wall, tan corduroy. Marvin never failed to fish something out of the dusty crevice between seat and back—hairpins, usually, but sometimes pennies or a long-lost lead soldier. An extra bureau stood in another corner, and on top of it was the Lang library: Marvin's two-volume set of Bible stories, Grimms' fairy tales and a Bible in German, and a three-volume set of the speeches and public papers of Abraham Lincoln. Across the front of the room were two windows giving upon the street, and to the left, next the never-opened hall door, was the door to Grandma's (and Marvin's) room. The walls were covered with a cheerful red paper, pink over the couch where many heads had rubbed. The pictures were ranged in a row over the mantel, where an onyx clock was flanked by two alabaster vases holding cattails. The pictures were "Lee's Surrender," "Bismarck and Napoleon III" and "The Stag at Bay."

It was a lovely home, one that Marvin need never be ashamed of. It was always dustless.

When Marvin began to mope in the corners and to sit for half hours on end with a far-off look on his face, Mother said the boy needed a physic.

"Did you go to the toilet today, Marvin?"

"Yes, I did. Right after breakfast."

"Did you do Number Two?"

"Yes, of course I did. Lots."

"See, mom? He dont need a physic."

"Vell, I dont vant to be buttinsky. You de child's mutter. I dont vant to butt in. But if he vas my youngster, I know vot I do. Abfuehrungsmittel!

The last word was a doom.

"Marvin, if you arent sick run out and play."

Marvin still moped.

"Marvin." Father took him aside one evening. "Do you ever play with your own self, with your body, there?"

"No, I dont. Gee whiz!"

"Dont swear at me, young man. If ever I catch you— Do you know it will rot and fall off?"

A new worry. Marvin avoided going to the toilet as long as possible.

"He's naturally delicate."

The tonic was increased, changed for another brand guaranteed to be twice as strong. When school opened again Marvin's lassitude vanished. New interests, new playmates, a new teacher.

The tonic got the credit, and Father wrote a testimonial. It was rewarded with a carton of six free bottles and the testimonial was printed in the *Chat*.

"Cured Anemia. Anemic Child Restored With One Bottle of Pfahr's Nu-glo. Only Son of Prominent Merchant Made a New Boy."

The advertisement was clipped and put in the Bible. Even the teacher, Miss Carmody, told Marvin she had seen the testimonial and hoped that his good health would continue and be reflected in his work.

Abstract arithmetic, North and South American geography, English, spelling, penmanship, physical training, music. Homework.

"I'm glad to see you keeping good marks in arithmetic, Marvin. Thats the way to get ahead. Where would I be today if I couldnt do numbers in my head? I'd still be behind the counter, thats where I'd be."

Thanksgiving Day.

Marvin was given a penny to buy a false face. The florid cardboard countenance, with sweeping horsehair mustaches and imperial, above an old blouse of Mother's and an older ruffled

petticoat of Grandma's made the family laugh. Marvin went out with a paper bag and visited all the flats, all the shops. He returned with six peppermint sticks, four pennies, two apples, a banana and a black eye. One of the Fourth Avenue toughs had hit him with a flour-stocking, smashing the mask. For dinner there was chicken with sage stuffing, and Marvin was given the wishbone, a leg and the tail.

Sundays Marvin went religiously to Sunday school, except when it rained. He collected motto cards, exchanged ten for a bigger, more colorful one. Ten of those, representing a hundred Sundays, were exchangeable for a framed motto, lithographed to imitate cross-stitch, choice of "Gott ist mein Schäfer" or "Suffer little children to come unto me." Marvin preferred to keep his cards. He didn't like the Dutch motto, although he might have given it to Grandma for Christmas. He did not like the sentiment of the second. He thought it meant that children had to suffer before they could come to Jesus.

There was nothing in the theology he absorbed from various earnest young women with starched blouses and boned collars or from the earnest young superintendent in starched collar and black-braided coat to make him think otherwise. All dwelt on the beauty of suffering, of self-denial.

Marvin firmly believed, because he was given no alternative, that:

God was three persons, one of whom was Jesus.

God made the world in six days.

He made it in the dark the first day and it was all water, so He made light to see by. Then He made land.

God first made trees and grass; then fishes and bugs and animals. Then He made a man.

God rested on the Seventh Day.

As an afterthought God made woman. Adam and Eve wore no clothes but didn't know they were Different.

God planted a tree, and when Adam and Eve ate from the fruit thereof their eyes were opened and they saw that they were naked, and were ashamed. So God kicked them out of the park when they put clothes on, and made them work.

The world got worse, so God drowned everybody and everything except Noah and his family, two animals of every kind, and, of course, the fishes. With the exception of the fishes every living thing destined to survive went into the Ark.

"Did God really make everything?"

"Marvin Lang! What does God think when He hears you ask a question like that?"

"Well, why did He make bad things?"

"We must not question God. What seems *bad* to us may be *good* according to His purpose."

"Does he think hooking apples from Greenbaums stand is good-according-to-His-purpose, maybe?"

"Marvin Lang, I am going to speak to your father!"

Marvin gave God up. He didn't understand Him. Why did He save mosquitoes from the flood, and roaches?

And if it was bad to show yourself naked, why did God punish Adam and Eve for putting clothes on?

He didnt dare ask the questions, and they worried him only for unrelated hours.

Marvin brushed his teeth every Sunday morning. He took a bath every Saturday night, except when he had a cold or swollen glands. The family insisted on these sanitary observances, and set him a good example. Grandma couldn't brush her teeth every Sunday because she took them out every night and put them in a glass of water in which a teaspoon of salt had been dissolved. Marvin's mother cut his nails, and trimmed his hair until it was palpably a barber's job.

Marvin was ten years old, going on eleven.

He had been to Prospect Park four or five times, to Coney Island three or four times. He had been to the Aquarium once and to Central Park Zoo once, and to Evergreen Cemetery every Decoration Day to put a geranium and a cotton flag on Grandpa's grave. Grandma went to the cemetery at least once a month, by herself, on the streetcar. She wore a black hat with jet beads and a stuffed black bird.

The neighborhood changed. The Grubbs moved away and so did the Larsens. They were only renters. Other boys and girls came to the block. More and more of them were Scandinavians.

"Marvin dont know how babies are made!"

"Ha-ha! He believes in the stork!"

"Look at Missus Friedsamms stumick. Maybe he thinks its a stork inside of her."

"Listen, Marvin . . ."

Marvin listened, and believed. After all, he had never seen a stork, and babies kept arriving in the neighborhood constantly.

He felt ashamed for his parents. Their bed took on a sort of revolting fascination for him.

"Marvin's mopy again."

"He needs a physic, not dot I tell anyvun how to bring up children."

"Maybe we better try another tonic."

Marvin was almost eleven when Grandma died.

She didn't get up for breakfast and wouldnt have a cup of coffee in bed one morning.

"The gas crowds around mein heart so. I shouldnt of ate her-ring salad las night."

Dr. Kruger was called in that night.

He sent out for some sharp-smelling medicine.

"It's her heart. She must be kept quiet."

Marvin went back to "Marvin's room."

For two days everybody walked on tiptoe and talked in whispers. Gradually life resumed its normal pitch. Sometimes Marvin didnt see Grandma for two or three days in a row, until she specifically asked for him. Grandma looked funny with her teeth out.

"Marfin, sei a good boy."

"Yes, grandma."

One evening Mother went into the hallroom with Grandma's tray. Marvin and his father heard the crash of china and tin, and a sharp cry.

They hurried through the rooms. Mother was on her knees beside Grandma's bed. The beef tea was all over the floor. Grandma was lying on her back with her mouth open. She was a dirty gray against the white pillow and sheet. Marvin saw that her eyes were not shut, but rolled back so only the whites could be seen. He turned and ran. Ran into the kitchen, shut the door, climbed up on the tubs beneath the quarter gas meter.

Somebody went out. Came back. Dr. Kruger came in.

Now there was a coffin with palms and rose wreaths in front of the windows in the second-floor parlor. Otherwise it was Grandpa's funeral all over again. The undertaker, the evening services, the ride to the cemetery, the stop for lunch at the tavern.

Mother aired the hallroom thoroughly, washed and ironed the sheets. Then Marvin was alone in the room again.

"Gee, Marvin, aint you afraid of the old lady's ghost?"

One terrible nightmare. Marvin felt a heavy body pressing him down. It was Grandma, with her eyes rolled back, sitting astride him in the bed.

Mother came running in, her bare feet noiseless on the carpet. Marvin saw her and shrieked louder.

Father came in and lit the gas. The gas jet screamed too.

"What sort of nonsense is this?"

"I dreamed—I dreamed—"

"Well, if you know you dreamed what is there to yell about?"

"Can I come in your bed a little while?"

"Marvin Lang! Shame on you for a big baby. Come on, go to the toilet and then go back to sleep."

Marvin knelt in front of the cold, enamel chamber pot under the reproving eyes of his parents. He climbed back to bed. The light went out, and he put his head under the covers.

Father was now a Landlord.

Being the Landlord's grandson had been a distinction only one other child on the block could match. Being the Landlord's son was an honor unshared.

"Besides with the money in the bank, and the insurance, you can tell Old Man Bohan to go fly a kite."

"Theres \$600 in the Dime Savings and \$1,100 in the Pilots National, and after the funeral and doctor is paid I guess there wont be \$50 left of the insurance."

"How much do you think the house would bring?"

"Maybe \$6,000—but theres a \$1,200 mortgage."

"We can count on \$7,000."

"That ought to be enough."

Marvin listened to his parents and watched them make rows of figures on the paper bag that the groceries had come in.

"Where do you think we ought to look?"

"What's wrong with Jersey?"

"Jersey! And everybody making fun of us. Besides I'm afraid of malaria."

"How about further up the island, around Jamaica?"

"It's so out of the way. Besides, those parts dont grow any."

"We ought to look at the ads in all the papers, even the *Times*."

"That's what we ought to do."

For night after night, after the supper things were cleared away, Mother and Father pored over the fine print in the classified columns of the newspapers. At the same table, under the morning-glory lamp, Marvin did long division with facility and kneaded dates and capitals into his brain.

"Look, this sounds sort of good."

"But Yonkers! Who wants to live in Yonkers?"

"The capital of Brazil is Rio de Janeiro—Rio de Janeiro—Rio de January."

Marvin was not particularly curious about his parents' consultations. He gathered readily that they planned to move somewhere, but were not at all sure themselves where. They were going to buy a house. Well, he would still be the landlord's son.

Strange men came to the house at night or afternoon. They walked around looking bored, flushed the toilets, opened closet doors, spent long times in the cellar.

"Now, Lang, lets talk business. You're a man of common sense, I can see that . . ."

One night a man who had been through the house a dozen times came with an envelope full of papers. Father brought out a tin box also full of papers. They talked a long time while Marvin helped Mother with the dishes, and they went out together before the spoons were wiped.

Father returned, hours later, jubilant.

"He took it for \$6,500. We close tomorrow! And what's more, we live here next month rent free if we havent found a place!"

Mother hugged Father.

"Now we have to decide. Lets go to Staten Island Sunday to look at that place."

"I want to get away from house furnishings."

"It's a vacant store."

"We can look over the neighborhood."

Sunday morning the Langs took the ferry to Staten Island. Then they took a trolley car.

"To think this is New York City just the same!"

Marvin gazed out the window of the galloping trolley. He saw farms with corn in shocks, just like pictures in his geography and reader. The trolley paused to let people off at what seemed to be arbitrarily chosen stops, with no houses in view. It clanged through villages with elms showering down their gold upon the streets.

"Belle Bay is next," the conductor said to Father. "You want the Center?"

"Yes, I guess so," Father said. "Do you know where Schurz Avenue is?"

Father pronounced it Schoortz, as he had learned from Grandpa.

"You mean Shoyz Avenyoo? I'll let you off there."

The trolley entered another village. Frame houses, huddling closer and closer until only a narrow "areaway" separated them. Shops—hardware, harness, butcher, grocery, hardware, general, gents' clothing, dry goods, a quick lunch.

"Shoyz Avenyoo!"

"Hurry up, Marvin."

The motorman watched them off. Clang! Ding-ding!

Buckety-buckety, the trolley rocked off, rounded a curve.

The Langs looked about.

They stood at a minor four-corners, in front of a lunchroom. "Meals At All Hours. Regular Dinner 35c. Tables Reserved For Ladies."

Across the street was a two-story brick building. The gas company's office. A dentist upstairs. "Gas. Dentist. Zahnarzt." Diagonally, a Methodist church. Opposite, a drugstore. "Ice Cream Soda. Cascarets."

Now the clipping was consulted again.

"Number 38. I'll ask in the restaurant."

Father came out.

"Right down the street, here. On this side."

The far side of the street. House after house. One-family, two-family. Sycamore trees and elms. Tiny lawns, privet-edged. A woman potting plants. Some men and boys raking leaves.

This side of the street. A coal depot behind a board fence. A six-family yellow brick tenement, with fire escapes zigzagging down the front. Four identical frame houses. Then a tan two-story-and-attic house, the porch replaced by a two-window store front. "For Sale or Rent. House and Store."

"This must be the place."

"Yes, there's the number."

"It looks real nice."

A man in a coat over his undershirt, carpet slippers under sagging trousers, came out of the house next door. He removed a meerscham pipe, carved to represent a claw holding a bowl, from his yellow mustache. Blue eyes, a straight nose, yellow hair clipped to skull.

"You inderesded in dis blace?"

"We were just looking. Are you the owner?"

"No, de owner liifs in Stabledon. Bud I god de key."

He fished in his pockets, pulled out a key, inserted it in the store door, walked in ahead of the Langs. The shop smelled of

fresh paint. The Langs looked around, wordless. Ceiling of pressed metal, painted white. Green walls. Brown floor. A door reached by a steep flight of four steps, in the rear.

"Gome in de house."

A dark, empty room, two shuttered windows giving out upon a weed-grown yard in which an ash tree stood stark-naked. A rusty ash can, a heap of boxes, a red fence.

"Dis way."

A big pantry, yellowed newspapers still in the shelves. Cupboards, with little heaps of starved roaches in the corners. A big kitchen, with a coal range and a place for a gas range. A sink with little heaps of starved roaches and flies in the corners.

"Dis way."

Up steep, dark stairs. A hall that cut the house in two. Straight ahead a bathroom, kerosene in the toilet bowl. A long tub, enameled pink, with claw-and-ball feet. Three squarish rooms. The walls painted—green; blue; green.

"You vond to see de cellar?"

"We might as well."

Slop, slop, clump, clump, tap, tap, down the stairs.

The man found a candle in a tin box on the inside of the cellar door. He lit it, sheltered the flame with a huge, freckled, gold-haired hand and led the way.

"A hoddair furnitz. In good condition."

The furnace like a petrified octopus.

A coalbin. The shop counter, gleaming ghostily white. A dirt floor, with the glistening trails of slugs.

"Nice and big," said Father.

They climbed upstairs again. Through kitchen, pantry, unnamed rooms, into the comparative brightness of the store, out on the sidewalk again. The man carefully shut the door, locked it, put the key in his pocket.

"You lige id?"

"How can I get in touch with the owner?"

"You chost wride Arnold Schleiermacher, Stabledon."

"Thanks, I will. Maybe you better write it down for me."

"You vait, I ged hiss gard."

They waited on the sidewalk. The sun was warm, when the big, gray, white-fringed clouds didnt get in the way. Marvin snuffed the strange-smelling air. It was scented with salt, wet leaves, smoke and Sunday roasts.

"Father, when can we eat?"

"In a minute."

"Are we going to live here, maybe?"

"Wait and find out. Dont ask so many questions."

Marvin sensed that his parents were not sure of themselves, did not know the answer, were brusque to him to preserve a superiority they did not feel that moment.

The man slipslapped out of his house, gave Father a card.

"Hey, don geep id. I ony god id one. Goppy de name."

Father copied the name on the edge of the clipping.

"What sort of store was there before?"

"Hardware."

"There's hardware stores on the main street."

"Blendy."

"What sort of stores does the neighborhood need, do you think?"

"A good saloon," chuckled the man. "Dere iss none two blogggs from here."

Father smiled, handed back the card.

"Now, lets eat. The restaurant at the corner looked nice and clean."

It was Marvin's first meal in a restaurant, barring the post-funeral lunches he had twice shared in. A waiter distributed napkins and silverware, black at the edges, after polishing the ring-marked mahogany top of the uncovered table. Then he brought glasses of water, a basket tray with rolls and slices of bread, butter in chips. The Langs sat stiffly upright, hands in laps, bending a little this way and that to accommodate the waiter's ministrations.

Some others were eating in the place, but Marvin was warned that etiquette forbade staring at them. "Be a little gentleman."

The waiter handed around menus in purple script, a little blurred.

Father cleared his throat.

"You—er—advertise a 35-cent lunch—"

"Oh, that aint on Sundays," the waiter replied cheerfully. "Sbusinessmans lunch. Now we serve our reglar Sunday chicken dinner, half a dollar."

The Langs were too embarrassed to get up, but even Marvin felt as if they had been lured inside under false pretenses.

They ate thick chicken soup, yellow and full of rice. There was celery, usually but a biannual treat, at Thanksgiving and Christmas. They ate chicken fricassee, with Irish potatoes, car-

rots, turnips and cole slaw. They ate ice cream with sponge cake and drank coffee from big saucerless mugs.

Father tipped the waiter a dime.

Marvin felt very grand. He also felt very uncomfortable from too much food. He belched a little, and said "Scuse me please" like a little gentleman.

The Langs rose heavily, and trooped to the cashier's desk. Father paid with the exact change and took three toothpicks, which he distributed.

"Lets walk around the neighborhood a little," he suggested.

They walked up past the vacant store to the end of the street, turned left, walked another block past frame houses, to a corner where a saloon made a landmark. Turned right, past a plumber shop, a hay, feed and grain store, more homes. They came to the car line again, and seeing a trolley approaching, waited and boarded it. It proved to be the same one they had come to Belle Bay on.

"Ja find jer address?"

The conductor jingled the change sagging his leather-reinforced pocket.

"Yes. What sort of a town is it?"

"Oh, good enough. I hear they gonna open a movin-pitcher house this winter, if they kin git it past the choich people."

"About how many people live in the place?"

"Oh, about a thousan, I guess. It's a nice place. Ony half a mile to the water from the corner there. Lots of folks come through in the summer to go to the beaches."

"Thanks. I'm thinkin of settlin there."

"Theres lots waise places."

St. George at last. The sun was low as they waited for the Bay Ridge ferry. Mother and Father were wordless in thought. Marvin got a penny and put it in a slot machine for chewing gum. After hammering the metal box he got a little oblong of gray chocolate.

The ferry; smelling of wet wood, horse urine and soft coal. The Langs stood on the ladies' side of the bow, watching the heights of Brooklyn draw nearer.

It was an hour's walk to the house. Before they reached home it was night, and Marvin was hungry again. Mother warmed over some stew and poured it over slices of stale bread.

"Are we gonna live on Staten Island?"

"You'll live with us, Marvin. Dont worry. We wont leave you behind."

Bed, and presently breakfast and school again, and home again.

"Watch out of the window for Father."

Father came home whistling, slapping his thighs with his folded *Journal*.

"I guess we ought to hear from Schleiermacher tomorrow."

"Did you mail the letter?"

"Of course I did."

"Hadnt we better decide what line of business you'll go into?"

"I was thinkin. How about delicatessen? We didnt see a single delicatessen store. It's a nice residential neighborhood, lots of trade. Saturday nights and Sunday nights especially. And in the summer—you heard what the conductor said. Lots of people come there."

"But you dont know anything about the delicatessen business."

"I know how to run a store, dont I? What do you suppose I got charge of Bohan's hardware department for? The principle of one store is the same as another. I guess I can slice ham and cut cheese and dish out pickles and herring."

"Think how cheap we can live too, all our food at wholesale."

"There's that to consider, certainly. We'll save more money in a delicatessen than in a hardware store."

"I can make potato salad and baked beans."

"Sure, and Marvin can deliver to the neighborhood."

"Gee, father! Will you get me a bike with a wire basket onto the handle bars?"

"Easy, now. Were just talkin, and not to you."

"There's nothing like a little store of your own."

"Independent."

"No boss."

"What about store fixtures?"

"Oh, there's companies specialize in that. Just give em the word and they fix the place all up with iceboxes and counters and shelves."

"And out in the country like that. It'll be grand for Marvin."

The Langs moved to Belle Bay just before Christmas. For weeks before, Father spent all day Sunday at the Store.

Marvin was amazed when he and his mother arrived at 38 Schurz Avenue. The windows of the shop had been whitewashed. Big paper signs announced in fancy handlettering; "On or Be-

fore December 21 This Place Will Open as a First Class Delicatessen. Lunches. Sandwiches."

Father had come over with the first van. A second and smaller load was still on the way. He bowed Mother and Marvin into the shop. Marvin had never seen him so playful.

"Oh, how grand!"

"Not bad, hey?"

Masking the door to the living quarters was a big oak icebox. On both sides of the shop were counters, backed by shelves, glistening white. One half of one counter was topped by a glass showcase. At the door end of each counter were big rolls of brown wrapping paper.

"Look, here's the cash drawer."

It rang a little bell when pulled open.

"You should of been here to see the salesmen!"

"When does the stock arrive?"

"It'll start comin in tomorrow. The canned goods. The smoked meat and perishables Friday. We'll open Saddaday. That'll give us three days to get settled. Marvin dont have to go to school until after New Year's."

Marvin stood behind the counters and imagined the shop filled with customers. Yes, mam. A quarter's worth of liverwusht. And dill or sour?

"Marvin, come help me put up the beds."

He fell asleep at a later hour than ever before except Christmas nights or New Year's eves.

Early the next morning crates and boxes, cartons and kegs began to arrive. Father ran around with a hatchet. "Put em anywheres. Roll that barl behind the counter. What do *you* want? Yes, I'll want ice beginnin Friday. Whats in that box, Marvin? I know, but cant you read what it says? Its the coffee grinder!"

The space between the counters was filled with boxes, opened, half-filled, empty. Small boys begged for the empties and were thankfully donated all they could carry away. Father ran down to look at the furnace, the operation of which was still mostly a mystery.

Mother stacked cans on the shelves. Salmon, corned beef, condensed milk, sardines. She turned the job over to Marvin and tackled the bottled goods. Catsup, horseradish, olives, sweet oil.

Marvin spaced his cans meticulously, pyramided them with the precision of an engineer. Father screwed down the coffee

grinder, emptied a fragrant gunnysack of roasted beans into the big red canister. No one rested, no one thought of eating in all that welter of food.

A woman poked her head in through the open door.

"Have you any bread?"

"Not yet, madam. We are just gettin ourselves fixed up. We'll be open on Saddaday an pleased to accommodate you."

"Well, it'll be a blessing to have a shop so handy. Wish you luck."

"Thank you, thank you very much."

Did you hear what she said? "A blessing the neighborhood'll have a shop so handy!"

Father did a wardance, waving his hatchet.

Oh, it was grand to be alive! Marvin was so happy he felt like crying. He was a member of the family in active service. He was helping; not just helping like with the dishes or the dusting, but *working*.

"I'll go make some tea and open a can of these here peaches an some crackers for lunch if I can find the can opener."

"Hey, that's poor business. We cant be takin food from the shelves for ourselves. Here's some change. Buy the stuff."

"Can I sell em to Mother, huh, can I please?"

"Sure thing, son."

"I want a can of them cling peaches an a box a Uneedas."

"Yes, mam. Thatll be—how much, father?"

"Fifteen cents."

"Fifteen cents, please."

"Here you are. It certainy is a blessin to have a shop so close."

Father whooped, Mother laughed, Marvin jumped up and jiggled on the counter. Life was perfect. They had their lunch in the store, loath to leave it. Father would get up with his mouth full of tea and cracker and pry the lid off another box.

"Shoof!"

"Shoof? Whats that? We never et shoof."

"(Gulp) Soup! Cammel soup!"

Night came and Father lit the big gas globe. A pilot light burned in it constantly, even during the daytime, and all that was needed to illuminate the shop was to pull a chain.

Marvin sold his mother two cans of the tomato soup and another box of crackers. The money jingled in the till.

"Forty cents already and we havent opened yet!"

By nine o'clock the shelves were loaded with canned and bottled goods and the place really looked like a store. And the morning and the evening were the first day.

Next morning a grimy boy brought bundles of handbills in a soapbox wagon. Carl G. Lang announces . . . Table Delicacies . . .

"Mr. Brannigan says its two dollars and do you wanna put an ad in the *Banner*?"

"What do you think about an ad?"

"I guess we ought to. It gives us a solid sort of beginning."

"How much are the ads, son?"

"Mr. Brannigan says five dollars for a quarter page."

"All right. Here, wait, I'll write it out."

The delivery boy seated himself in his soapbox wagon and stared at Marvin while Father and Mother composed the advertisement.

"Put down homemade salads."

"Yes, an free delivery."

"Imagine! Just like Bohan's ad in the *Eagle*."

Marvin was started forth with the handbills. "Put one in every single letter box. Dont throw em around loose, it'll make folks mad."

Marvin felt self-conscious at first, walking up the stoops of strange houses and stuffing the dodgers into the mailboxes. He visited every house on both sides of the street to the uttermost limits, returned for more of the bills.

"Anybody say anything to you?"

"I didn see anybody atall."

"Dont skip a single house, now."

"Can I have one of them appricots?"

"No, we cant afford to be takin food from our stock. It's money outen our pockets. Here, you can have two."

At one house a boy smaller than Marvin forbade him to mount the stoop and Marvin, unsure of his ground, skipped that place. At another house a fox terrier barked shrilly from the top step. Those were the only two of a hundred houses that Marvin skipped, although an angry woman snatched the dodgers from the letter boxes in another and screamed after the boy never to stick his trash in her vestibule. Four blocks from home Marvin passed a red-brick school just as the boys and girls trooped out for the lunch hour, which reminded him he was a stranger in a strange land and vulnerable, and hungry. He ran all the way back.

In two days Marvin distributed 250 handbills, and covered Belle Bay's ten paved streets.

"There isnt another delicatessen store in the whole town."

Mother and Father were working in the house now, laying rugs and unpacking trunks, moving furniture.

Marvin had a big room to himself, with windows on two sides. One was directly opposite the window of the house next door, not ten feet distant. The other opened upon the flat, tar-and-gravel roof of the shop. The window opposite his belonged to a bedroom, Marvin could see. There was part of a dresser mirror and a white-enamel bed visible in the daytime but at night the shades were drawn.

The handbills delivered, Marvin's next job was to clean up the back yard. He piled the trash and burned it, Mother watching from the window to see he didnt catch fire. Broken bottles, bits of rusted metal, old cans, were pitched into a corroded old ash can. Father lugged it through the house to the curb because the alley door wouldn't open.

On Friday the tubs of butter and the big round cheeses, store and Swiss, were put in the icebox. A man left a dozen quarts of milk in a shiny new can with a dipper hanging from the lip. A tub of pot cheese came and a tub of salt herring; mackerel in brine, chowchow and sweet pickle.

"We can make most of this stuff in the kitchen after we get started."

"I ought to make potato salad. Marvin, run to the grocery and get me a peck of small potatoes."

A boiled ham. A huge chain of frankfurters. A smaller one of knockwurst. Limburger under a glass dome and a blutwurst, cervelat, a round globe of pickled onions.

"Carry the potatoes into the kitchen. Oh, I forgot. Run around the corner to the butcher's and order me two nice tender roastin chickens and a fresh ham about ten pounds. Tell em to send it right away."

The kitchen smelled deliciously of baking beans.

A jar of pickled pigs' feet. A pan of headcheese, of souse, of scrapple. Food enough for an army. Food enough to last the Langs for forty years, by themselves.

A box with a padlocked lid was set down beside the front door for bread and rolls. The baking company supplied the box, supplied the stenciled inscription: AUNT NELLY'S BREADS ROLLS

PASTRIES EXCLUSIVELY AT LANG'S. TRY OUR HOME MADE PIES AND CRULLERS.

A dour old man carrying a wooden box and a hangover entered the shop and bargained for an inscription on the windows.

"Put DELICATESSEN in a curve on both windows," Father directed. "And under one put LUNCHES and under the other CARL G. LANG PROP."

Marvin watched, fascinated; the old man opened his box to reveal tubes and bottles of paints, gilding; brushes, rags, mahlstick. He wiped a section of the windows clean and set to work, rapidly lettering backwards. It was the first time Marvin had seen an artist.

After the sign painter finished Father began to decorate the windows. He nailed up crepe paper and fringed festoons. He piled up cans and boxes, left space to display meats and cheeses. At midnight all was in readiness for the grand opening.

Mother, her face red, her fingers bandaged, her hair in loops over her ears and forehead, brought in the big roast fresh ham, two heaping platters of potato salad, two roast hens, and two small pans of baked beans.

Then she sat down and cried.

Father patted her shoulders, stooped and kissed her ear. He seemed to understand why Mother was crying but Marvin couldn't understand it at all, so he took a dried apricot from beneath the paper lace at the edge of the box where the gap wouldn't show.

"Just about broke but by golly all set to go."

"How—how much is left?"

Father dug into his pants pocket, pulled out a little wad of bills.

"Nine dollars is all we got in the world."

"But the house free an clear!"

"Yes, an I paid ten per cent cash on every bit of stock and the new fixtures are on ninety days."

"There's nothin to worry about; lets get to bed."

"We have to be up early tomorrow. Lay me out an apron."

Marvin was routed from bed at 5:30, without protest. He had a white apron with strings that went around his waist three times.

A hurried cup of coffee and a dish of rice flakes for all. It was cold in the house.

"Your job'll be to tend furnace as soon's I get the hang of it to teach you how."

(Marvin, dont go near the stove. *Marvin*, dont play with matches. *Marvin*, *your job will be to take care of the furnace!* Maturity!)

Father lit the glass gas globes in the windows. He opened the bread box with his key, carried in loaves of fragrant, still-warm white bread, powdered with flour. Marvin took out the sack of rolls. Six dozen rolls! He piled them in a wire basket.

"Now for the customers!"

Footsteps sounded hollowly outside. Marvin and Father and Mother stood professionally alert behind the counters. The footsteps passed. A team clop-clopped up the street. More footsteps. Men passed, some without turning their heads, others peeping in curiously, with a sort of childish coyness.

Daylight made the gaslights dim.

A little girl ran into the store.

"A dozen rolls."

Marvin jumped. He ripped a paper bag from its nail, counted out the rolls, took the little girl's dime and handed it to his father. The cash drawer tinkled its little bell. There were no sweeter chimes on any church.

"Maybe we should of made the first sale free?"

"A dime isnt wortha free sale."

Presently the little girl came back.

"Momma says she wants the extra roll!"

Martin looked aghast. "I put in twelve!" Twelve-make-a-dozen was a first-grade truism.

"Momma says she always gets thirteen to the dozen."

"Give the girlie another roll, Marvin."

"And here's a appricot for you, girlie."

Six times twelve is seventy-two. "We'll be shy six rolls, father. Why dont the bakery give us thirteen to the dozen?"

A woman with a shawl around her head came in for a loaf of bread. While it was being wrapped she stared around her, missing nothing.

"Anything else?"

"That's all, thank you."

By eleven o'clock half the rolls were gone and five loaves of bread had been sold. One customer came in for a bag of flour. The Langs did not sell flour.

"Probably her credit at the grocery is gone."

"Strickly cash business, that's what we'll do."

Between eleven and noon, trade became brisk. Women and children came in for a dime's worth of boiled ham, six franks, a quarter's worth of mixed baloney. More ham, a quarter pound of butter, a half pound; a loaf of seeded rye. A can of salmon. Have you any stale bread? A pint of milk please. How much are the baked beans? My, that roast ham looks good. "Wont you have a taste of it, mam?" No chicken salad?

"What's yours please?"

"I think this gennelman is ahead of me."

"Father, how much are canned pineapple?"

The Langs made themselves sandwiches and forgot to pay for them. At six o'clock, after a midafternoon lull, the store was actually crowded. A steady stream of customers trickled in and out from seven o'clock to midnight, almost.

Father wrote a sign on a bag: "Open Sunday morning 8 to 10. Evening from 5."

He propped it in the window, turned out the lights. He emptied the cash drawer into his apron. The family retired to the sitting-dining room. Father dumped the money on the table and it made a pleasant muted jingle.

"I'll count the bills. You count the quarters and halves an Marvin can count the small change."

Clink clink clink.

"Now how much you got?"

"Pennies, nickels an dimes—seven thirty-two."

"I got four sevenny-five."

"An I got sixteen dollars in bills! How much is that?"

Marvin wrinkled brow and pursed lips, achieved the sum. "That makes twenny-eight dollars an seven cents."

The three looked at the piles of money with awe. "More than a weeks salary in one day!"

"Geewhillajers, father, that's two hunnerd a week nearly."

"Well, we cant expect to do that busness every day. Sadda-days the big delicatessen day. Monday'll be slack with people eatin leftovers."

"And it's not all profit, remember."

"No-o-o. Not even half of it. But bettern ten dollars clear."

Marvin went to bed in a golden daze. Wealth, success! The future . . . who could tell? A bike with a coaster brake and a folding stand and rubber handle grips. A goat team and wagon . . .

For Christmas Marvin got new shoes, a shirt with a collar band and gold-plated collar buttons, a celluloid collar just like a man's, and two snap-on ties. He got a tube of Colgate's tooth paste for his very own. He gave his mother a comb-cleaner of knotted string, wrought in Brooklyn manual training class, and his father a set of cuff links, gold lions' heads with ruby eyes, bought for ten cents in the general store.

"I'm sorry we couldn't afford the bike, Marvin. When things get going a little better and we can see our way clear . . ."

"Gee, that's all right, father."

Sunday rules applied to the store for Christmas Day. There was no Christmas tree. Marvin felt very grown up, instead of disappointed. The Langs dined and supped on leftovers, bits too small to sell; potato salad, sausage, cold pork, milk, rolls, bread, smoked fish. Father and Marvin tended store alone Christmas night. Mother went to see Grandma McAneny. She returned before closing time.

"Mas eyesight is getting worse, an her rheumatics . . ."

"An old lady like her ought to be in a ninstitution."

"I was thinking . . ."

"We had a fair day. Took in about ten dollars."

"We got extra room . . ."

"Turn the lights out, Marvin, an lock the door."

Marvin darkened the shop, put the perishables in the icebox. He twisted the tail from what was left of a cold chicken, and munched the luscious greasy morsel as he rejoined his elders inside.

"My mother is different! It was all right for *your* mother to come an live with *me*!"

"My mother wasn't no pauper. She owned the house."

"My mother aint a pauper!"

"Well, what has she got? How much will she put into the business?"

"That aint the point. She earns her own way."

"A fine reputation we'll get. Old Lady McAneny who scrubs out the bank and the gas office an lives with the Delicatessen Langs!"

"She'll earn her keep right here. She can peel potatoes, soak the beans, clean the house. It'll be a load off my shoulders."

"Until she goes blind, besides crippled with rheumatics."

"Till she goes blind. Then you can set her up with a tin cup an some pencils down by the ferry where she wont be recognized."

"Come along to bed. It's after midnight."

"I wont put my body into your bed. I'll sleep in the icebox. Its got a warmer heart than you have."

"Marvin, you get upstairs!"

"Say Merry Chrismus to your father, Marvin."

Marvin kissed his parents; his father's stubbly cheek, his mother's salt-wet one. He felt sorry for his mother but he hoped Grandma McAneny wouldn't come to live with them.

1907

GRANDMA McANENY went to an institution and the Lang household went on as before. Mother slept with Father, and not in the icebox after all.

Father took all the bills to the bank at nine o'clock every morning, keeping the silver, nickels and copper from the preceding day's sales to make change. The shop netted \$45 profit, about the first week; not counting in overhead, like taxes, gas and such stuff, of course.

New Year's Day Marvin set out his new shoes, collar and shirt to wear to school the next day. He was up early to help open the store and shake down the furnace. At 8:45 he started for school.

Since the shop had opened Marvin had stirred little beyond its doors except to make deliveries. The novelty had worn off. He was glad to be able to go back to school.

Belle Bay Public School housed all eight grades. Marvin walked through the crowds of boys and girls, who ignored him pointedly. Outwardly stolid, he was in a blue funk. His hands sweated, his lips parched.

"Wu-wu-where's the principal's office?"

The big boy gave no answer, but jerked Marvin's cap over his nose.

Marvin pushed the cap back, and entered the building. A teacher went out of her way to show him Mr. Burns's office. Mr. Burns, small, fidgety, spectacled, looked at Marvin's transfer card.

"Lang, *Marvin* Luther—hm. Why not Martin? Lessee your report card. Hm. You'll have to brush up in your histry and spelling. Miss Folger's room."

Marvin stood mute, regarding Mr. Burns's back. Then he

turned, tiptoed into the hall. A janitor, approaching with pail and mop, directed him. "Miss Folger? Upstairs, room 21."

Through halls smelling of rubber, chalk dust and disinfectant. Up slate steps, iron-grilled. Room 21.

A blonde young woman, her hair coifed high, black dress with white collars and cuffs. "Yes, I'm Miss Folger. A new boy? Isn't that nice? Now where shall we put you?"

She walked along the aisles of desks, selected one, tapped it with her pencil.

"You may sit here. Has Mr. Burns your cards? Good. What is your name? Marvin Lang? A very nice name, Marvin. What is your favorite study? Do you like to draw? We have the drawing teacher on Monday. I'll give you your books as the class recites."

Marvin had never met such a nosy woman.

Bells clanged and Miss Folger left the room. More bells, then a shuffle of feet on stairs. Shuffle of feet behind walls. The cloakroom doors opened and a line of boys and a line of girls entered from opposite sides. They found their seats, stood beside them, staring at Marvin. Marvin sensed hostility with the curiosity. That was natural. He didn't care. He had a hard time ahead of him for a day or two. He dreaded it but did not question it.

"Stand up, Marvin."

Marvin stumbled to his feet. He felt his face burn. His hands fumbled for his pockets, dropped to his sides. He was in the outside row on the boys' side of the room. A pert little girl with silver-white hair, golden lashes and freckles, was beside him. She stuck out her tongue. A dark-haired, dark-skinned girl in front of her turned, stared and sniggered. A spitball hit Marvin on the ear and he winced. A colored boy stood in front of him.

"Now, children, all ready?"

Thirty young shoulder-pairs straightened, thirty young chests arched, mouths opened. The class room sang. Miss Folger waved a pencil in air.

"Good *morning* dear teacher good morning *dear* teacher . . ."

Gee! What a sissy bunch. Over in Brooklyn they gave that song up in the second grade. I'm not afraid of these sissies.

"Window monitors, please. Now, class. Hips—*firm!* Arms upward—*fling!* Hips—*firm!* Arms outward—*fling!* One-two, one-two . . ."

An outflung hand caught Marvin a stinging blow on the cheek. He turned in indignation. The boy on his right was staring

straight ahead with angelic innocence, but all the others around were grinning.

"Smarty," whispered Marvin. "I'll get you!"

"Who is whispering?" lilted Miss Folger. "Eyes all front. Fingers on shoulders—*place!* Arms upward—*fling!* One-two, one-two. Class, seated! I hope you all had a merry Christmas and that Santa brought you everything you asked for."

A chorus of boos and groans at mention of the name of the patron saint of children and thieves. Miss Folger paid no attention.

"After our long holiday I'm sure we are all eager to work. I know I am. First we will take up arithmetic and I wonder what child can tell us the last problem we worked on?"

Marvin was glad that arithmetic would start him off in the new school. He would show these sissies! But what a liar the teacher was. Why did teachers always talk in that singsong pretty-pretty way and make believe school was fun?

"That's right, Betty. We were dividing by hundreds. Now, just for practice, we'll all go to the board and I'll give a problem."

Shuffle, stamp, push. Marvin was pinched twice. He was crowded away from the board, wormed his way into a space, saw there was no chalk.

"Now, the problem is to divide—make your long division sign—four-thousand-sev-vun-hun-dred-fift-ty by—what is it, Marvin?"

"I havent any chalk."

"I have no chalk."

"I have no chalk."

"Miss Folger."

"Miss Folger."

"Alvin, break your chalk in half and give Marvin a piece."

Marvin received a damp piece of chalk an inch long.

"Now I will restate the problem—

"As soon as you have finished, turn and face the class."

Marvin worked at top speed. Finished, he wheeled and faced front.

"Well, well, a new boy has beaten everybody. Well done, Marvin. Class, arent you all ashamed to have a newcom—Ah, Priscilla! And Raymond has finished. Hurry, everybody. Merle—John—Frances—good work. William, you are the only one not finished. I'll count to ten and then times up. . . . Times up. Now read your answers."

Marvin announced his result.

"How many have the same answer?"

Hands shot up all around.

"—seventeen—twenty—twenty-three! Fine! I see we are all going to be very proud of Marvin, our new classmate, very proud!"

"Ya big show-off!"

Marvin dodged to the right, and into that ear was growled:

"Gonna be teachers pet, ainchu?"

The edge was taken off his triumph.

It was all Miss Folger's fault (Marvin thought, as he found his desk) because she talked like a gosh-darn old ninny. All proud of our new classmate! Holy Gee, he'd hafter fight!

More arithmetic. Then reading. Marvin was not called upon. Spelling, then, with the boys lined up opposite the girls. Marvin discovered that his entrance had made the division equal, fifteen of each sex.

"Nec-es-sary. Marvin!"

"Necessary. N-e-c—"

"Go on."

"Ne-c nec, c—no, I dont mean that—"

Glibly Beatrice, the albinisque brat, spelled the word.

"Sit down, Marvin, and open your speller."

("Sit down, you big slob, lettin the girls win!")

"I havent—I mean, I have no speller, Miss Folger."

"That's right. There is one on the desk. Take that."

The girls won, with nine standing when the last boy was spelled down. While the girls were eliminating each other bells clangd through the building.

"Recess! Girls, stand! Mark—*time* left—right! March!"

The girls marched into the cloakroom.

"Boys, stand! Mark—*time*!"

Down the slate stairs, the girls out one side of the building, the boys another. The fresh, cold air felt good to Marvin. He put his hands in his coat pocket and looked around, shy as a wild animal.

One of the boys from his room came up and stood squarely in front of Marvin.

"Whatcher name, kid?"

"Puddin Tane. Ask me again and I'll tell—"

The boy pushed Marvin in the chest.

Another had crept up and knelt behind him. Marvin's feet spun into the air. He came down heavily on the gravel.

"Hi-yi!"

"Whoopee!"

"High-divin champeen!"

Marvin got up dizzily, brushed off his clothes. The fourth-grade boys had formed a ring around him, swelled by some curious ones from the fifth and third.

"Whats up?"

"A new boy."

"Oh, the delicatessen kid."

"Hello, baloney!"

"Gimme a slice of ham!"

Marvin received a resounding thwack on the buttocks. He lurched forward, arms wide. Somebody pushed him in the chest, sending him reeling backward. His cap was snatched off. When he turned to look for it, he was tripped.

Marvin was scared through and through. He wanted to cry. He wanted his mother. He stood up, a hole in his stocking. The skin scraped off his knee.

"Baloney! Baloney!"

"Hello, limburger!"

There was but one thing to do, and Marvin did it, although he hated it and had to spur himself to the necessary task. He put his head down and charged at his nearest tormentor, fists flying. The unexpected charge made his chosen opponent retreat a pace or two.

"Fight! Fight!"

The boys from all grades crowded up, made of themselves a wool-faced ring of flesh.

"Go on, Fuzzy! Sock im."

"Slice his cheese!"

Chin on chest, fists clenched, Marvin glowered through red haze at the boy opposite. He was a stranger, and bigger than Marvin. In his blind charge he had picked on a boy from a higher grade. But there was no joy of combat in the other's eyes. He looked wildly around, tried to retreat, was thrust back. He doubled up his fists, swung at Marvin from a distance of three feet.

Marvin felt more confident.

"Hit me, come on an hit me," he challenged. "I dast you!"

"Sock him, Fuzzy!"

"Smear him, delicatessen!"

Ah, someone was seconding him! He had a friend. Marvin jumped at Fuzzy, punched him in the belly. He was gripped

around the shoulders. The antagonists fell, Marvin on top. He slugged for the face.

"Say nough!" he panted.

Marvin did not hear the warning, did not sense the evaporation of the audience. He was in a fight for the third time in his life, and for the first time was on top.

"Leggo!" he hollered, feeling his coat-collar gripped.

Instead he was jerked to his feet. Marvin went limp, sensing authority and adulthood in that grasp.

"So, is this the way to start your first day in school? A rowdy, hey?"

It was Mr. Burns.

"He—hit me—first!" blubbered Fuzzy.

"Did you hit Firman first?"

"Well, a whole bunch was pickin on me. They hit me and tore my stockin."

"Answer my question! Did you hit Firman first?"

"I dunno."

"Come to my office after school at three o'clock."

"Yes, sir."

"And go right to your room now."

Marvin went, head bowed, through silent, idling boys.

Recess ended. The children filed back into the room. Again everybody stared at Marvin. Mr. Burns came to the door, talked to Miss Folger who eyed Marvin sadly, shaking her yellow head.

"You're gonna get it!"

"He'll make you take your pants down."

"I'm glad I'm not you."

The whispers hissed around Marvin's ears like hail in dry leaves.

"Attention, class! We'll go on with spelling. Tablets out. Pencils—ready! The first word is pen-in-su-la. Remember your geography! Pen-in—su-la!"

The noon hour was one of the busiest at the store. Marvin made himself some sandwiches, peeling the ends of liverwurst and blutwurst for the filling. He waited until it was five minutes before one, and then ran all the way to school. His calculation was exact. He arrived just in time to tag on the end of the line marching upstairs.

In the afternoon there was history. The class showed great concern over one Roger Williams, of whom Marvin had never heard before. He was allowed to read the day's lesson while the

class recited. Geography was a review and Marvin volunteered the chief product of Chile. There was nothing in the school books to identify or translate guano, but someone had once told him what it was. It was one South American item he would never forget. In the closing half hour a new subject for the entire class was introduced for the ensuing half-term. It was called hy-jee-en. Marvin opened the slim volume and was immediately fascinated by the diagrams of hearts, intestines, lungs and bones. There was a full-page plate of an asexual human body with the skin removed. Local deficiencies in the anatomy had been supplied by some enthusiastic young artist. The first lesson was about the-bones-of-the-body. Miss Folger read about the bones with real dramatic effects, flexing her arms, tapping her skull, passing a hand down her corseted hips.

The bells rang.

"Girls—rise! Mark—*time!* Forward—*march!*

"Boys—*rise!* Not you, Marvin! Mark—*time!*"

Marvin slumped in his chair. His hair and ears were tweaked as the boys marched past to the cloakroom, but Marvin stared at his folded hands. Presently the room was empty.

Miss Folger returned briskly. She gathered up the spelling papers, took her hat from the cupboard, skewered it with pins.

"Marvin, I'm very sorry you spoiled your first day here by fighting."

Marvin gulped, hung his head lower.

"You will get the reputation of being a city tough. You wouldn't want that to happen."

Marvin moved his folded hands and bent a sour gaze on the sweaty stain they had left.

"Why did you have to fight?"

"Gee, Miss Folger, they all picked on me. They said I was a smarty, and pushed me down and tore my stocking and—and everything."

"Two wrongs never made a right, Marvin. You must learn to bear and forbear, to heap coals of fire on the heads of those that mock you."

The vision of himself shoveling glowing embers on the scalps of sundry bound and helpless youths made Marvin smile.

"Come with me to Mr. Burns's office."

Marvin rose with resignation. He was in the grip of powers he could not combat. He trailed Miss Folger down the stairs, into the principal's office.

"Excuse me, Mr. Burns, but here is Marvin Lang."

"Oh, yes. Tell him to sit down. Good afternoon, Miss Folger."

Marvin sat down on a straight-backed chair and swung his feet while the principal, back turned, wrote with a spluttery pen in a very large manila-covered blank book. The hands of the clock crept to a quarter past three, to half past, to twenty minutes of four.

Mr. Burns sighed, and rose.

"Well—huh—what do *you* want?"

"You wanted to see me." Meekly.

"I want—oh, yes. You are the new boy."

Mr. Burns's chin pressed against his collar and his eyebrows mounted halfway to his hair.

"You are the boy I found beating another."

Marvin wiped his perspiring hands on his pants.

"Didn't I?"

"N-no, sir. Yes, sir."

"You may have been accustomed to ganging and scrapping in Brooklyn, but that sort of stuff doesn't go in Belle Bay."

"No, sir. But, Mr. Burns, they started it. They—"

"Silence! It is bad enough to fight without trying to sneak out of it when you are caught. Lang, you will have to have a lesson in decency and sportsmanship."

Mr. Burns reached behind the door, took up a rubber-tipped pointer, swished it in the air.

"Lean over and put your hands on your knees!"

Marvin obeyed. His heart was a churn and his blood was water.

The pliant wood creased his backside. It was the first time in his life that Marvin had been struck by anyone except another boy, in fair fight. His hands slipped from his knees and he fell on his face, missing the second cut of the switch.

"Get up!"

Marvin lay on the floor, his breath whistling in his gullet. He shook his head, rubbing his nose on the rubber mat with the motion. Burns grabbed him by the shoulder, jerked him to his feet.

"So you are a coward, are you? You'll not stand to be hit yourself, hey?"

"Nobody—ever whipped me—before," Marvin whispered, and burst into a torrent of tears to prevent which he would gladly have been beaten bloody.

"Maybe that's the trouble with you. You need a good hiding to teach you to be orderly. I am going to write a note to your father. It calls for an answer which you will bring me in the morning, do you hear?"

Marvin nodded.

He stopped weeping, but could not control the periodic sobs, too big for his throat.

"Here's the note."

Marvin took the folded paper, turned, made for the door.

"Come back here!"

Marvin was tempted to run, knew he could not run far enough or fast enough to escape, ever.

"Is that how a young man leaves his principal's office?"

Marvin stood, dumbly.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Burns!" The principal enunciated.

"Goodafternoon, Mr. Burns!" Marvin repeated.

"Good afternoon, Lang."

Marvin walked home slowly. His bottom hurt from the cut of the whip.

"Marvin! Where have you been? Your mother is worried to death and there's a big order waiting for 11 Hamburg street!"

Marvin passed his father the principal's note.

"Kept after school," he mumbled. "Where's the order?"

"In that box. What's this?"

"Note."

Marvin shouldered the box and kicked the door of the shop open. He hoped that accidentally, what with his vision obscured by the box and all, he would be run down at the corner, preferably by a fire engine.

The gaslights were being lit when he reached the store again. Father was waiting on a customer. Marvin passed through to the kitchen.

"Oh, Marvin! In trouble the first day of school."

"Well, it wasnt my fault! A whole gang picked on me and knocked me down. Look at my stocking. And when I hit one of them the ole principal came along and—gee whiz!"

"Dont shout so, Marvin. You havent kissed me yet, either."

Marvin wiped his lips on his mother's cheek, took down his apron and went into the store tying it on.

Father was still waiting on the same woman. But there was someone else in the shop. Marvin blinked. It was Beatrice, she of the blond eyelashes and strawtop, who spelled so glibly.

"Hello, Marvin."

"Hello."

"Mommer wants two shillings' worth of eggs and a quarter pound of green tea."

Marvin wrapped up the order.

"Forty cents."

Beatrice gave him half a dollar. Marvin made the change.

The girl started slowly for the door, hesitated with her hand on the latch, came back.

"Marvin," almost a whisper. "Didja get hit?"

"Yes."

"Did he make you take your pants down?"

"He did not, the big slob. I'd like to see him make me!"

Marvin wanted to show off in front of this little girl who was so sympathetic. She seemed rather disappointed at the padded whipping, though.

"Gee, Marvin. He sometimes even makes the girls take their pants down."

"Go on! Did he ever do it to you?"

Beatrice shook her head violently. Her eyes were aswim, and her tongue peeped between her lips.

"Mmmm."

"Well, I guess I showed them I could fight."

"Gee, I bet you did. Us girls didnt see it."

"Say, where do you live?"

"Right next door, you big booby."

"Next door—you mean over there?"

"Sure thing! I been in here before. I came in the first morning and bought rolls and you skinned us out of one."

"I didn't remember you at all."

"Say, Marvin, come on over. My uncle has rabbits in the cellar."

"Gee, rabbits?"

"Ooh, there's Mommer callin'."

A flirt of skirts, and Beatrice was gone. Marvin felt two inches taller. His behind didn't sting any more.

At nine o'clock Father closed the store. "A poor day," he said, scooping the money from the cash drawer, easily with one hand. Marvin put pans and jars into the ice chest.

"I'm sorry to hear that your principal complained on you the very first day."

"He's a big—"

"Ah! A-a-ah! Easy, now."

"Well, it wasnt my fault."

Marvin told his story. He started telling it with his head in the icebox, finished in the kitchen.

"I believe Marvin."

"But he cant fight and give us a bad name. That boy's mother wont trade here, and she'll talk to her friends. Marvin, if you do anything wrong it's cheating your mother and father who work and toil for you. It's taking money out of the cash drawer."

"Well, am I gonna stand an let em hit me?"

"Dont do anything to provoke them. Say 'yes,' 'sure!' It wont hurt you."

"Well, gee whiz, if they hit me first—"

"You go right in and tell the principal."

"But—"

"Dont argue!"

Father searched for writing paper, hunted for the ink. There was one sheet of paper, no ink, no envelope. He wrote in pencil.

"My dear Mr. Burns. I am very sorry to hear my Marvin was disorderly and I assure you it will not happen again. Marvin is usually peace loveing and well behaved but inclined to be nervous and always a delicate boy so the excitement must of gone to his head the first day. I think he has learned his lesson. Yours respec'yly Carl G. Lang, Table Delicacies."

He read it aloud.

"Maybe you ought to apoligise to the boy you hit. Find out where he lives without fail, and we'll go to his house tomorrow night."

"I aint no girl!"

"No, but you are going to be a gentleman! You cant scare off customers, you got to learn."

On February 1 there was \$387 in the Lang account in the Belle Bay branch of the Richmond Savings & Trust Co.

Also a pile of envelopes in the mail.

While Marvin traced a map of Europe, Father and Mother shuffled the papers removed from the envelopes and did sums on the backs of them.

"\$387 in the bank and bills for \$766!"

"But look, \$300 of that is for the fixtures, and you said they gave you ninety days. That gives us until March 15."

"Well, then, try to see how many times \$466 goes into \$387!"

"Listen, send each of them a little bit. Send them each half; that'll show you are trying."

"Theres so much dead stock. Nobodys bought olives yet. We ought to send em back."

"We've got low on canned soups and herrings in tomato. Those are good numbers."

Marvin muttered darkly, took his homework away from the table.

"We've got to economize. We must have taken in over \$500 since opening. Where did it go to?"

"I suppose you think I put it on my back? I sup—"

Marvin closed the bedroom door on the debate.

Marvin went to the Methodist Sunday school on the corner.

One evening in mid-January a tall, broad-shouldered man, redhaired and violet-eyed, with hands like a pitcher's mitt and huge feet made larger by arctics, had entered the store.

He waited, scanning the shelves, until the store was empty.

"Mr. Lang?"

"At your service."

"I am the pastor of the church at the corner. My name is Jackson."

"Pleased to meet you, reverend."

"I would have come sooner, but I wanted to give you folks a chance to get settled."

"I'm nicely settled now, and hope I'll please the neighborhood."

"We needed a store like this."

"Nice of you to say so, reverend."

"Is this your son?"

"That's Marvin, our only child. Shake hands with the reverend, Marvin."

"Marvin, we need boys like you at our Sabbath school. School!"

"Is your good wife at home?"

"Yes, she is, reverend. Marvin, call Mother."

Mother came into the store, wiping water-wrinkled hands. She had been putting the washing to soak.

"This is the Methodist parson, mother."

"Pleased to meet you, I'm sure."

"I came to welcome you to our little community. A little late, I'm afraid, but Christmas is our busy season, and you know how it is."

"Oh, yes, we know. Wont you come in and sit awhile?"

"Well, then, just for a few minutes. I'd like to get acquainted."

"Marvin, you can close up."

Marvin put out the lights in the windows; he put in the icebox the things that needed to go in the icebox. He raked the sawdust on the floor, dimmed the big central globe, and went into the living room.

"—you are affiliated with any other church."

"Well, in Brooklyn we went to the Lutheran church and Marvin rarely missed a day at Sunday school."

"I see."

"But there ain—isnt any Lutheran church in town, now, is there?"

"I understand there is a small group meeting in a vacant store out on Bay Avenue. But they are Swedes, mostly. Foreigners from the shipyard."

"Oh. Well, then! We aint scanihoovians, ha-ha!—no, sir! My father was in the Civil War."

"A Boy in Blue, hey?"

"My folks are English—Scotch, that is. *I* was brought up in the Presbyterian Church."

"Is that so, Mrs. Lang! Well. We have a Presbyterian and a Dutch Reformed church in town."

"Well, we are all bound for the same station, if we do take different roads, I always say."

"Quite right, Mr. Lang. I sometimes pray that sooner or later all the Protestant denominations will unite against the common foes."

"Yes, there's too much competition."

"Well, I really must go. I hope you'll see your way clear to join us, both of you. And we'll expect Marvin at Sabbath school next Sunday at eleven."

"He'll be there. He missed not going to Sunday school."

Marvin went down cellar and tended furnace. What made them think he missed Sunday school? Good grief, as if he didnt have enough school five days a week, and work all Saturday and afternoons and evenings. Couldnt a feller have any time to himself?

"Well, Marvin, it will be real nice, wont it?"

"Huh!"

"You want to grow up to be a Christian, thats what. Find out

what its all about. Besides, its bad for business, us not being seen at some church or another."

"Are you goin'?"

"Well, now, I think it would be best if Mother and I dropped in, some Sunday at one church, some at another, just sos not to show any partiality. It dont pay for a storekeeper to take sides."

So Marvin went to Sunday school, two cents in his pocket for the collection. The school met in the basement of the church. After two hymns and a short talk by the superintendent, who was the paying teller at the bank, the boys and girls gathered in groups around their teachers.

Marvin was in a group of seven boys, all in his room in the public school. His teacher was a fat, jolly woman with iron-gray hair, nose glasses, and a corset that creaked. Her name was Mrs. Massina, and she was Italian. Marvin had believed Italians were all males (who worked for the gas company) dagoes and Catholics.

"Now, what does the story of the widows mite teach?"

"How can *we* use the lesson of the Good Samaritan?"

"What Jesus meant when he said it was easier for a camel to pass through a needles eye than for a rich man to enter heaven was that you cant get into heaven just because you are rich. I guess none of us will have a hard time, hey, boys?"

After the group lessons there was responsive reading. The superintendent selected a psalm and read a verse. Then the whole Sunday school read the next verse in chorus. Then the superintendent read the next verse. Sometimes he would have the girls read one response and the boys the next.

It wasnt so bad, Sunday school, after you got there, Marvin thought, but gee, the dressing up!

"Mother, I need a new collar. This one is busted at the buttonhole."

"But, Marvin, you only just got it at Christmas!"

"Well, it wore out."

"Wont your tie hold it together?"

"But if I move my head the tie jumps off of the button and the collar comes undone."

"Oh, dear. Let me see it."

There was a sort of club called the Epworth League. They wore a "button" and couldn't ever dance, go to a show or have any fun. They were a bunch of prunes.

At Sunday school Marvin was taught that God (who was Three persons) made the world in six days and loved it so that

He gave His only begotten Son to save it, and wrote a Book about it, every word of which was True. If you were good you went to heaven when you died and being a Methodist was being good. God forbade people to make graven images, to work on Sunday and a lot of other things that pretty nearly everybody did anyhow. From the Bible, with Mrs. Massina's help, Marvin learned that Jesus turned water into wine, walked on water, raised the dead, rose from the dead and suffered so all Methodists could go to heaven, although the Presbyterians and a few others stood a pretty good chance. From the Bible, with the help of some of his more advanced classmates, Marvin learned about circumcision, menstruation, fornication, sodomy, incest and whores.

At school Marvin maintained high marks in arithmetic, passing grades in history, English, hygiene; in spelling and geography he had his ups and downs.

He played marbles and pitched cigarette picture-cards. It was gambling but it was fun. He had no more fights. As soon as school was over in the afternoon he went straight home; if he was late his mother was worried. His father also was apt to be cross. Marvin helped tend store, made deliveries. He ate baloney ends, bits of cheese, crumbs of butter, broken crackers, dried apricots and prunes and had no appetite at mealtimes, so tonics were still administered. Every Sunday morning he was given four cents, half for the collection, half as pocket money. Custom at the shop fell off abruptly after the first six weeks, the novelty gone for the neighborhood. Lang's was an emergency depot. Marvin's overcoat sleeves and mittens did not meet, but many children had no mittens.

Bums came and asked for handouts. If there were customers present Father handed out black coffee and a roll; if no one was in the store he gave the panhandlers nothing.

Sisters of Charity came softly once a week, hunting in pairs. Father always gave them a loaf of yesterday's bread and a can of something, nodded acknowledgment of their "*God bless you!*" When they left Father would observe they gave him the creeps in their spooky getup and cats' feet, but you had to stay on the right side of them. Lord knows what might happen if you get the nuns and Jesuits down on you.

The Langs always had full bellies; that was one good thing about the store. Each month Father paid a little on his bills from two months before.

"Business'll pick up in the summer."

"Yeah, the crowds will be comin through for the beaches."

Spring came. The maples bloodied the sidewalks with red blossom-corpses, the ash buds swelled, the elms made a green froth against the sky. Marvin felt a delicious languor, sitting on the bread box outside the store; was given sulphur and molasses, which wasnt half bad stuff. Beatrice skipped rope, sat on the box beside Marvin.

"You never play."

"Gee whiz, I got to work all the time."

"You never came down our cellar to see the rabbits."

"I'll come Sunday afternoon."

"All right. They're funny. They lay lots of babies."

Marvin was called inside to put on his coat.

"Gosh, mother! It's too hot. I'll roast."

"This is deceitful weather, Marvin. It feels warm but that's just to fool you. It's newmonia weather."

Marvin went out in his coat but Beatrice was playing hopscotch with Johanne Sundquist.

Some boys went by with shinny sticks.

"Yea, Marv! Come on an play."

"I cant."

Later to his parents he proposed an advance on salary so he could buy a shinny stick for a dime.

"Oh, Marvin, that's such a rough game."

"You'll get to going with a gang."

"And it's so dangerous, playing in the streets."

"I want my son to be a man, of course. Why dont you play baseball?"

"Gee, I aint got no glove, and no time either."

"Business is slack. If there are no deliveries to make after school you can play. You ought to be in the fresh air more."

"Can I buy a mitt?"

"Save up your money!"

Friday afternoon Marvin went out to play baseball.

"Ya bat cross-handed."

"You'll break ya risk."

Marvin, gloveless, was allowed to play right field. He chased two fouls, missed one fly. In three times at bat he struck out once, was out at first on an easy roller to the pitcher's box, was hit in the ribs by a pitched ball and forced at second.

He got mud on his pants, had the two top buttons of his blouse ripped off.

"Cant you play some game that isnt so roughhouse?"

Sunday, after Sabbath school and dinner, he knocked at Beatrice's back door.

"Kin I see the rabbits?"

"Ooh, you bet."

"Gee, it's dark down here."

"You can see the rabbits, though. They're by the window."

Marvin saw a dozen twinkling noses, gleaming red eyes; smelled the sharp lepine stench. Beatrice stood very close to him.

"They lay babies lots."

"Yeah?"

"Once I seen one hop on top of another."

"Yeah?"

"Are you ticklish?"

"No; why?"

"I am. I dare you to tickle me."

"What's the fun? Lets go upstairs. I dont like the smell."

Vacation time arrived. Marvin was promoted to the fifth grade. The nigger boy was left back.

"Suppose on Saturdays and Sundays we made a lot of sandwiches and wrapped them in paper napkins. I bet Marvin could sell a lot on the beach."

The beach; Marvin had been to it twice. Once with some boys who went to test the water and found it cold and dirty; once when all went in swimming but Marvin, who watched their clothes.

"You lay chicky for us, see?"

Sunday morning, after Sunday school closed, Marvin took the big chip basket in which the rolls were usually kept and went down to the beach. As he crossed the car line he saw crowds getting off a trolley and trailing off down Schurz Avenue, which continued down to the bay.

Red earth grew salty with sand, then came sand in which coarse grasses grew and rustled. Rows of boxlike houses eaves to eaves, without back yards at all. Smell of sea and kerosene. Bathing suits flopping on washlines strung across 4 by 8 porches. Slatted wooden sidewalks half buried in sand. Men in shirt sleeves, carrying blue serge coats, handkerchiefs tucked inside their collars. Women in starched white skirts, held above the sand. Beer bottles and greasy papers. Children in button shoes, boys in white linen suits; girls in white dresses, petticoats and drawers, visible in so many layers. Children in bathing suits, children in underwear. Children with tin pails with American flags lithographed on the sides.

Some of the houses were tents. The row facing the water was of more pretentious structure than the back ranks. They had scrollwork at the cornices and some had names: "Dew Drop Inn" and "Co-zee Corner." There were eating places; a Japanese place where rice cakes, waffles, sesame candy and souvenirs were sold; a German place where beer, soft drinks and sandwiches, hot corn, were served. A shooting gallery, a ring-toss game, a row of penny-in-the-slot Columbia phonographs with ear tubes, a dip-the-dip ride.

The beach was dotted with men, women, children. A rotten old pier, sagging badly, was employed as dressing room for groups of young men. It served in the same degree that a pillow over the head serves as protection against lightning. The women-folk kept their backs politely turned, jerked their children's heads around. Women undressed their children on the sand. Men in knee-length bathing suits, showing hairy chests and backs, pranced into the greasy surf.

It was congenial, gemuetlich, lively, democratic.

Marvin thought it was swell.

He put his basket down and sat in the sand. Whenever anyone passed close he looked up and asked mildly, "Sanwitch?"

"Whaddaya got, kid?"

"Ham, Swiss cheese and corn beef."

They were five cents apiece.

"Ma-ma-a! Buy me a sannitch!"

"We got moren you can eat in the basket."

Marvin sold eleven sandwiches by one o'clock, mostly to young, unattached males. He ate one himself. That left a dozen to dispose of. A policeman, who had been patrolling the beach, came out of the German beer garden wiping his mustache, straight to Marvin.

"Hey, whaddaya doon?"

"Sellin sanwitches."

"Got a peddler's license?"

"N-no, sir!"

"Thin git to hell off the beach, see? No peddlin allowed."

Marvin walked slowly up Schurz Avenue. Near the car line, just below the Methodist church, he sat down on the curb. People were still straggling down to the beach. He sold one sandwich; around four o'clock the ebb set in, people hurrying to catch the trolley. Sunburned, cross, stockings full of sand; children upset from the sun and sweets.

At five o'clock Marvin sold another sandwich. The customer unwrapped the grease-soaked paper. The sandwich drooped in his hand like a piece of flannel.

"Wotzis? A cellerloid sandwich?"

"No, sir. Swiss cheese."

"It tastes like crap."

The man threw the warm, limp bread into the gutter and walked off without demanding his nickel back. When he was safely lost in the crowd waiting for the trolley Marvin shouldered his basket and ran home.

Father was opening the shop for the evening.

"I sold thirteen!"

"No profit in that. The leftovers are no good. We'll have to eat them for supper."

"And a cop chased me. I got to have a license."

"Why did you let him chase you? Why didnt you stand your ground? Did you tell him who you were?"

"No. He said I had to get the aitch out of there."

"I'll have to see if I can get some pull, that's all."

Marvin played ball; visited the beach early of mornings and pulled off his clothes under the old pier and went in bathing. He never got wet above the waist unless someone tripped him, ducked him. He hated the taste of the bay water, was afraid to get it in his nose and eyes. He kept his bathing excursions a secret from his parents for fear they would forbid them, until one day he found his shoelaces knotted, his shirt sleeves tied and soaked in salt water. He had to run home, barefoot and in his undershirt. To his surprise Father laughed; Mother, fuming at the rascality of children without proper upbringing, did not forbid revisiting the beach.

"Dont go in over your head."

Most unnecessary advice.

Marvin began suddenly to grow. His shirt cuffs were midway to his elbows, the drawstrings at the waist did not help keep contact between blouse and pants. It was agreed that "the child needs clothes."

"Cn I have long pants?"

"Long pants! My God, and him not twelve."

He went on needing clothes. Plenty of time for a new suit when school opens. Besides, times were getting harder.

Women began asking for credit again. They had asked that

from the beginning, and Marvin had been instructed always to point to the sign which proclaimed "In God We Trust Nobody Else."

"If they dont get credit here theyll go somewheres else."

"Yes, but we still have the goods they would of hung us up for."

But Father bought a ledger at the stationery store and allowed familiar and hitherto good cash customers to have credit. The list grew.

Women would come in and pay something on account. Then when the bill grew awkwardly long they would stay away, walk on the far side of the street, until some evening an appearance would be made with a \$5 bill.

"Hello, Mr. Lang. Will you deduct this from what I owe?"

"There was no hurry, Mrs. Probst." Polite lie. "Is there anything else I can do you for—ha ha. The cut of ham is nice, right down the middle without fat."

"Hm, I'll take a dime's worth."

Mrs. Probst walked out with \$2.63 worth of food, but there was an unexpected and badly needed \$5 bill in the cash drawer.

"Hello, Lang."

"Good evening, Mr. Swartz."

"Dropped by to pay you a liddle something. Got a job paintin over at Dongon Hills."

"No hurry at all, Mr. Swartz. Any times convenient."

"Ja hear about that fine some judge plastered onto John D.? Over two millyan dollars!"

"Ya dont say. That's a lot of dough even for Stannard Oil."

"It's time them trusts was busted up."

"Leave it to Teddy. He oughta be re-elected."

The Roosevelt Admiration League went into session and Mr. Swartz went away forgetting to pay on his bill.

Marvin played cops and robbers, Injans and cowboys, baseball. He cowered in thunderstorms. "God is angry, that's why it thunders. I hope you got a clean conscience, Marvin."

"Gee, mother, I didnt do a thing."

"Keep away from the stove, it attracts lightnin'."

And suddenly Marvin found girls utterly distasteful. He hated their ability to make insulting faces, hated the way they quarreled shrilly with each other, scorned their namby-pamby games. Kaffeeklatsch, with tepid sweetened water poured into thimble-size cups! Dolls! Dressing up!

"Looka the golen rod. It's yellor. That means school soon."

"Then can I have long pants?"

Marvin's twelfth birthday.

"Now you're goin into your teens."

"So can I have long pants when you get my new suit?"

"You got to grow more. You should eat up your vegetables, an the crusts on your bread."

The evening of another day.

"Bad news, hey, Lang?"

"What's that? Here, Marvin, wait on the lady. What bad news, Loehr?"

"Didnt you see in the paper? Knickerbocker Trust went up the spout."

"My heavens!"

"It's a panic all right."

"Teddy'll pull us through. It's Wall Street tryin to get back at him. For bustin up the trusts."

"Teddy my eye. That bastid. He's scared busness out of the country, that's what he's done."

"Well, I cant pretend to know much about it."

Marvin going home from school the next noon saw a lot of people standing at every corner, talking. He counted five women crying openly.

"Gee, somethin awful must of happened!"

He ran to the shop. There was no one in it. Behind the icebox and up into the living room he pounded. There was Father, sprawled over the table, head in arms. Mother stood against the wall between the windows twisting her apron, staring into space.

"Mother—father—what hap—!"

"My poor boy."

"What's the matter? All the people cryin on the streets . . ."

"Shut that damn trap," from Father, muffled.

Marvin sat on the floor. He felt as if something were clawing through his guts into his chest. There came to him an awareness of world terribly complicated; of distant forces manipulating lives, unseen, unreachable.

"I noticed the people going past in a hurry like there was a fire," Father began suddenly, talking to himself more than to his family. "I steps out. What's up? I yells. Mrs Kleister dont stop. Run on the bank, she yells to me. Of course I ran. The line was past York Street already. It scarcely moved at all. Then the cops

come along. Move along, move along, they says, the bank's shut up. My God, even men fainted. Oh, my God."

"We're better off than most," Mother said.

"They're all crooks. How can they make money disappear? I put it in, why cant I get it out? If I took an short-changed a customer fifty cents I'd be arrested. Are they putting the bank people into jail? Ha ha ha ha. Oh, my God."

"We own the roof over our heads, anyhow."

"And what's it worth? You couldn get a hundred in cash for it."

"It's shelter. We dowanna sell it. An we have food, we wont starve."

"Oh, no, we can eat up the stock. An when it's gone we cant get any more or pay for what we took, but what's the use of worrying? Jesus!"

"An we got our health an strength, thank the Lord."

"You'd be better off in a charity ward sick. What's the use, what's the use? Thank God I kept up my lodge insurance. I'll take the pipe. You bury me in potter's field and the thousand dollars will see you an Marvin out of this mess."

"Father!" Panic gripped Marvin the tighter. He scrambled across the floor and hugged his father's legs. "Father! Dont! Dont die. I'll work."

"Ah, you're a good son, Marvin."

"Marvin, you come get some lunch or you'll be late."

"I'm not goin back to school. I'm gonna work. I can shine shoes."

"People wont have shoes to wear this winter."

Father stood up. He seemed shorter, shrunk, less stout. His hair was rumpled and his eyes black-rimmed. He went into the store. Marvin darted ahead of him, got between him and the keen baloney knives.

Father went to the cash drawer, opened it.

"Just three dollars an one cent."

His knees went out from under him. He clutched the edge of the counter staring blindly over the top, blue eyes twitching in their sockets.

Suddenly he began beating his forehead against the counter. He jerked his head back and drove his brow against the sharp edge.

Marvin screamed for Mother, afraid to go near. Mother ran into the store, stopped short at the sight of Father rhythmically

driving his forehead against the hard wood. Blood was all over his face.

Mother plunged the dipper into the milk can, poured it into Father's face; she grabbed his shoulders, pulled him over backward.

"Carl Lang, you're a fool an a disgrace. You havent the backbone of a louse. Get up, you Dutch slob. A fine example to your boy."

"I wanna die, I wanna die!"

Mother picked up a can of baked beans and bounced it from Father's head. She swept a whole pyramid of cans down upon him with one sweep of an arm. Marvin ran to her, clung to her, begging her to stop.

Four or five children gathered in the doorway to see the fun. Father was on his hands and knees now, staring down at the pink puddle of blood and milk that dripped from his nose to the floor.

"Get out of here, Marvin. I guess I can handle this fine father."

Marvin retreated, saw the kids in the doorway, charged at them with a bellow of rage and shame. The children fled across the street.

"Yah yah, Marvin's ole man is drunk!"

Marvin threw a stone at them, turned back into the shop. His father was up, leaning against the counter. Mother was wiping his forehead with her apron, kissing his cheek, and sobbing and calling him baby names.

Marvin walked to the corner. Groups of people everywhere. Women with aprons hugged to their breasts; women with shawls, with men's jackets and with hats, without hats, with dustcaps, and with hair down their backs.

Men in slippers, in undershirts; and two policemen marching up and down in front of the bank. The bank's iron grille stretched across door and windows.

"Hi, Marv!"

"Hlo, Chick."

"Gee, I wisht I could of seen it."

"My old man lost a lot of dough."

My old man. It was the first time in his life Marvin had used the deprecatory title for his parent. He had a momentary vision of Father beating his head against the counter.

"Yeah, my old man lost a whole lot of dough. It nearly made him batty, I guess."

"Aincha gone to school?"

"Naw."

(If the old man takes the pipe like he said I'll take care of Mother. I can run the store as good as he can, I guess.)

It took a national panic to do it, but now Marvin had a pair of pants with a buttoned fly. Mother contrived the garment out of a pair of Father's trousers that were out at the seat. The material salvaged from the legs mended the seat, wherefore they were not long pants. They were long in the waist, true enough, but anyhow they had a button-up fly instead of a flap.

Things got cheaper, but for reasons no one could understand that made it harder to live. Goods bought on credit in September brought less than wholesale prices in November, which was cheap enough, God knows, except few people could buy much.

Father went to Tompkinsville to negotiate a mortgage.

"You know how much this place is worth, they say?"

"No, Carl. We paid—"

"Listen, worth twenny-five hunnerd only."

"But we paid moren twice—"

"I know it, I know it. Who paid out the money? But anyhow they let me borrow six hunnerd on it but right away they collect the interest in advance."

"Thank God, now we can pay some bills. I never know if it's a collector or a customer comin into the store."

"Father, why cant I work like I said? Gee, school! I cant remember the junk we had last year an I can do arithmetic in my head."

"You keep at school. Someday you'll be glad we afforded you an education."

A frugal Thanksgiving and a dull Christmas.

"I swear I dont know where the money goes."

"We pay a little here an a little there. I wish we had enough to pay all the bills at once, then we could go on a cash basis . . ."

"Why dont you wish for a million dollars while you're at it. It's just as easy as wishin for a little bit."

"Somebody in the store now."

"By God I wish I was back in Bohan's again, back in the old house collecting rents. Here last years taxes aint even paid."

"Cant I get a job, father?"

"You can go wait on who's in the store, that's what. Work? Why dont you do the job that's on hand an give me a minute's peace from that damn store, I wanna know."

1908

ANOTHER SPRING. Business was better. The bank was open again but Father kept the money hidden in the house and that was a new worry for Mother on account of burglars.

"And suppose there's a fire!"

"Did we ever have a fire? Do you know anybody that had one?"

Father kept it a secret, how much money he had. When bill collectors came he would go to his hiding place, return with wadded bills.

"I'll give you twelve dollars on account."

"That's half of what you owe. Can I have the balance next week?"

"Come around an I'll see."

"Well, looks like Taft is gonna be nominated."

"And elected. God, if the Democrats had been in last fall!"

"I don't know, now. Bryan says . . ."

"Bryan, hey? How'd you like it if I'd just paid you in twelve big silver dollars? Bryan an his silver! You'd need a pushcart."

Who was President was important. Congressmen, governors, mayors, aldermen and cops got their jobs by pull. Rotten eggs and dead cats is good enough for Democrats.

Marvin simply had to have a new suit, just the same. Father admitted it after taking Marvin under the light and turning him around critically. So Mother was given six dollars and she bought Marvin a suit two sizes too large for him, with good Scotch thrift.

But then Marvin developed a toothache and Mother filled a bag with salt and heated it in the oven, gave it to him to hold against his swollen cheek. When that did no good she bought a dime's worth of tooth wax at Schreck's Pharmacy and poked it into the cavities with a toothpick. After the effects of the narcotic

wore off the wax in the teeth made Marvin's pain unbearable, and he cried aloud despite all taunts of being a sissy and a coward.

"That's what you get for eatin too much sugar swiped from the bowl."

"Sweets rots teeth."

"Take him around and have em yanked, that's all."

Mother took Marvin to Painless Pardoe's Parlors. A smiling young Jewish dentist jabbed Marvin's gums with a syringe, tackled the stumps of his six-year molars with terrifying pincers.

"Spit."

"Now open wide, I got to get the pieces."

Marvin felt as if his mouth were as big as a ferry slip. The four extractions cost \$2, and it was fun, walking home, to spit blood on the sidewalk.

"I hope, son, you'll always appreciate what your parents have done for you. You're a big expense to us but we think you are worth it. So try to be a little apprecshative."

Mainly the social life of the Langs was limited to across-the-counter gossip. Sometimes Father would stand outside the door of the shop to smoke his pipe and men would stop and talk.

"Looks like a late summer."

"It'll be hot enough soon enough."

"Yep, seems like we cant ever be satisfied with the weather. Stoo hot or too cold. Too long between rains an floods when we get it."

"I guess it aint natural for humans to be satisfied."

"I guess we wouldnt get nowheres if we was."

Philosophy! Or, occasionally, political economy:

"Taft against Bryan, I guess it will be. Well, the way I look at it the Republicans stood for a united country in '61 and by God in '98 they showed the old countries a thing or two and made the country bigger. The Democrats was against the Civil War an against us lickin the Spanish. Trouble with them is, they are always against things. And against sound money, against collectin a tax on furrin goods that takes the food out of an American workingmans mouth."

Or science:

"I see them Wright brothers is over in France now. It's wonder to me they're alive at all. Flying—flying in the face of Providence I calls it."

"Vaccination? Before they'd get me to let em put dirty old

cow pus from an infested cow into the clean blood of my Marvin they'd have to electrocute me."

Certainly religion:

"Live an let live is my motto. A man can be a better Christian than most an not go near to a church. I believe in baptism an funeral services, of course I do. Certainly every kid ought to go to Sunday school. I dont know 'where I'd be except for my Christian upbringing. But where us Prodderstants is all wrong is getting all divided up into different sex. Look at the Catholics now. The Masons cant touch em for a click. Of course they *are* mostly ignorant class of people. That's what makes the Romans so strong, keepin the people ignorant. Keep the Bible away from em, forbid em the public school an teach em all they have to do is kiss a priests toe and all sins is forgiven."

Marvin learned the arguments by heart, they were so often repeated. Then he would repeat the family dogma to his play-mates in turn.

"By the time I'm a man all we'll have to do is push a button an let lectrizitty do all the work."

"If a Cathlic kid swipes an apple all he's gotta do is give the priest half or somethin an the cops cant touch him."

Usually, he found, his companions believed exactly as he did. Exceptions were mostly youthful Democrats.

Marvin passed into the sixth grade without honor but by the same token without conditions. Some of the boys of his class were not promoted and Marvin joined in the chorus tagging behind the moping failures.

"Left back, left back, *Jimmie Brenner was left back!*"

The chant varied with:

"No more studies
No more books
No more teachers
Nasty looks."

Vacation!

For an hour every morning Marvin had to sift ashes. The winter's accumulation, piled high in the cellar, had to be shoveled into a zinc hopper and the screen inside revolved by a crank. The cinders were piled in the coalbin. The flourlike residue was carted into the back yard and spread to keep the weeds down.

During the noon and evening "rush hours" he was supposed

to help in the store, and did willingly. It was no longer a novelty to guess at a pound of butter in carving from the tub, or to slice a wafer of sausage to make the scales balance exactly at four ounces. But in the shop he was not a child. He was an adult to whom other adults came for assistance and sustenance. He heard gossip. He was a man, not only among men, but among women.

The rest of the day was at his disposal. Mostly he trooped with other boys around his own age, the "Schurz Avenue gang" they were pleased to call their company. They spoke darkly of going over and showing the York Street gang who was bossing Belle Bay.

In the vacant lots and along the beach the boys went about their intense, aimless pursuits. A game of leapfrog was spontaneously organized, to break up in loud whoops and a mad rush at a signboard, behind which they all dropped to build a fire in a bottomless garbage pail someone had decently discarded out of sight. That summer Marvin tried his first cigarette. Every cigarette box, Mecca or Recruits Little Cigars or Omars, was pounced upon by the first lad to spot it, because some blokes left the picture cards inside. Once one such cardboard container held an overlooked cigarette, oval, pungent. It was concealed on the person of the finder and with theatrical airs of innocence the troop retreated to a safe hideaway, where the cigarette was lighted and passed from hand to hand. Most of them coughed. Marvin did, and for hours he was conscious of the taste in his mouth from the single drag.

"My old woman says she can always tell if I smoke cause it'll make my eyebrows darker."

"Gee whiz! Hey, watch my eyebrows while I take a puff—did they get darker?"

"No. I think that's a lot of crap."

"But smokin does stunt your growth."

"Well, gee whiz, that's smokin reglar. A puff now and then dont count. It stands to reason."

Occasionally the gang would make a foray on some minor grocery. Two or three would go in, when it was seen that the shop was in the care of a lone clerk, and beg for matches or stale bread, to mask the operations of those on the outside who filched potatoes and apples from the barrels displayed on the sidewalk.

Marvin and two or three of the more regular attendants at

Sunday school never took part, except to "lay chicky" for the cops. It was stealing, pure and simple. When the stolen fruits were baked in a bonfire the conscientious objectors usually compromised with their still, small voices to eat of the cindery, half-raw cookery.

Rarely did they talk of anything beyond the activity immediately engaging them. Some of the boys had chosen careers for themselves as tugboat captains, harbor pilots, wild animal trainers.

"One thing, I aint never gonna get *married*."

"I sh'd say *not*. Gee, a man's a boob to get married."

"I'm gonna go where I darn want to go, with no woman tagging after me. But I'll have me girls."

"I dont even wanna bother with girls."

"I'm gonna go to places like Turkey an—an—like that. An I'll go to the slave markets an buy me ten girls, an sit on a couch, smokin an puffin rings an make the girls all take their clothes off and march around *naked*."

"Yeah, an they'll want you to kiss em. Girls always want to be kissed."

"Didja ever see a naked woman?"

"I seen pitchers of em."

1909

AT THE threshold of puberty Marvin knew:

That the earth was round like an orange slightly flattened at the poles and shrunken like a dried apple, which caused the mountains;

That it was made by God in six days;

That on it were six continents, namely North and South America, Europe, Asia, Africa and—and—oh, yes! You know, where them funny animals are—Austria? Australia!

That the biggest country was "America" and it could lick the whole world with one hand tied, and both feet.

That the greatest man in America was Teddy Roosevelt who won the Spanish War and then scared all the other countries by sending the fleet around the world.

That Teddy Roosevelt was a Republican and so were all regular folks; there were queer ones, Democrats, who were something like Catholics, a race apart but hiding their perversion under normal-looking exteriors.

That a guy had to honor his father and his mother, who were hard to fool and worked their hands to the bone for you.

That parents, just the same, were not as smart as they thought because you knew lots they didnt know you knew.

That to be a workingman was to be the salt of the earth and the backbone of the nation, but always at the mercy of politicians, grafters and bankers who lived in Wall Street.

That eight twelves were ninety-six and fifteen went into forty-five three times and ten mills mad a cent, ten cents a dime.

That it was wrong to steal.

That it was wrong to say "Jesus!" or "Christ!" except in prayer.

That girls were made different from boys in such-and-such

details but even more so in the way they thought and acted and were scared of worms.

That if you got your feet wet you got a cold and you might get inflammation of the lungs or marasmus as a consequence.

That a drink of whisky made the lining of your stomach bright red, and made your brain just like it was cooked.

That if you "played with yourself" you got half-witted and eventually actually rotten.

That Christy Matthewson was almost as great as Teddy.

That babies grew inside their mothers and came out between their legs.

That Mrs. Kemmerer, Mrs. Ransom, Mrs. Taggart and half a dozen others were slow pay and Mrs. Radowitsch didnt buy that stale bread for her dog like she said but wet it and freshened it in the oven and fed it to her family just to save three cents.

Marvin had heard about, but had yet to see: a motion picture; an airplane; a circus; a subway train. He had never ridden on a railroad train, nor talked over a telephone, nor left New York City.

1910

EXCEPT CERTAIN ACADEMIC revelations which he accepted without argument, remembered as long as he had to, disencumbered himself of as speedily as possible, Marvin added nothing to his creed or knowledge in the next two years.

Teddy Roosevelt had gone to Africa, had been christened "Bwana Tumbo" by the cannibals, had returned in triumph to New York. When God was looking the other way for a moment a couple of Jews opened a nickelodeon in a vacant store on the main street of Belle Bay. Neither fire from heaven nor moral nor physical bankruptcy followed. Some people that used to buy at the shop died and others had had babies. Bills were still paid piecemeal.

The gang broke up into smaller groups. There was not so much trooping over the open country, more loitering at the drug-store. Firman Larkin had a job as fly boy in the printery where his father was linotype operator; Beatrice's skirts had suddenly dropped almost to her shoetops. She gave a birthday party to ten boys and girls of the seventh grade, and her mother bought \$4 worth of stuff from the Langs for the occasion.

The boys gathered at one side of the living room and the girls—"crows"—at another, and segregated they remained for the first hour. After Geburtstag cake and lemonade broke up the formation the boys sheepishly joined in playing Musical Chairs, Jenkins Says Thumbs Up, Pin the Tail on the Donkey; kissing games were barred although one or two of the non-Methodists grumbled at that. After sandwiches, candies, ice cream, pickles and coffee the boys moved stonily toward the door, politely wished Beatrice many happy returns of the day and on the way downstairs, pushing, shoving, tripping, some yelled back that they had had a dandy time, thank you very much.

"Gees, them crows!"

"Oh, Wil-lee, dont muss my ruf-fuls!"

"Crows. They make me sick."

Spring stirred Marvin in a new way. He was vaguely unhappy. Belle Bay looked strange to him, as if he had suddenly been set down in a town familiar to him before only through pictures. He had longings to be elsewhere, and yet discovered a furious love for his mother that made him lie awake at night trembling and sweaty for fear she would die.

Only one year more of school.

His voice was changing and he feared to use it. No matter how throatily he spoke, it would suddenly rise into a falsetto peep. He discovered straggling hairs on his groin and under his arms. He cultivated them with applications of vaseline, which he also applied to his chest in a vain hope to cover that blue-veined, white and ridged expanse with a mat of black.

Curious dreams troubled his sleep. He dreamed he was wrestling with his teacher; dreamed he was tending store with no pants on, with customers insisting upon goods from the upper shelves.

He always felt tired.

Next time he went to get a haircut he was going to order a shave.

"I guess you'd better look for a job this summer, hey, Marvin?"

"Gee, I wanted to get a job years ago when I was a kid."

"Well, you'll live to bless the day your mother and I let you finish your education. But you've only got one more year in school, now, and it would be good experience for you to get a job this summer."

"Where'll I go?"

"Where'll you go? Do you expect me to shut up shop and find you work?"

"No, but I dont know any place."

"Go to the newspaper office; I'll bet they can use a smart boy around the presses. Try the bank; maybe we can get back some of the dough we lost there. Try the beach. Good Lord, there's hundreds of places."

"When should I start?"

"There's no time like the present. Tomorrow morning."

Marvin felt a head taller.

"I'm going to look for a job tomorrow, mother."

"My baby!"

"Holy gee! Hey, what's the idea?"

Mother took her arms from around Marvin's neck, thrust a loop of hair behind an ear with one forefinger.

"My baby's a man, now."

"Where do you get this baby stuff?"

"Someday you'll understand, when you have a grown boy of your own."

Marvin hugged his mother.

"Go on, I'll never marry."

"So you say now."

"I'll never leave you! Never!"

Marvin put on his best clothes next morning. He tucked the blue-striped linen tabs on the backs of his shoes out of sight, polished the shoes with stove blacking. He wore "crash" knickerbockers and a striped shirt turned in at the collar, sleeves rolled to the elbows.

"Good luck, my big son."

"Slong."

"Try the bank, Marvin. Maybe they'll want to hire a new president."

Marvin walked down the block to the Center.

"Yi, Marv!"

"Hlo, Nutsy."

"What's up?"

"Lookin for a job."

"No foolin?"

"Straight."

"Where?"

"I dunno yet. The bank, maybe."

Marvin felt embarrassed to start job hunting with an audience. He leaned against the window of the restaurant and stared at his shoes.

"I know a good job for you. Cigar store Indian."

"Twenty-three!"

"Go on, lets see you get a job."

"I'm thinkin."

"Come on down to the beach for a swim."

"Naah."

"Gee, you're sociable! Hi, there's Kippy. Yea-ay, Kip! Beach?"

Marvin was thankfully alone.

He walked down the street and stared at the bank building.

Its grimness discouraged him. He strolled back to his corner. How does one get a job? What does a fellow say?

Marvin resolutely crossed the street and entered the drugstore. It was cool inside, and scented with soap, ice cream, camphor and rubber. Marvin looked at a basketful of sponges, examined the candies, read patent medicine labels.

A short, bald man with a limp came from behind a partition in the rear, shaking a newly labeled bottle violently. He peered at Marvin over his spectacles.

"Hello, Marvin, what's yours?"

"Hello, Mr. Schreck. Nothin."

"Say, Marvin, do me a favor I give you a nickel."

"What?"

"Run this prescription over to Mrs. Sundquist. Her baby has summer complaint."

"Sure thing. Chuck it here."

"Tell her forty cents, and bring me thirty-five."

Marvin strolled up the street under the elms. A trolley cantered by. Eventually he came to the yellow cottage with brown shutters and blue-checked curtains in the windows. Foreigners always had colored curtains instead of net. Marvin mounted the steps, twirled the bell.

A baby began to mew inside and Mrs. Sundquist came to the door angrily. "Ay yust get him to sleep an you vake him!"

"Gee, I'm sorry. It's the medicine."

"Ach, ay tank you."

"It's fordy cents."

"You got change from a dollar?"

"No, but I'll get it."

Marvin walked back to the drugstore, was given sixty-five cents. He trotted back to Sundquist's, gave the woman sixty cents, took the dollar bill and walked back to the druggist's shop.

"Gee, I could of told her it was fordy-five cents and kept a dime. I wouldnt."

He re-entered the drugstore. "Here's your dollar."

"Thanks, Marvin."

Marvin walked to the door, turned back, walked to the soda fountain, mounted one of the high stools. Schreck had gone back behind the partition again. Marvin watched the big red second-hand leap around the clock's face. The minute hand moved in tiny jerks. Marvin wondered how the hands traveled at different speeds when they were all hitched on top of one another.

"Hello, you here still?"

"I'll swap you the nickel you gimme for a soda."

"What flavor?"

"Black-n-white."

Schreck sighed, selected a glass, put in a penny dip of vanilla ice cream, ladled a spoonful of chocolate syrup over it, filled the glass with seltzer and stirred the mixture with a long-handled spoon.

Marvin ate the bubbles.

"Say, Mr. Schreck . . ."

"Dont tell me it aint sweet enough and to put in more syrup. I know you boys. Next it's too sweet an you want more soda water."

"Mr. Schreck, do you want a boy to work for you?"

"I got a feller. Lou Snyder works for me afternoons an evenings."

"Oh." Marvin tilted his head beneath the inverted glass.

"Was it yourself you are speaking about? You want a job?"

"Yes. An I got experience. I can mix sodas too, I bet."

"Work all day?"

"Sure." Marvin's heart was doing tricks. His palms were wet with sweat and one knee began to twitch.

"I been thinkin of letting Lou go an get me somebody who works all day. I'll tell you, you come back tomorrow morning. Say, you aint so old. Lou is sixteen."

"Oh, I aint sixteen yet, but I been workin for my old—my father ever since we come here."

"You come back tomorrow early."

Speechless, Marvin nodded violently, jumped from the stool, darted through the door on a dead run for home, only a few rods distant. He ran twenty paces and stopped.

Why go home? Home to stifling jobs like sifting ashes and such kid work, and he now a man with a regular job? A job that did not begin until tomorrow, and here it wasnt even lunchtime and the day stretching sunny and empty before him?

Marvin saw his father come out of the shop and stoop over the bread box. Marvin flattened himself against the nearest house. Father went in with an armful of bread. Marvin turned and ran to the corner, across the car tracks, down to the beach.

Some of the Early Birds were in the bungalows and tents: women hanging up washing; women sitting in the sun drying their hair; brats playing in the sand. The penetrating kerosene odor from lamps and stoves, spoor scent forever of bungalow colonies,

heavy in the sun. Half a dozen heads bobbed in the surf; the tide was at flood. Marvin walked to the decaying jetty, examined heaps of clothing, identified Kippy and Nutsy's, peeled off his own to the underwear and, keeping modestly close to the mussel-fringed piles, ran into the water. . . .

Hunger and the 1-o'clock whistles called him home. He edged into the store as a customer was leaving. Father was entering the purchase on the ledger.

"Got a job."

"Good! By golly, that's good. How much does it pay?"

"It's at Schreck's. I'm gonna run the soda fountain too."

"That's a real job. Not just errand boy or sweeper out. A real profession. Can you do it?"

"Sure I can do it."

"When do you begin?"

"Tomorrow."

"And what's he fixin to pay you?"

"Oh, we didnt settle on that yet."

"A fine way to take a job without a business understanding."

Marvin went into the house to tell his mother.

"Will he learn you the trade, Marvin?"

"I guess so. Maybe."

"Oh, I hope so. I want my son to make something of himself. A druggist is such a dignified business."

"Come around an I'll treat to a soda."

Marvin ate a lunch of cold baked beans and cold coffee. Then:
"Think I'll go out with the fellows a little."

"But, Marvin . . ."

"Gee, this is the last day I can play. Look, after tonight I'll be really workin."

"It would be nice if you stayed around the house, then, your last day and all."

"Gee whizzo, I'm not gonna move into Schreck's for keeps. I'll still be home nights, won't I!"

"Have it your own way, then."

Marvin went out through the back yard and alley to avoid a possible job in the store. He felt cross with his mother, with himself. Mother spoiled everything. Why did she have to ask him to stay home! Now he didnt want to go out with the fellers at all and he certainly didnt want to stay home. Oh, hell! He savored the oath, whispering it. Hell hell hell. No one was in sight, so he said it aloud.

He walked to the corner and looked at Schreck's store from every angle, from all four sides of the square. It looked the same as it did the day the Langs had stepped off the trolley into Belle Bay for the first time.

None of the fellers were around. The street slumbered in the June heat. Marvin walked to the home of Charley Seebold, who lived over his father's paint, wallpaper and roofing store. He stood in front of the store and raised his voice:

"Oh, Char-lee!"

No answer. Marvin stared across the street a full minute. Gee, when the fellers came into Schreck's for a soda he'd have fun.

"Oh, Char-lee!"

He'd put extra cream in for some, and—gee, castor oil! He'd dope up a special with a fancy name for blokes like Sonny Sonnenschein or Smarty Kress, and put in some castor oil.

"Oh, Char-lee!"

Mr. Seebold wrenched the door open.

"Belling like a sick jackass! Charley's not here."

The door slammed.

Marvin walked away, whistling. He sat on the curbing. The trolley rocked into view, and Marvin got up, put a pin on the track and sat down again. The trolley passed. Marvin picked up his flattened pin. It broke in three pieces. Marvin threw them away.

"Gees, nothin to do."

He strolled aimlessly away, found himself suddenly in front of the delicatessen.

"Any deliveries?"

"No."

Marvin went into the kitchen. His mother was peeling boiled potatoes for salad.

"Lemme help."

"Get on with you. You'll eat half you peel."

Happy all at once, Marvin picked up a knife from the soiled cutlery and dishes in the sink, pulled a chair to the table and set to work. Marvin helped slice the potatoes into big china bowls, mixed them with a wooden spoon. One bowlful with mayonnaise; one bowlful with sour dressing and tiny squares of crisped bacon. He helped his mother wipe the dishes, hung around her until evening. Once she dropped her work and seized the boy to her breast. He hugged her hard, kissed her cheeks.

"My big baby! You're as tall as I am."

In the evening he helped his father in the store. The warm,

brackish breeze stirred the festoons of fringed crepe paper hanging from the chandelier. Marvin felt the strange unease again.

"Can I go out now?"

"All right, but be back at nine."

"I will."

"Where you going?"

"Oh, just out."

"Dont hang around the corners, now. You'll get a bad name."

Marvin strolled down to the car line, walked a block north, crossed the street and came back south. He met no boys of his crowd, and at Schurz Avenue he turned down toward the beach. It was livelier than it had been in the morning. Men, home from shop, factory and office, were happy in being as naked as the law allowed, playing in the sand and in the water with their children. Women sat in the sand, some in bathing suits, others in wrappers, house dresses, bathrobes. Fat breasts, released from corsets, relaxed on unconfined bellies with the same passive joy that their owners felt released from housework or notions counter.

Marvin gravitated by habit toward the jetty. He saw a little group of men and boys on the far side, crawled through the damp, shelly piles and joined the group.

Four or five young bucks were shooting craps on a newspaper. Three or four others stood around, broke or prudent. Half a dozen boys, all of whom Marvin knew, completed the audience. He slipped into the ring and watched without comprehension. The men threw the little spotted cubes, snapping their fingers, and then cursed. They used the same words whether they won or lost, the vehemence greater when they won.

"*Cheese it!*"

"*Stop! I gotcha!*"

The crowd ran as one man, splashing through the pools, scattering. Marvin looked up, saw the gray-helmeted, charging cop, darted off obliquely into the crowd. He tripped over a sleeping brat, which screamed a protest. Marvin, on all fours, dodged the irate mother's sweeping, open-handed blow. He saw the policeman stooping over the newspaper to scoop up the nickels and dimes, and ceased his flight. In the mob Marvin found Charley Seebold. The pair walked boldly past the cop, their hearts leaping with the thrill of successful bravado.

"Lets get up a game of cops and robbers."

"Stoo hot."

Automatically the boys began to run. Whenever they saw a

girl building sand castles remote from adult aid, they trampled the fragile structures in their course. They watched some men fishing in the surf, and a woman nursing a rash-speckled baby.

"Wonder what it tastes like."

"Why dont you ast her for a suck?"

Marvin tripped Charley and ran off, Charley giving chase. They dodged in and out of the throng, sidestepping to avoid slaps. Charley caught Marvin and tripped him. Gee, it was swell fun.

Marvin was at Schreck's at seven o'clock the next morning. The door was locked. At 7:15 Schreck arrived, the *New Yorker Herold* under his arm.

"Well, that's a fine start!"

He unlocked the door and fastened it ajar with a brass hook and eye. The sweet, dead air stirred as Marvin followed the drug-gist inside.

"Here!"

Marvin caught a white coat tossed at him from a hook on the partition. He followed Schreck around behind the false wall into the alchemist laboratory laymen dared not look upon. Jars of white, gray, brown powders; jars with queer sticks, spiraled lengths of dried bark, broken leaves; jars filled with pills of all sizes, brown, white, shiny, dull. Scales with minute weights, spatulas, china bowls, a mortar and pestle.

"First you sweep out. Then you uncover the trays. I guess you can do that?"

"Yes, sir."

A broom, the straw covered with cheesecloth. A pail. Fill it from that faucet there. Sprinkle the floor before you sweep.

A woman came in. "I want a dime's worth of larkspur seed."

"Yes, mam."

He went behind the partition. Mr. Schreck was leaning against a table reading his paper and smoking a pipe.

"Customer, Mr. Schreck!"

Marvin did the chores.

"What next, Mr. Schreck?"

"Next? Oh, I don know. See if you can learn the stock. The prices are marked on the packages. The code starts from F."

Marvin did not know what Schreck meant. He went to the shelves. Father John's Medicine. Duffy's Pure Malt Whiskey. Beef Blood, Iron and Wine.

Marvin opened the sliding glass door that screened the shelves, picked up a package at random. On the bottom he saw LJ neatly marked in pencil. The code.

What the devil was the code? The mystery of being privy to a code gave Marvin a physical thrill, for all that its meaning was closed to him.

Grant's Infant Suppositories, FO. Pape's Diapepsin, GJ. Schreck's Own Horehound Compound, FGJ.

Two women came in.

"Why, hello, Marvin. Going into a new business?"

"Yes, mam."

"Can you make us up a couple of lemon sodas?"

"Yes, Mrs. Fowler."

Marvin scurried across to the soda fountain, selected two glasses, flipped open one of the two zinc heads staring up from the chest of cracked ice and ladled ice cream into one glass.

"Good morning, ladies. Here, Marvin, better lemme do that."

"I can do it."

"Well, I'll watch."

With much less joy than was his a moment before, Marvin put ice cream into the second glass, added three squirts of lemon syrup from the flask on the counter, let the seltzer hiss into the glasses.

He stuck a spoon into each glass, twirled it, set the potation before the women.

"Ten cents please."

Mrs. Fowler put down a nickel. Mrs. Schaaf put down a dime. Marvin slid her the nickel, turned to the cash register with the dime and was lost. Schreck grinned, pressed the 10 lever. The drawer sprang open with a clang.

"That's all you have to do."

"Are the sodas all right?"

"Fine, Marvin. They certainly help on a hot day."

After the women departed Schreck warned Marvin not to fill the ice cream scoop heaping full with the solid cream but to shave it from the sides of the can. It went twice as far that way.

"Otherwise you did good. Can you make banana splits an frappays, do you think?"

"Sure I can."

"How are you gettin along with the stock? Do you get on to the code?"

"Well, not yet."

"Its easy. F is 1, G is 2, and so on. FNJ is a dollar ninedy-five."

"I'll learn it."

"That's all you got to know. But dont you dare to monkey with any of the medicines and chemicals. You can deal out package goods but dont you dare hand out one pill or powder."

Marvin had half an hour for lunch, from 11:30.

"What pay you gonna get?"

"Gee, I forgot to ast him."

"A fine busnessman you'll make. You find out this afternoon, do you hear? If he wants to pay you less than three dollars a week you walk out."

"Even if he says two-fifty?"

"Even if he says two ninedy-eight."

On the way back to the drugstore Marvin was hailed from the restaurant corner: "Hey, Lang, come over here."

It was Lou Snyder, former occupant of the post Marvin now held. Marvin's heart missed a beat.

"Cant. I gotta work."

Snyder, round-faced pimply youth, threw his cigarette into the gutter and crossed over to Marvin. Marvin edged nearer the drugstore door.

"You got my job!"

"I didn know it was your job, honest."

"Hell, I was gonna give it up anyway. I been workin mornins for the bakery but I'm gonna go on full time startin Sunday."

"Oh. Well, I gotta work."

"Lissen, I'll tip you off to some things if you're good."

"I'm your friend, Lou."

"All right. I might come in with my skirt some time. You know me."

"I know you all right."

"I'll tip you off to some things."

"Thanks!" Thanks for a lot; thanks for no slap in the puss.

Marvin dusted shelves, eyed the trays of red cinnamon sticks, pink peppermint hearts, gray coltsfoot candy, brown peanut brittle. During the afternoon he sold a jar of vaseline, a dozen sodas. When boys and girls he knew caught sight of him through the windows he tried to look professionally aloof, to wave off their greetings with a careless gesture. Nutsy Fagan tried to coax him into selling a vanilla soda for four cents, and Marvin laughed him out of the store.

Schreck told him to tell the kids to beat it.

"I go across to the lunchroom for my supper," he said. "If anybody wants a prescription filled or some other thing you cant do, tell em to come over and get me."

"Yes, sir."

"At eight o'clock you can go home and eat. Be back at 8:30. We close up at ten."

"Yes, sir."

"Saturdays, though, we open to eleven, and we shut Sunday morning."

"Yes, sir. . . . Mr. Schreck?"

"Well?"

"I—Father said—how much do I get paid?"

"I'll give you \$3.50 to begin with."

"Gee, thanks!"

Maybe Father would let him keep the extra half dollar for himself! On the other hand—suppose he didn't say anything about it? Suppose he said he had been offered \$2.50, had stuck out for \$3? The old man wouldn't know the difference.

Marvin went home for supper.

"Come into the kitchen. Our star boarder aint goin to eat in the store."

Star boarder!

"Hey, Marvin! Did you settle with him about—"

Pride overcame Marvin's nascent cupidity.

"Three dollars—and a HALF!"

"Good boy!"

Mother had hot corned beef, boiled potatoes, fresh peas and strawberry pie, "Special treat for our workingman." Marvin was very, very careful not to spill anything on his white coat.

Marvin was allowed a quarter a week from his wages. From this he bought himself a soda, guiltily packing the ice cream hard into the scoop; he bought a nickel's worth of peanut brittle for his mother, a five-cent cake of shaving soap for his father, the first Sunday.

Monday afternoon he bought himself another soda. Schreck watched him ring up the nickel.

"Take it back, Marvin."

"Take what back?"

"The nickel—if that's your first soda today. You can make yourself one soda a day; but dont touch the candy."

"I never did."

"I know. I watched you. You're a good boy, a credit to your parents."

That was something to repeat at home!

When boys and girls came in together it was a silent combat between the young males and Marvin every time.

The boys tried to be condescending, as to a mere waiter, a servant. Marvin retaliated by being very professional, terribly bored.

He swept, dusted, carried ice; he delivered prescriptions, waited on the soda fountain, the candies and patent medicines. Sometimes customers would not even state their wants to him, but whispered them to Old Man Schreck, who supplied them with small parcels from some secret drawer behind the partition.

Marvin pondered this. He concluded that Schreck sold drugs—opium and stuff like that. Had Schreck plumbed Marvin's suspicions he would have, literally and enthusiastically, kicked the boy out in indignation.

July came. Marvin felt vastly superior to the kids shooting off firecrackers while he dispensed lemon phosphates, black-and-whites, cherry frappés.

After closing hours he sometimes lingered at the darkened corner with the boys.

"Didja hear about the fellow playin ball in a pasture and slid into what he thought was third base?"

"Didja hear the one about the guy who was taken short in the train comin into the Grand Central?"

"That's old. Didja hear—"

The wit the boys bandied was heavy, fecal, depending upon Saxon bluntness for earning laughter.

Marvin blushed in the darkness. He wondered where the fellers got all their stories. He never offered any in exchange. The only jokes he knew were the ones his companions related. He honestly enjoyed the ones concerned with the excretory functions. The sexual jokes were too often beyond his comprehension; at those he laughed loudest.

"Say, Marv! Do you know where Schreck keeps his Spanish fly?"

Spanish fly?

"I dunno. There's a million flies in there, but I dont know which is the Spanish one."

Shouts of laughter.

"You're pretty cute!"

"That's a hot one."

Marvin was delighted with himself. Somehow he had made a joke. It wasn't clear to him, but it was good.

"No, sir!" he added. "There's flies on the soda bar and the candy counter, but I aint had time to talk to em."

"You're all there, Marv, old boy, old boy!"

August, September.

"School next Tuesday, Marvin."

"Holy gee, do I hafta go back to school!"

"Dont you want your diploma?"

"What good's an old diploma?"

"Marvin, Marvin! Dont you appreciate what we are trying to do for you, to give you an education?"

"Maybe there's something in what the kid says. What good's one year of school?"

"Carl Lang, you know yourself the boy'll be handicapped all his life if he dont finish school."

"Gee, father, think of the money."

"I guess your mother's right. You finish up your education."

"I am educated. Gee whiz, I—"

"Not another word, now! Here your mother and I are willing to toil and provide for you, and you havent the gratitude of a louse."

"I have, too!"

"Prove it, then."

Marvin gave Schreck a week's notice.

"What! You didnt say anything about school when I gave you the job."

"Well, my folks want me to finish up."

"I'll raise you to \$4 if you stay. An I'll help you if you want to study nights. You can go over to City College or Cooper Union."

Wrong move, Schreck.

"No, my folks wont let me."

Marvin was fifteen years old. He needed a shave every two weeks.

He entered the eighth grade, which was taught by Mr. Burns. Marvin was sustained by the thought that on the last day of school, when he had his diploma, he was going to beat Burns up. The memory of the caning four years before still rankled.

Charley Seebold became Marvin's chum and partner without especial arrangement by either.

"We'll go halfies on everything."

They did their homework together, sometimes behind the delicatessen, sometimes over the paint store.

"Lets get up a code."

"Adda boy! We'll write notes in school."

"I know Old Man Schreck's code. He has F for 1, G for 2, and so on."

"Well, what good is that to us? We din want a code for numbers. We cant do arithmetic in code."

"Ya poor dummy, we'll just turn it around and have numbers for ABCs."

"Gee, thas a swell idea!"

"See, A will be 1, B 2, and so on. Lemme write it out. Now wait—how's this? If I send you a note with 2-21-18-14-19 and 9-19 and 14-21-20-19 on it, what would it mean?"

"Dont tell me. Lemme figure it out. Gee, dont that look swell. Nobody'd guess it was a lot of words—21 is U—'Burns is nuts!' Oh, mamma! Oh, gee!"

One morning in October when the class marched into its room it was to find a newcomer sitting on the girls' side of the room. Primly sitting but self-possessed, eyelids lowered but veiling nothing, as Marvin and every boy stamping up the aisle was made aware. "Redhead" said each boy to himself if each boy reacted as Marvin did. Her hair was held at the nape by a celluloid barrette, and descending below the back of her chair in even ripples. Marvin had noticed the clothes of no girl in his ken until now; now he saw lace bertha over white-shirtwaisted shoulders, tan cloth skirt and smooth black stockings, shoes, with heels, fastened with smoky, translucent buttons.

The newcomer made the boys acutely uncomfortable and enraged the girls, in their sensible woolen dresses and slicked-back hair.

"Redhead! Hmf!"

Mr. Burns read the roll, boys first, girls last; the boys bawling out "Present!" in their deepest voices. And at the very last Mr. Burns looked up with a smile and said: "*And* Ruby Collins," whereupon the new girl unrolled red-brown eyes and merely smiled. Down went her lids again and she contemplated clasped hands, and the finger with the gold ring.

Marvin's mouth went dry and his elastic garters and his collar were at once too tight. All he could see of Ruby from his seat was the back of her head, the lobe of one ear and the curve of one cheek, her clasped hands and one leg, two feet. Wallace Brannigan

sat in front of him and beside Ruby, a boy from over the other side of town, and Wallace was making a store of spitballs with sly gestures to Ruby against the time when Burns's back would be turned. Ruby looked at Wally sideways and put one hand to her mouth to hide a smile; or to point it out.

"Marvin, will you demonstrate this problem, please?"

Marvin untangled his feet, rose to them slowly. Ruby did not look up. She did not know Marvin existed. Wally was drawing faces on his fingernails with ink for her delight.

"Aw, gee, Mr. Burns, that's too easy a problem. Wait till you put down a hard one." Marvin pitched his voice at its deepest.

He had his reward. Ruby turned her head and stared up at him. Everyone else in the room stared at him, Mr. Burns included.

"Since when did you acquire all this wisdom, young man?"

A rustle of excitement in the room.

"I suppose you know so much about arithmetic there is really no use your coming to school, is there? You probably know more about arithmetic than the man who invented it, hey?"

Burns waited for the laughter he counted upon.

Marvin looked down and saw that Ruby was watching him over her shoulder, eyes bright and nose wrinkled in laughter. He grinned back.

"Since you know so much it bores you to recite with the class you may stand where you are and solve this problem mentally. When you have the answer you may go to the blackboard and write it down, if there is anyone left in the building by then to care about the answer. Find the cubic contents of a cylinder two feet deep and two feet in diameter—in inches!

"Bert Kress, will you demonstrate the problem that bored our wizard?"

(Two feet across by two feet deep. Holy Moses. To find the area of a circle multiply the square of the diameter by . . . no, not three dot one four one six . . . multiply the square of the diameter by dot seven eight five four; that's it. The square of two is four and four sixes are twelve two and carry one four ones are four and one is five . . . no no no, four fours are sixteen and carry one and four fives are twenty . . .)

Marvin looked at the floor, at the ceiling, at the nicked electric bell on the wall, at his desk. He dared not look at Ruby, at any other.

(Three dot one four one six times . . .)

His lips moved silently. The class measured imaginary fields,

imaginary cordwood, imaginary corn in bins of insane dimensions. Marvin put his fingers to his ears to keep from adding their figures to his own. One leg went numb.

The arithmetic period ended and spelling was taken up. C-o, co, a-g, ag, u-l, ul, a-te, ate, coagulate; c-o-n, con, c-e-s . . . (six dot two eight three two times one seven two eight. O God! Eight twos are sixteen, six and carry one . . .)

"—gold was discovered first by a man named—named—named—"

"Who can tell?"

"Sutter! Of course there was no telephone or telegraph so it took a long time for the news to get out East and—"

Recess. The bell jangled, the class rose and filed from the room, with curious looks at Marvin who stood heavily on one foot, his lips moving like a monk's at prayer. (Five naught one six five six plus . . .)

The children filed back into the room, bringing with them such fresh, clean and cool fragments of outdoors as clung to their clothing. In the mild excitement of seat-taking two spitballs stung Marvin's ear.

"Well, Mr. Wisenheimer, have you the answer yet?"

Marvin did not hear.

"Marvin Lang!"

"Yes, sir."

"Are you sleeping or working?"

"Working. I know the answer in cubic feet anyhow."

"What is it?"

Marvin's mind was a blank. The class giggled, and, seeing Burns smile, dared to roar with laughter.

"No, Marvin, the answer is not zero. But I think that's your mark for today in arithmetic and spelling and history."

"The cubic contents of a pipe two feet by two feet is six dot two eight three two. But I cant do it in inches in my head, Mr. Burns."

"Then you admit you dont know everything."

"Yes, sir."

"All right, sit down."

Marvin sat down very slowly. His thighs ached from standing, his mouth parched from figuring. He looked at Ruby, and saw only her russet curls. But she'd never forget him!

Noon, then, and Marvin accosting Charley roughly.

"A fine guy you are. Why didnt you slip me the answer?"

"Oh, yeah? All you was doing was showing off to the new skirt, and I should help you?"

"Aw, shut up. Who cares about girls?"

"Not Thomas Edison Marvin Lang. Oh, no. No! All he cares about is arithmetic."

"Shut up or I'll slap your jaw!"

Marvin increased his pace, walked home alone.

Beatrice was just passing when he started back to school. "Show-off!" Beatrice protruded an inch of pointed tongue.

Marvin crossed his eyes and made sounds indicative of acute nausea. He crossed the street and ran all the way to school.

The boys on their side of the playground were discussing the newcomer. "Her old man's a politician. Evlyn said she said so. He's got a swell job on the sewers."

"She told Nettie she can toe-dance and is gonna be a nactress."

"Come on, you sissies, an play knife," Marvin said gruffly. "Gees, talkin about girls allatime."

When the afternoon session was over Marvin rushed to the front of the school to see which way Ruby went home. To his acute sorrow Ruby took a path directly opposite his own. She walked with her arms linked in two other girls'. When they passed a knot of boys the girls walked with an exaggerated motion so their skirts twitched behind, sign of profound feminine contempt and challenge.

Marvin walked slowly home, his mind busy with means of making Ruby like him. He'd get a job afternoons in the garage McGrath had just opened in connection with his smithy. He'd drive a car past Ruby's house and pretend it needed fixing. She'd come out and watch him. Why, hello, Miss Collins. Just testin' this ole racer. How about a little spin?

Marvin idled about the store. Her mother might send her around for something and it would be too big an order for her to carry, so he'd deliver it. My, you're strong, Marvin. Won't you come in and rest a bit?

Maybe somehow he could take her to Schreck's for a soda and insist on going behind the fountain to fix a double banana split the *right* way.

At closing time Marvin meditatively cut a thick slice of ham baloney and wrapped it in waxed paper, put it in a bag. On second thought he added a stick of gum and a sugared fig, stuffed with almond. He put the parcel in his pocket.

Next day just before recess Marvin reached as far as he could

to toss the wrinkled, flattened, slightly spotted package on Ruby's lap. She turned, arched her eyebrows, secreted the bag in her desk, all in one instinctive motion as natural, as graceful, as selfish, as a cat clawing at some small passing thing which might be a mouse or a wind-blown withered leaf.

Not by smile or sign did Ruby ease Marvin after recess, until he doubted that he had had the courage actually to toss his offering, and felt in his pocket for it again. Then most suddenly a square of paper smacked upon his desk and not even precautioning a clear field Marvin opened the note with shaking fingers. He read:

"Dear Mr. Smarty, I am not a wild animal that does tricks for raw meat but thanks a lot for the lovely candy and gum. R.C."

He had pleased his lady. Marvin looked up dizzily to catch a blurred impression of a quick smile dissolving into an impersonal ear turned his way. He took a sheet of scratch paper and wrote: "Dear Miss Collins I can get you lots my father has a store and I will bring you something every day M.L."

He bided his time and tossed it safely.

In the afternoon he brought her another stuffed fig and the next morning a handful of dried apricots.

His commerce with Ruby was not missed by the class, the boys watching with envy because of Marvin's great source of supply and the girls watching with envy because never had any of them been favored by any of the boys with such concrete affection.

"Marv's soft on Ru-u-uby Collins!"

"Ruby and Marv, Ruby and Marv!"

Even Charley Seebold linked an arm with the obnoxious Kress and minced across the cindery playground at recess.

"Ow, Ma-arvin! I'll love you as long as your popper's store holds out."

"You better lay off that, Charley Seebold, or I'll bust you one in the puss!"

"Go on, I dare you to."

"I'll get you after school."

Beatrice, flouncing by on the way home, flirted her skirts.

"Jealous!" said Marvin very decidedly.

"Hmpf! What have I got to be jealous of? Not carrot hair, I guess."

"Bettern tow hair."

"You shut up and stop teasin me, Marvin Lang, or I'll tell my mother! She wont trade with your dirty store."

Marvin at his chores scanned the stock for new tidbits to take his Ruby. He took samples from the tin boxes of sweet cakes; chocolate, marshmallow topped, pink coconut crowned.

Then one night with the terrible omniscience of parents, Father came surprisingly into Marvin's room. Marvin had just turned out the gas. Father was in his undershirt and stocking feet, trousers sagging. Marvin was uneasy, moved away when Father sat heavily on the bed's edge.

"Marvin, I've been thinking. . . .

"Marvin, I think you're old enough to know . . . you need to be warned about . . . things.

"*Keep away from girls.* That's what you've got to do. You've got to keep away from girls or you'll get into trouble, see? I know what I'm talking about. You got to keep your mind off them, too. That's important."

"Why?"

"You'll get crazy, girl crazy, thas why. You'll be chasing after them and first thing you know you'll be in trouble. Dont start kissing girls, now. That leads to worse. It's . . . it's the devil, I guess. You must know how it is, I guess. Keep your hands off them. It leads to all sorts of dirty thoughts and dirtier doings. You'll only weaken yourself and weaken your mind. And first thing you know you'll be in trouble. Do you hear me? You keep away from them now. That's final."

Father got up and clumped out the room. "Gees," said Marvin.

"Show me where your store is."

"Gee, if the old man sees me he'll make me come in an work. I can run the store good as he can, an better too. An he knows it."

"It must be awfly swell to have all the cakes an things you want."

"Aw, you get used to that. I bet I could go a year without eatin any. Last summer I helped out Schreck the druggust an I invented so many kinds of frappays I could use up gallons an gallons of ice cream an cherries an bananas an marshmaller without tastin once."

"You must have an *awfully* strong mind."

"No, I guess old Burnsy thinks I'm pretty thick except in arithmetic. I guess I'm no slouch at that, but runnin a store you got to do arithmetic, fractions an all that. For instance, if a kind of baloney is forty cents a pound an a customer asts for two shillins' worth, how much would you give to her?"

"Mercy, I dont know. I couldnt do it. I'd say, 'Lady, you have to take twenny cents' worth, half a pound.'"

Marvin laughed loudly.

"Gee, that's pretty rich. But you got that pretty quick, half a pound for twenny cents. Well, you'd give her ten ounces for twenny-five cents."

"It must be wonnerful to do things in your head like that."

"Gee, it aint hard. Is this where you live?"

"Yes, isnt it a dump?"

"Gosh, I dont think so. I think it's swellegant."

"Papa says we wont have to stay long. He says if the election comes out right he'll get himself transferred back to Manhattan into a better job an the men that sent him out here will wish they never heard of Staten Island."

"Staten Island aint so bad. Of course, I was born over in Brooklyn myself. I din always live in this dump. My family came here for its health."

"Well, so long an see you tomorrow."

"So long an I'll bring you some macaroons."

Tomorrow and weeks of tomorrows.

"Isnt this glorious weather?"

"Gee, yes, it's swell."

"I've been teasing Mommer to let me go to the city to skate in Central Park. Did you ever skate there?"

"No, I never cared much for skating."

"Oh, you ought to. It's the bestest fun! Do you like dancing better?"

"I donno. I cant—I never learned it much."

"Oh, you must learn. Mommer said I could have a party during the holidays, an we'll dance! Maybe we'll have a hayride an a dance after."

"Gee, that sounds swell."

"But you must learn to dance real good."

"Howm I gonna learn?"

"Why, I'll teach you, silly. Come on in the house. Oh, come on, your father can get along without you for a few minutes. Let him run his old store by himself."

Six concrete steps to the top of the terrace. Six broad wooden steps to the porch, a porch as big as the store at 38 Schurz.

A dark-green front door with beveled plate glass, set about

with squares of wrinkly "stained glass." A dark, square hall with an oak staircase right-angling upward. Thick carpet, a blue-and-white umbrella stand, a hatrack studded with deer's antlers.

"Mommer! Yoohoo!"

To the left a darkened dining room, white linen on the table. Right, a marble mantel crowded with bric-a-brac, red velvet hangings, a gilded chair and a gilded grand piano, "baby grand," red velvet draperies over the tilted lid. Swell! Gee, but it was swell!

"I guess she isn't home. Poor Mommer. She's always over in the city. She hates it here too. But Popper hopes we'll be transferred right after New Year's. Come on in here."

A phonograph on its own record cabinet, the trumpet a pink and mauve morning-glory that stirred memories in Marvin. Where—oh, the gas lamp in the old Brooklyn house!

"Can you crank it? Do you like the Turkey Trot? Here, let me show you."

Rugs carelessly kicked aside. Music miraculously from waxy cylinders.

"Now you put your right arm around me with your hand right between my shoulders. Now, give me your left hand. Don't be so stiff, Marvin. Let yourself go limpish sort of. Now step off with your left foot and sort of trot four steps—balance—wait, let me show you . . .

"Do you see? Now let's try it. Don't push me away like that. Oh, Marvin, you old goose. And there goes the record. Let's try a waltz, it's easier."

It was.

"*One-two-three-four; one-two-three-four.* Splendid! Only don't turn to the right always. *One-two-three.* You're catching on. Oh, I love dancing."

A new record.

"Let me show you by myself again. Look."

Thistledown before the breeze; a flaming maple leaf floating earthward. "Now together!" Ruby danced up to him, drew him close, whirled him away. "Mind my feet! *Tum-te-te-tum-te-te—*"

Bump into a chair. Bump into the piano. *Bump* into the couch.

"Oh, I'm breathless. Let's sit down. Isn't this cozy? If you want I'll do my toe dance for you after a while. Isn't dancing fun?"

"Gee, I'll never learn. I'm too clumsy."

"Go on! I've taught lots clumsier than you are."

(Oh, you have, have you?)

"Who? Wally, or Charley?"

"Goose! No one in this poky town. What a pretty pin that is. Keepsake?"

"Na-ah. It's a Sunday-school pin."

"Beatrice's?"

"That crow!"

"Oh, I know all about you an Beatrice."

"We live nex door, that's all."

"Say, did you ever kiss her?"

"Me kiss her? I'd rather slap her jaw."

"Did you ever kiss a girl? Cross your heart, now."

"Well, maybe I did. It was mostly foolin'."

"Do you think it's silly for girls to sit in boys' laps?"

"Silly?"

"I think you do!"

"I do not!"

"Well, then."

Alarm, that was it; not delight, nor resentment at quarry become pursuer. Alarm, as the girl smoothed her skirt over her bottom and sat on Marvin's lap, because it was a new experience, never anticipated.

"What a nice lap you have. Nice long legs. Well, stick-in-the-mud?"

Marvin lifted leaden arms, to left and right of the red-haired burden. He joined clammy hands and rested them on her hipbone.

She put two arms over his shoulders, slid them closer together, kissed Marvin on the lips. And again.

They were both panting a little.

"I'll bet some girl did give you that pin. Let me have it. There, now."

She slipped the emblem inside the front of her dress.

"If you want the old thing you'll have to get it."

"Dare me?"

"No, I dont dare you."

Marvin unlocked his fingers, lifted one hand to Ruby's throat. She hunched her shoulders forward.

Marvin's pulse churned in his ears. Chuff-chuff! Chuff-chuff!

His hand groped down into hotness. Cold fingers, hot flesh. Was that her pulse or his fingers trembling? Three middle fingers against hard tenderness, thumb and little finger against tender softness, curving.

Ruby's head drooped forward, sideways, against his cheek. One finger inserted itself between the buttons of his shirt, drew spirals on his recoiling belly. His throat was a cinder. His hand

closed upon one little breast, tiny, soft, crisp-tipped. Ruby gasped and rocked back and forth on his knees.

Feet stamped on the porch!

"It's Mommer or somebody."

They were both on their feet. "How do I look? My hair?" Ruby was in the hall when the door opened.

"Hello, Mommer darling."

"Hello, kiddiekins. Why dont you light a light?"

"Mommerr doll, this is Marvin Lang from my class. Marvin was helpin me with my arithmetic. He's awfully smart. An I was teachin him dances."

"Well, enjoy yourselves, children."

Mrs. Collins rustled as she walked.

"My, that was a narrow escape."

"I gotta go. It's gettin pretty dark."

"Give me a kiss, Marvin—quick!"

Marvin held lips against hers, retreated through the door, slipped on snow, raced homeward without looking back.

(Dirty—dangerous—filthy—trouble—I love her!)

"Marvin! It's after five o'clock."

"Gee, I went to one of the fellers' houses. I didnt know it was so late." (Give me a kiss—quick!)

"What feller?"

"Oh, you wouldn know him. They dont trade here."

"What were you doing?"

"Well, maybe the class is gonna give a hayride so we were talkin."

"A hayride, hey? There's a chance to turn a penny, Marvin. Maybe you can get the order for refreshments from the class for us."

"Yeah, that's what I was talkin about." (If you want it you got to get it . . . give me a kiss, Marvin—quick!)

The hayride was held on the Wednesday of the Christmas vacation. On the night of the afternoon that Grandma McAneny died. Marvin had nearly forgotten about Grandma McAneny. Mother used to go over to visit her once a month, but Marvin didnt go along any more. Then the telegram came. Mother didnt cry. She made ready to go to New York. She just said, "Poor soul, poor soul, poor soul."

Father said, "How am I gonna tend store all by myself? Marvin, you'll have to stay home."

"Oh, father! Please! No, no!"

"Carl, for shame. You can make out one night, and you know it. I'll stay home rather than spoil Marvin's fun."

"Well, let him go then. Go on an have your fun, both of you."

"Fun! To tend my own mother's laying-out? Poor old lady, dying blind an crippled an alone."

"Did I say anything about her?"

"Go on, Marvin. Dont pay any attention. Go on your hayride. You're only young once."

Marvin put on the new woolen underwear he had received for Christmas, the new stockings, the new gloves. At 7:30 he stood in front of the Collins home, half an hour early. There were lights in all the windows. In fifteen minutes another boy arrived, on his heels another.

"Come on, les go in."

"Na-ah, les stay outside."

"Aw rats, I'll go if you go."

Two girls arrived and snickered at the boys. They marched up the steps, rang, were admitted by a real colored maid. Four more girls approached.

"Come on, les beat the crows."

The three boys pelted up the steps, stood suddenly abashed. The door opened without summons or warning, gushing light and warmth and the private odor of the house. Every home has its own, every building has, every individual has, each part of every individual has. Next to the eyes, the nose.

"Put you hats an coats on de rack."

The parlor ablaze with lights. Marvin saw the couch, the phonograph, and his skin prickled. Ruby danced out from the little crowd.

"Hello, Charley, hello, Marvin. Come on in. Hello, Wally. Make yourselves at home. I want you to meet my friends. This is Pat Dugan and this is Arnold Haufler and this is Bill Carter."

The three strange youths urbanely offered their hands.

"These are old friends of mine. From New York. Arent you?" Ruby said archly. "We used to have fun, didnt we?"

One of the strangers winked elaborately, the two others grinned. "Some fun! Mmm-huh!"

"*You* know. . . !"

"Fins on all that," Ruby cried. "What'll we do till the others come? Shall we dance? Lets dance."

The phonograph was set in motion, and one of the New York dudes played along with it on the piano. Another began dancing

with Ruby. The other made no move to dance with the local girls. Marvin put his hands in his pockets, took them out, put them in again. They were sweating. He leaned against the mantel, studying the little china figures.

"Marvin!"

Ruby was by his side. "What's the matter, grouching at my party? Are you jealous?"

"My eye!"

"Come on out an dance with me."

"I dowanna. I fell on the ice."

"Oh, poor little itty-bitty Marvin hurt hissself. Would you show me where? Would you show me if . . ."

"Miss Ruby, heah comes some mo."

Ruby danced off to greet the newcomers. The room was full of children, sitting everywhere, girls all together, boys all together. Whispering, primping, shoving, each according to his kind or hers. Only the three New York boys, smilingly self-possessed, walking about with knowledge.

Ten girls, eight boys. Who didn't come? Isnt that mean? Eighteen cups of hot cocoa, burning hot cocoa, with little cakes. Marvin had never before seen food served without a table.

Then coats and hats and icy air.

The livery stable pung, owned for just such excursions, at the door. Two shaggy dappled grays, breathing steam. The driver in fur cap, coat collar turned up, lapping tabs over his ears; icicles on his mustache, striped mittens on his hands, legs swathed to the hips in yellow horse blankets.

"Minnie—here, next to me. Minnie!"

Ruby the hostess, Ruby the Queen Bee, surrounded by the drones from New York. "You get in first, Pat, and I'll sit next to you and then Bill."

To Marvin in a whisper: "You sit across from me an I'll sit next to you on the way back."

Prickly, brittle straw.

Legs intermeshed. Pushing and giggles. A jingle of sleigh bells, as the horses stirred, excitement communicating.

"All set? Gee-yap! Giddup there, you, Bob!"

The creak of cold-stiffened harness. Bells jingling. Cheers from the boys, squeals from the girls, as the pung lurched forward, throwing everyone sideways.

"Lets sing something."

Nobody answered. Ruby, leaning against Pat, drooped her

head against the guy's shoulder. She began singing "Jingle Bells," and some of the girls joined in. The boys yowled, groaned, picked up the chorus. The horses trotted, then walked, then trotted. The boys and girls sang all the songs they knew. After forty-five minutes the sleigh pulled up at a crossroad. The driver stepped out of his blanket cocoon and threw the yellow coverings over the horses' rumps.

"Fifteen minutes," he said, and walked slowly and deviously to the saloon while his passengers piled out noisily. Some kids from the neighborhood gathered around to watch, awed by superior numbers from making criticisms. Ruby, flanked by Pat and Bill, trailed by Arnold, led the way to a confectionery store and all others followed after, completely filling the little shop and routing its odor of tobacco, vanilla and newsprint with their own odor of snow melting on wool.

Not everybody had money. Marvin had none. Ruby said she wanted ice cream, not plain. Something fancy. Marvin sidled up, running his elbow along the marble top of the soda bar.

"Whyncha get a double malted cherry dream?" he suggested.

"Are they good?" Ruby beamed through the scowls of her three New York admirers. "A double whatzis?"

The nervous little Jew behind the counter became more agitated.

"A sherry frappay, yes?" He opened a can of ice cream and plunged his ladle forthwith.

"Hold on there!" Marvin spoke with authority. "This lady dont want any ole cherry frappay. She wants a double malted cherry dream."

The man left his scoop in the can, threw up his hands, clasped them to his concave breast Marvin might have been a Cossack demanding a thousand gold rubles and a virgin Jewess.

"Here, lemme show ya," Marvin said contemptuously. He strode behind the counter, fascinated at his own courage. He peeped into covered syrup jars, opened all the cream cans. He selected a pressed-glass "banana split" dish, pressed into it a ball of chocolate and a ball of cherry ice cream, ladled a spoonful of candied cherries over them, demanded the whereabouts of the whipped cream.

"No whipped cream? Gees, what a dump. Marshmaller, then."

A spoonful of that gluey confection, a dusting of malted milk powder, the whole crowned with a single bleeding cherry.

"Thats fifteen cents, I guess. A nickel from each of you guys."

Haughtily he walked from behind the counter. One knee was

twitching, and he was perspiring badly. He could feel the drops of sweat trickle coldly from his armpits. His courage ran out with his sweat. Marvin opened the door and ran back to the sled. There triumph overtook him again and warmly embraced him. Marvin felt suddenly old, and wise, and strong.

"Git out of here, shrimps," he commanded the cluster of neighborhood brats at the tailboard of the pung. He jumped into the straw. The driver came back, paced up and down the curb awhile, located his charges and rapped on the shop window. Steaming and noisy, the boys and girls streamed out of the shop, the unpaired girls arm in arm.

Marvin got up and let Ruby slide into the nest he had warmed for her. Pat promptly sat down beside her, and Arnold shoved by to gain the other side. Marvin waited for Ruby to remonstrate, to grant him his promised place. When she made no such gesture of gratitude, he turned his back on the crowd.

"Mind if I get up here?" he asked the driver gruffly.

"Nope."

Marvin climbed up on the hard plank seat into a new atmosphere, alcoholic.

"All abroad? Giddap, Bob. You, Ned!"

Bells jingle-jangled, harness squeaked, the sled moved forward, turned sweepingly, creakingly.

Behind Marvin giggles, whispers, sharp exclamations promptly smothered with sh-sh-shings; kid stuff! Marvin sat erect, removed from such mush. He had demonstrated an art. Let the kids have their fun.

The Collins house again—and at last.

"Come on in, everybody. We're going to have doughnuts an coffee an games an things."

Hot house, fragrant house; still house, suddenly noisy.

"Post Office!"

"Not it! No, lets count out to see who's postmaster. Stand still!

"Eeny-meeny-miney-mo . . ."

Marvin was It. He was posted at the folding doors.

"Who's out first? Lets count off again:

"Ibbity-bibbity-sibbity-salve!

Ibbity-bibbity-knoller!"

Beatrice Heinemiller was counted off. She swept past Marvin flirting skirts, and took up position behind the doors.

"Five letters for Charley," she whispered curtly.

Marvin stepped out: "Five letters for Charley Seebold!"

The crimson-faced, reluctant Charley was shoved forward. He disappeared through the crack between the doors. Marvin, from his post, heard five smacks in rapid succession, no words. Beatrice walked forth demurely.

Marvin stuck his head through the doors.

"Whaddaya say, Charley?"

"Gees, I dowanna play this fool game."

"Come on, pick somebody."

"I dowanna kiss any of them crows."

"I'll pick one for you," Marvin decided. He faced the expectant crowd.

"Ten letters for Cornelia Gifford," he shouted, picking the freckle-faced, eyeglassed and stupid maiden one inevitably finds in any gathering of over a dozen hapahazardly selected human beings of any age. Cornelia bounced from her chair, looked wildly about, and sat down again. The two boys nearest her made as if to pick her up, whereupon she jumped from her seat and ran to her amazing tryst.

Marvin cocked an ear, heard a flurry of sucking sounds, heard, to astonishment, Cornelia protest in a whisper, "Thas ony nine!"

Charley leaped into light and freedom.

Cornelia, suddenly brazen, said she had six letters for Arnold Haufler, who rose from his seat, winked at the roomful, flexed his muscles, spat on his hands and amid cheers marched into darkness.

Marvin decided being postmaster was a job worth having. Cornelia whispered, "Oh, dont—dont—dont!" Then, a little later, "Oh, you bit me."

Marvin announced: "Ten letters for Ruby Collins."

Ruby went to the opening like a bee to the hive. Marvin heard nothing at all until Arnold smiled into the light, rolling his eyes and rubbing his stomach.

"Who for you?" Marvin questioned the darkness.

"Come in here an I'll tell you." Marvin stepped into an embrace, wet kisses on his chin, his cheek, his mouth at long last. "Hug me! Ugh, why are you acting so funny tonight?"

From the room beyond came rhythmic stamping and catcalls, yells of "No fair!"

"One letter for Pat Dugan," Ruby said, giving Marvin a last hug.

"One picture postcard for Mr. Dugan," Marvin cried, and then suddenly the lights went on in the "post office" and there was the grinning maid behind a table covered with heaping plates, napkin-shrouded. So Pat was gypped out of his kiss, which more than made up for the sorry ride home.

"Samwidges," chuckled the maid. "Come on an get em, you all."

They were sissy sandwiches, with lettuce in them, and in December! Served by a colored maid! And the heiress of all this luxury preferred Marvin! He walked home with long, virile strides.

Marvin, returning from a delivery, swinging his basket, white apron showing beneath coat.

"Marvin Lang!"

He stopped in his tracks. The man who had accosted him was the parson, Mr. Jackson.

"Well, well, Marvin, and how are you?"

"All right I guess."

"How's Sunday school?"

"I—I sort of dont get around—much."

"That's too bad."

"I got to help in the store, you see. And school."

"That is too bad. Cant you spare an hour for the Lord once a week?"

Marvin was silent and unhappy.

"Maybe a young man like yourself thinks Sunday school is a little—well, a little babyish? Aha, I thought so. You are old enough to belong to the church, Marvin. Yes, sir, you should join the church and be with the real men at the Lord's table. I'll come around and speak with you about it soon. We are going to have a splendid revival after the New Year."

"Yes, sir. Good-bye, Mr. Jackson."

"Some evening!" Good, maybe he'll forget it. Marvin asked his father for a nickel that night and went to the moving pictures. Bathing girls and policemen in a funny comedy. Illustrated songs. "In the Good Old Summer Time" with bird-song effects, very beautiful. Everybody join in the chorus, now! Marvin forgot all about the threat the minister had voiced.

1912

NEW YEAR'S EVE. Marvin begged for permission to go out with the bunch, was sternly denied by both parents.

"Marvin, you dont want to be a street-corner loafer."

"Do you want to get into trouble?"

"Gosh! Gee whiz! We just want to go around callin."

"I know all about that. No, you stay home. Welcome the new year with your parents. That's only right."

A good day for business. Customers dropping in until nearly midnight for cold meats, crackers, cheeses, pickles.

Then the first rumble of whistles. Somebody blew a fish horn. More whistles, bells tolling, windows slammed wide and out-thrust heads screaming "Happy New Year!" to the wide world.

Carl Lang wiped his mouth on the back of a hand, his hands on the apron, and hugged his wife, kissing her on the mouth.

"Happy New Year, Margaret!"

"Happy New Year, Carl."

It was a rite. Marvin was out on the sidewalk, hammering on the bread box with the broomhandle.

"Happy New Year, Marvin!" Father kissed him. The embrace was a shock to Marvin, and he covered his embarrassment by kissing his mother.

"Prosperity!"

"Here's hopin."

"How about some resolutions? Make up your mind to be a good boy, hey, Marvin?"

"He *is* a good boy, Carl."

"He'll pass in a crowd. There's always room for improvement."

Sunday. Marvin slept late, woke with the realization that the

holiday ended with this day. School tomorrow. It was 1911 now. In 1912, well, there would be no school, anyhow.

"Well well well, boys and girls. We are all happy to be back, arent we? All happy to be back. Yes. I suppose we all made the usual resolutions? How many of you have kept them this far without breaking? Aha, that's a good sign. Everybody has! Well well well. I suppose the resolutions were to study harder, do our homework faithfully and graduate with honors in June, hey? Just think, this is the year 1912. Our graduating year. The Class of 1912. I suppose we are all a little rusty from our layoff. I must confess I am myself. So perhaps we had better start off with a review. Are there any questions? We will open our books, now, for the first time in the new year, then, if there are no questions . . ."

Where is Ruby Collins?

Where is Ruby Collins?

Any questions? Marvin wanted to shout that, dared not whisper it.

Recess. Marvin greeted Charley Seebold as if he had not seen him for a dozen years. Charley recovered from the blow and sparred back.

"How are you, you old stud horse?"

"Hello, old bollix. Havent seen you since the hayride."

"Jeez, was that a party! And you rung that little whistle briches four-eyed Cornelia on me. Oh, you hunk of cheese."

"Well, you wouldn pick anybody yourself."

"Why dincha gimme a chanst at Ruby?"

"And get her sore at me, you old rotten onion?"

"That wouldnt of hurt, now she's gone anyway."

"Gone?" Gone? *Gone?* "Whaddayamean, gone?"

"Well, she aint gone yet. But her old man's goin back to New York. Didn you know? Jeez, I thought you two was practically married."

Gone? Marvin looked at the school clock every hour for the rest of the day, and every hour it showed that but five minutes had passed. Lunch was sawdust and quinine.

Gone? Three o'clock, and Marvin turned his back on the way to home, ran all the way to the Collins house. Anguish conquered every emotion, every instinct. He marched up the stairs, rang the bell. The colored maid answered.

"Whut you want?"

"Is Ruby in?"

"Lord, no. She gone to New Yawk with Missah Collins. She goin to stay with her auntie ontell Missah Collins gits himself moved outen dis trashy bitsy town. She—"

Marvin turned, stumbled down the steps. He heard the black woman laugh as she slammed the door.

Gone! Gone without a word. (If you want this pin youll have to get it! Give me a kiss—quick. Hug me.)

Gone! Tears stung Marvin's eyes. He stumbled against a curbstone, looked up. Why, he was almost home.

Maybe she had written him a letter! She hadnt had time to see him. He ran all the rest of the way, burst open the store door.

"Was there any mail for me today, father?"

Father's mouth opened. He blinked twice before he closed it.

"Any—mail? For—*you*?"

Father began laughing. Leaning against the cans of soup, laughing.

"Margaret!" he yelled. "Margaret! Lissen to this. Mar— Marvin asks me if—if—if *there is any mail for him today!*"

"Well, whats wrong with that?" Marvin demanded.

"Any mail! Dear Lord!" All the mail that came to the Langs arrived between the first and the tenth of every month. Bills. "What was you expecting? A love letter, maybe?"

Marvin clamped his lips and strode through the store. In passing he kicked at a pyramid of Cornflakes boxes and sent them crashing down.

"Marvin! Marvin Lang! Have you gone crazy? Come back here at once!"

Marvin did not turn. He brushed his mother aside in the living room and ran upstairs. He slammed the door of his bedroom and threw himself face down upon the bed.

Gone!

Steps on the stairs. His door opened. A hand grasped his belt and tugged. Marvin clung to the bedclothes.

"Marvin!" Father. "What's come over you? Look at me, sir!"

Marvin shook his head, rubbing his nose into the spread.

A stinging cuff on the ear, another. He began to sob. The sobs began away down in his guts and forced their way through his gullet. They were squares of ice, too big for his pipes. Each sob twisted him with effort.

"My *God!*" Carl Lang plumped down on the edge of the bed. "Marvin, dont be a damn fool. What's the matter?"

Sob.

"Marvin, lissen, tell me. Are you sick?"

How in—hell—could Marvin answer? He didnt know why he was crying. He didnt want to cry. He couldnt help it. Each sob demanded birth, prevailed with birth pangs. His head was empty, a balloon; his chest was empty between square sobs with ragged edges.

Marvin felt his father's hand pat his shoulders. At last, the last sob came forth.

"Marvin, son. Tell your father. What's wrong? Are you in trouble? Is anyone after you?"

Marvin shook his head.

"Did you fail in school? Come on, tell me. I never saw you act this way before. Tell me, Marvin. I'm sorry I hit you."

Carl lang laid an arm over the boy's shoulders. More tears came to Marvin, but easily now, comfortingly.

"Lissen, Marvin. I've been a kid myself. You know your parents are always trying to help you—"

Marvin sat up, ashamed of his tears. He averted his face.

"That's better now. Did you break a window or somethin like that?"

Marvin gulped.

"Marvin! You aint in trouble with any girl?"

"No, I'm not. I'm—" The arm around his shoulders tightened. "Its that Ruby Collins. She—she—"

"Oh, it is a girl. Marvin, what did I tell you? I warned you. Oh, what have you been doing? Didnt I warn you?"

"I didn do anything. She—she said—she—gee whiz, she's gone!"

"Dead?"

"N-no! She moved away and didn say—didn say—anything at all. She didn say she was moving."

"Well, what about it?"

"Gosh, dont you see? She said she liked me best and I liked her best and then she moved back to New York."

"Well, for the love—of—*God*! Of all the damn fool young pups of the world. And so you kick over everything in the store and make a holy show of yourself just because a little squirt hardly out of diapers—"

Relief, more than amusement, made Carl Lang lean back and laugh.

Marvin sat stony-faced. He breathed in gusty sighs.

"Lissen, young man! How old do you think you are any-

how? No more girl business, do you hear? Plenty of time for that. Plenty. You keep away from them like I told you and you wouldnt be made a boob of like you been. Oh, wait till I tell your mother this. It's a joke."

Carl Lang got up heavily, chuckling. He left the room, went downstairs. Marvin heard his voice rumbling up through the floor. Heard him laugh; his mother laugh.

"Damn women," said Marvin. "To hell with girls. I'll show em. Malarky!"

Marvin promised the Reverend Mr. Jackson he would be at the Sunday school next Sabbath.

Marvin found, as the class assembled, that Mr. Jackson had not concentrated upon him alone. There were seven other boys, and fifteen girls; some older than himself. The senior class.

Mrs. Massina took charge of the girls. Superintendent Oakes himself gathered the boys around him.

"Lissen, fellows," said Oakes. "We're all going into the church after for services. Isnt that swell? We'll wait until the services are ready to begin an then we'll all march in. Reverend Jackson is going to make an announcement this morning thät is going to be a big surprise, just for you fellows."

Marvin had been in church three or four times before, at Christmas or Thanksgiving exercises.

Mr. Oakes marshaled his charges in the entry. From behind the golden oak door came the joyous, rhythmic shouts of a hymn:

"—Come to the Church in the Wildwood!

Oh, come to the church in the dell!

(In the dell)

The little brown church of my chi-yild-hood—"

There was a two-part chorus, with the basses thumping out "come! come! come!" like frogs or drums.

"Now!" whispered Mr. Oakes, pushing the doors ajar. "March right down all the way to the front, looking straight ahead."

The song, the groans of the organ, jumped down the throats of the eight boys. They swallowed and, two by two, marched down the aisle. The floor slanted sharply.

Higher rose the anthem, a new exultation buoying it.

Marvin kept his eye on Mr. Jackson, who was smiling fixedly. In front of the altar the boys lined up behind the girls who had marched down another aisle.

"Let us pray!

"Oh, God! We know it gives Thee great *joy* this Sabbath morning to look down from *Thy* throne upon these *young* men and these *young* women unspoiled and innocent who come to dedicate *their* youth in the service of Thee *and* Thy Son, Jesus *Christ*. Father, they ask Thee to guide their *faltering* footsteps along the strait and narrow path upon which by the *Divine* Grace of Jesus they have been permitted to set their feet. And we, their elders, who are *also* but as little children to Thee . . ."

And so on. Marvin stared at the top button of the girl's dress in front of him. It was iridescent mother-of-pearl with four holes and four crisscrossed strands of thread. The button was not quite round because one edge had splintered, in the clothes wringer, likely.

Marvin felt bored and resentful. If this was the surprise Oakes had promised to h(ell) with it. He did not at all feel the way the parson was describing him to God.

They all sat down in the specially reserved front pew. Then there was another good, rousing hymn; a regular marching song: "Onward, Christian Soldiers!" Marvin felt better after it.

Mr. Jackson made some announcements and said he had a more important one he would keep to the last and now he would read to them from the eighteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Matthew . . .

Marvin fell asleep and never found out what the important announcement was until Mr. Jackson came into the store one day with a cardboard poster to put in the window announcing a week's revival service by "Home Run" Winegar.

"And Marvin is going to be an usher!" beamed the parson.

Father was scarcely impressed.

"I guess you wont have to put anything in the collection plate anyhow so long's you're working for the church. . . . Evry night for a week. Hmpf. Well, I guess you wont mind getting away from work in the store."

Mother was more interested.

"I'll get some cleaning fluid after your Sunday suit. And for heaven sakes shine your shoes. It's real nice they should pick you for an usher. Remember to be nice an polite."

Marvin's feelings were mixed until the meeting of the ushers Wednesday in the Sunday-school room, just before prayer meeting. Mr. Jackson gave each boy a white armband with the word

USHER in blurry blue letters. The girls were given rosettes with a dangling ribbon similarly inscribed.

"I am sure you will all not only profit from hearing Mr. Winegar but will be really interested in him. You know, boys, he used to be a famous baseball player with the New Haven team. Old Home Run is still a two-fisted he-man. He can box and broad-jump and throw a baseball. He will tell you all about himself and how he gave up a life of evil to follow the Lord.

"Now one thing more. Wednesday afternoon and Thursday evening there will be extra services, an I'll see you get excused early, you girls who are in school, because the Wednesday services will be *for women only* and the extra early evening Thursday service will be *for men only*."

Marvin was sort of glad he'd gone to Sunday school.

"This way, mam."

"No, you dont. My pew's down tother aisle!"

"All the pews are free for the revival, mam."

"Well, I like that. No, I'll sit in my own place an whoever's in it can get out. I cant hear noplac else."

"But, lady, the minister said—"

"Never mind what he said."

Marvin left the stubborn old woman to shift for herself and went to the door to convey a new group to seats. "This way, please." Six women to one man. Many strangers, who stared around curiously, appraisingly. The church was full, and Marvin and other boys brought in folding seats from the Sunday-school room to put in the aisles.

Mr. Jackson perspired, shook hands, whispered, smiled, mopped his forehead, popped in and out of a little yellow door to the left of the organ. The organ hummed, boomed, roared.

A tall young bald man jumped on the platform waving a cornet. He raised his eyes to the roof and the cornet to his lips and launched into "The Old Time Religion." When two or three essayed to follow him vocally he blew louder, drowned them out. He played the refrain twice, dropped the cornet into waiting hands below, lifted his arms: "*Now* all together!"

How that grand old tune leaped from three hundred throats, eighteen not singing! Marvin felt prickles marching up his spine and passing through his scalp. Then all at once the bald young man had his cornet again and was standing sideways to the audience, facing the steps up which a tall, bald old man was climbing, followed by Mr. Jackson, still sweating and smiling. The bald young

man horned the bald old one right across to the pulpit while the throng sang louder. The bald old man gripped the edge of the pulpit, threw back his head, shut his eyes. Mr. Jackson, beside him, bowed his head and shut his eyes. When the song stopped and everybody sat down the two preachers still stood there.

Then Home Run Winegar prayed.

"O gracious God, Thou hast this night vouchsafed Thy servant . . ."

Marvin bowed his head and shut his eyes; and wondered why God had always to be addressed in such funny language.

Then Mr. Jackson introduced Mr. Winegar, who stepped back and put his arm around the tall young man, bald, and introduced *him* as his son. "Sunny" Winegar. He spelled it, to make sure the audience would put in the "u" and not an "o." He said Sunny never smoked, never touched a drop of beer or wine or spirits, had never told a lie.

"And he can run a hundred yards in ten seconds, and jump six feet high. He can knock the stuffings out of a punching bag, walk on his hands, chin himself forty times—and he can kneel down, as he does with me every night at bedtime, like a simple, humble babe, and renew his strength from that Fountain Filled With Blood."

Sunny smiled to all corners of the church and lifted his cornet. He played about that sanguinary fountain in a way that had them all gripping their knees.

Then Home Run walked up, got a good hold on the pulpit, looked everybody in the eye and said that he was especially glad to be with the good people of Belle Bay because this year of 1912 marked his coming of age in the Lord.

"Twenty-one years ago this afternoon I was a wastrel, a scoundrel, a bibber of wine and a tippler of strong drink. I never opened my lips without taking the Lord's name in vain. I consorted with lewd women. I gambled. I was the idol of a fast crowd, and the victim of that same crowd. Twenty-one years ago this afternoon . . .

"Twenty-one years ago this night I awoke from a long carouse. I woke in the charity ward of a hospital in a big eastern city . . ."

Home Run told how he awoke and saw pink serpents gliding around him. How he had screamed and how a white-haired woman in nurse's garb came to his bedside.

"She reminded me of my mother, my poor old mother. I had

not seen her, nor spoken to her by word of mouth or letter, for sixteen years!"

He begged the nurse for a drink of whisky, and she brought him water. He dashed the glass from her hand.

"Just as, today, I would dash a cup of wine from my lips if it were brought to me, yea, on my deathbed!"

"Amen! Amen! Amen! Amen!" from all corners.

Home Run told how thirst tortured him until at last he sipped of the water, and how good he found it, how wondrously good.

He told how he had demanded a racing sheet from the nurse, and how she had brought, instead, a Testament; and how he had tossed it aside with a curse!

Gasps from the audience.

But the nurse put the Testament on the table beside his bed, and that selfsame night a man in an adjoining bed had died horribly in delirium tremens, cursing God with his last breath.

"In my shaken condition that experience unnerved me. To take my mind off it I took the worn little Testament and opened it at random. And what did I see? What did I see?"

"Oh, my brothers and sisters, *what* did I see? God opened that book. God opened that page. God directed my eyes.

"I read: '*I tell you, nay; but, except ye repent, ye shall LIKEWISE perish!*'"

Stunned silence over the audience. *Then* the Amens thundered forth!

Marvin decided, when he had a chance to do it, he would let God open a Bible and get some divine guidance himself. Home Run suggested a hymn, and it was sung; he asked the audience for suggestions, and selected one and while that was in the singing the ushers were started down the aisles with the collection plates, oak with red cloth on the inside. Marvin's practiced eye told him there were four or five dollars in silver or copper in his plate alone.

Home Run urged everybody to come back the next night bringing a stranger, and the meeting broke up with another jolly hymn. The boy ushers stayed behind, though, to help tidy up and put the hymnbooks back in the racks. When he had a chance Marvin flipped a Bible open at random, stabbed with his finger, and read:

"Entering into a ship at Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia. The next *day* we touched at Sardis."

It didnt seem to be applicable in any way.

Tuesday night Home Run began to work. He had come to preach Christ crucified. Marvin shivered as the evangelist bloodied the church. Home Run hammered the nails into Jesus' gentle hands, and clewed them fast. He forced the thorny crown upon the meek brow so that you could see the barbs tear the skin into red, ragged furrows. Then he invited every man and woman and child present to dabble fingers in the innocent blood and erase all sins with its warm crimson.

The Amens boomed and squeaked. Some of the women sobbed. Marvin felt ashamed, somehow, and ashamed for feeling ashamed.

"Oh, my brothers and sisters, come to this ruddy fountain of living blood," wept Home Run. "Come and drink deep. Bury your lips in the reviving stream from your Saviour's heart. See how sorrowfully he hangs there, his half-closed eyes searching, searching for *you*! Shall he hang and plead in vain?"

Men and women began to rise and shove their ways into the aisles. The women especially wore wide-eyed looks of ecstasy. Mr. Jackson and the deacons helped them all down to the pulpit where the converts wallowed in imaginary gore. Marvin noted that Pinky Swackhamer, who worked in Guldensuppe's butcher-shop, was among the men; and didn't wonder.

Next afternoon was the special session for women only. Marvin wished he had a girl, so she could tell him all about it. Well, Muriel Hopkins would tell Linc Holzhauer, and he would get Linc to tell him. And Linc did:

"Jees, it wasnt nothin at all. Just about vanity an spendin money on cloes and how wicked it was to paint and powder and that kinda crap."

The service for men only. Nobody under fifteen admitted.

"If you look at a girl's ankles and get improper thoughts it's just the same with Jesus as if you had stripped her clothes all off, stripped her bare naked and raped her.

"Some of you, I know—I can see it in your guilty eyes—have kissed unmarried girls, making a fleshly mockery of the conjugal embrace. Stealing kisses! Just as criminal as stealing money. Worse, for it is stealing virtue, which you can never pay back. Would you want to marry a girl knowing that before she came to your arms she had lent her lips to a dozen other men? Yet when you kiss girls—oh, I know you say it is just in fun—*you are debauching the brides of future husbands!*"

Ruby!

Marvin had done more than kiss *her*. Ruby could go to hell.

He hoped he had debauched her good and plenty. He hoped when she got married he'd meet her husband and have a laugh on him. But what about God, now? To hell with Ruby but what about God?

That night Home Run preached Christ militant, a manly, hairy Jesus who slept in the open, worked with his hands, looked Death in the face with scorn. A Christ who resembled the G.A.R. conception of Abraham Lincoln, remembering what Grandpa had told of Honest Abe.

"Are you all a bunch of white-livered, lily-fingered la-di-da sissies, afraid to follow a leader like Him? Do you say, when he calls you to enlist under his flag: 'Oh, it's too much work' or 'Tomorrow will do. I'm still young,' and go back to your sporting pages and your beer? To your soft beds?

"Ah, but you dont know when the time is coming when you are tied to that bed and cant march in the Army of the Lord! And then it's too late. The Devil comes like a junkman and he snatches you up! 'You marched with my army on earth,' he laughs, and away you go, cast into a lake of everlasting fire. Have you ever burned your finger, maybe lighting a filthy, soul-destroying cigarette? You remember how that little blister *hurt*? Do you think you can imagine what it means to really *hurt like hell*?

"Oh, come put down your name on the sacred muster roll, as one with courage and bravery and strength! Come to Jesus . . ."

Marvin rose from his seat in a trance. He felt nine feet tall. He stretched out his arms to balance himself. The lights blurred and gyrated, and somebody took him by the hand, led him to the altar.

"You dont have to carry a knapsack in the Army of the Lord! He'll carry your load. He'll calm your fears. Oh, it's a glorious thing to march . . ."

Marvin stood uncertainly before the pulpit, craning his neck up at Home Run and beginning to wonder how he got where he was. Hands pressed down upon his shoulders.

"Kneel down. Oh, Marvin, I'm so glad."

It was Mr. Jackson. He knelt beside Marvin. Pretty soon Home Run came down, hugged him roughly with one arm, pumped his hand, left him with a slap on the back. Marvin looked around. Next to him knelt Smarty Kress, three or four married men whom he recognized as occasional customers at the delicatessen.

Marvin hung around the darkened entry of the church after the post-service chores. He had some deeply disturbing private

problems to be settled. How about working in the store Sundays after this? Should he honor his father and his mother or keep the Sabbath Day Holy?

Mr. Jackson, Home Run and Sunny came out of the church together, talking. Sunny was saying, "—cant make traveling expenses."

"Well, it isnt a wealthy community," Mr. Jackson said, locking the door. "Collections barely average fifteen dollars a week."

"Then we'll have to shake it out of them," Home Run declared. "I'll try jollying em tomorrow with that line about a noiseless collection."

The men went up the frosty, deserted streets discussing finances. Marvin went home as soon as they were out of sight.

"Well, I hit the trail," he said to his parents, who were making ready for sleep.

"You hit the trail for bed," his father said. "They ought to pay you for workin over there until almost midnight."

Marvin listened to the sermon the next night with the thrill of being an insider to a plot. Home Run was jolly, then full of pathos, then jolly again. He announced there would be a competition between the four aisles on the size of the respective donations. Then he gave each aisle a second chance to add to its sum.

Marvin told Oakes he couldnt usher the next night because Saturday was the store's busiest. He stayed away Sunday without excuse. "And if Linc or anybody says anything about me gettin converted I'll bust his jaw," Marvin vowed.

Monday evening Mr. Jackson came into the store and said he was the happiest man in the world now because Marvin was a Christian.

"You are on the probation roll now," he explained. "After your period of probation you will enter the church as much a member in the sight of God as I am myself."

"What do you mean, probation?" Marvin asked slowly. "I didnt do anything."

"Oh, no, no. I mean for that period you will receive instructions and you will be observed to see you fulfill your Christian duties."

Marvin did not go to Wednesday prayer meeting, and stayed away from church the following Sunday. When Mr. Jackson came into the store Tuesday, Marvin saw him coming and hid behind the counter. He tried to explain his reversed emotion to himself. It was the way Home Run talked about money, maybe, but it was also shame at having made a holy show of himself, walking

goofy-eyed down the aisle with Jackson holding him up like a lush.

He couldn't shake off the hypnotism fully. He worried at night about hell and saw Christ looking sadly at him, like in the religious chromo on the wall at Nick the Barber's. He went to church the Sunday after. Mr. Jackson smiled at him after the services, said he was happy to see Marvin wasn't really a backslider, and turned to talk to another.

Spring came again. Now the talk was all about graduation.

"I'll have to have a new suit, and can I have long pants now?"

"A new suit? Wont your Sunday one do?"

"He should have a new suit, Carl. What will the neighbors say? I can go over look in Hearn's."

"Well, if it must be it must be."

"After all, he only graduates once."

"Yes, I guess you're right. Besides, long pants will give him a better chance of gettin a job."

"We ought to have his picture taken with his diploma."

"Yeah? Maybe we ought to send him to college too."

Marvin got his long pants, pegtopped, tight at knee and calf. A vest, with four pockets and a strap at the back with a black-enamel buckle. Father grinned when Marvin tried on the suit for him. Marvin walked about in vest and pants, snapping his suspenders.

"Well, Margaret, we must be gettin old. A son in long pants!"

Marvin looked down at his vest pockets, ignoring the label sewed on one and imagining instead a row of fat cigars, a fountain pen.

"You cant wear long stockins with long pants. Take a quarter from the cash drawer an get yourself a pair of socks an garters."

"Gee, can I really?"

Manhood. It—it—no words for it.

Graduation exercises were held in the Labor Lyceum on a warm June night embroidered with heat lightning.

Nine girls and five boys, sitting in a semicircle on the stage. Nine girls in white dresses with long sleeves and high necks, some with black button shoes, some with white canvas slippers. All with roses pinned to their chests. Five boys in blue serge, four in long pants. Smarty Kress wore knickers, but he was a shrimp. Five boys in blue with high, stiff collars, white neckties, rose in button-hole.

A table at the edge of the stage; fourteen diplomas, nicely rolled and ribbon-tied, piled in a heap. A pitcher of water and a glass, and next the table an empty chair. Beyond, rows of faces blurred by busy fans; fifty or sixty faces, attached to mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, grandparents, younger brothers and sisters.

A man in full evening dress stepped through a side door, with Mr. Burns in blue close behind. He was led to the chair next the table.

Silence in the Labor Lyceum.

"It gives me great pleasure—*great* pleasure—to welcome you townsfolk at this auspicious not to say momentous occasion in the lives of our young folks whom I am honored to have led through their last difficult year and whom I present to our distinguished speaker of the evening who needs no introduction for he is known and honored and trusted by us all the Honorable Howard Michael Carmody of the Board of Aldermen."

Few of the women present, none of the boys and girls, not half of the men, had ever seen the trusted and honored Carmody before, but everyone clapped heartily.

"Ladies and gents and you young folks who are about to embark upon the stormy waters of life, this gathering here tonight reminds me of the story of the English dude who came to this country. It seems this dude was standing on a street corner waiting for a trolley and pretty soon a laboring man came up and stood beside him waiting for a trolley himself. Now this man's pants what from hard toil had bagged far out at the knees. Away out—like this. And the dude stood watching him standing there on the curb with his pants bending away out at the knees and he steps up to the Irishman and he says, 'Excuse me an all that bally sawt of rot but why dont you jump?'"

The Honorable Carmody waited for the audience to laugh and the audience waited for the withering retort expected from the Irishman, having been trained that in all anecdotes the Irishman always has the last and devastating word. Then the audience realized 'twas its move, and supplied the laughter which enabled the Honorable Carmody to go on.

"But in all seriousness now, here are these young folks standing on the brink of their life, standing I might say on the curbstone waiting for the trolley of opportunity, and I ask them: Why dont you jump?"

This time everybody laughed on the dot.

The Honorable Carmody talked on and on about the benefits

of education, of the generosity of the commonwealth which educated its children freely and completely.

"Some of these young people are going to pursue learning further and some are going forth to wrest a living from the world. Some of the young ladies I dare say are ready to make homes of their own—aha, I see some blushing!" And so on, until he sat down suddenly, mopping his brow, and the audience applauded and the children applauded and Mr. Burns.

Smarty Kress arose and recited a piece. Two of the girls recited pieces. Then Mr. Burns read the names off the diplomas and handed them one by one to the Honorable Carmody who handed them to the children that claimed them. Then everybody sang "The Star-Spangled Banner," or wiggled mouths to simulate singing, and Marvin and his schoolmates were educated, and stamped, signed and sealed to the world as such.

Mother came to the exercises. Marvin saw her beaming at him all through the exercises. When he joined her afterward she kissed him right out in front of everybody.

"Is this your mother, Marvin? How do you do Mrs. Lang? I am Marvin's principal and teacher. Mr. Burns."

"Pleased to meet you," said Mother.

"I'm hoping you'll let Marvin go on to high school. He has a good head for figures. He might take a course in bookkeeping."

"Oh, Marvin's smart enough if he puts his mind to it."

Marvin walked home proudly, peering through the rolled diploma telescope-wise. His legs felt funny in long pants. Father read the diploma and said it ought to be framed.

"Mr. Burns said Marvin was real smart. He said he ought to go to high school an study bookkeeping."

"How do you feel about that, young man?"

"Gee whizzo, I'm sick of school."

"Now, now! That's no way to talk. Would you like to be a bookkeeper? You've got to decide on a career now."

"A bookkeeper? Holy gee, that would be like goin to school always."

"Well, now, Marvin; it's a real nice profession. Nice an genteel, aint it, Carl?"

"Yeah, white-collar work."

"Gosh, would I have to wear a collar alla time?"

"Well, I tell you how I look at it, Margaret. Here's Marvin goin on sixteen. Four years of high school and he'll be close to twenny. That's a man full grown, twenny is, an he'll just be startin to look for a job. On the other hand, if he goes out an

learns a trade he'll be earnin a little something right from the start. In four years he'll know his trade an be steppin right into full wages."

"Sure, father; that's what I think."

"We—ell, there is something in what you say, now. But what sort of a trade? I wouldnt want him to do somethin dangerous or not dignified."

"From my way of thinkin there's three things people cant get along without. That's food an shelter an clothing. Any trade that supplies them necessities is safe, that's certain. Now what are they? Take doles, he can go into a store; he can go into tailorin but that's a sheeny business; he can go into a mill but there aint none around here.

"Take food. He can clerk in groceries but that's no busness; he can learn the butcher business or the bakery trade, an pastry cooks gets high money, I tell you.

"Then there's the housin business, an he has a big choice there. Carpentring, plumbing, plastring, bricklaying, or bein a roofer. All big money and most of them steady work. There's steamfittin and gasfittin an electrizzity. All the new houses is made for electric lights. Why, there's no end of choices."

"I wanna work in an automobile garage," Marvin said.

"That's a lot of foolishness. Autos are toys for rich folks. Why dont you want to be a pearl diver or a poodle dog fancier?"

"Gee, I'd like to drive an automobile."

"Lissen, we arent talkin about your likes an dislikes. This is business. Work, a lifework. Somethin you'll plug at all your livin days or starve."

It sounded like doom to Marvin. Lifework! All your livin days. Day after day and week after week and year after year, hammering nails or cutting chops or laying pipes.

"He might—no, I was thinkin of the letter carriers but he'd have to be out in all sorts of weather."

"Bah, that dont take brains. Just a grown-up errand boy."

"How about the cops? Can I be a cop?"

"No; in the first place you're too young an in the second place it takes a lot of pull."

"Well, lets sleep on it, Carl."

"Good night, father; good night, mother."

Marvin was educated. He was practically a man. In a simpler civilization he would have taken himself a wife and made himself a spear, his woman a hoe, and settled down.

School had taught Marvin to multiply, divide, add, subtract. He could compute compound interest and the number of cords in a pile of wood and never in his life put either training to any use. He knew that a sentence consisted of a subject and predicate; that the United States consisted of forty-eight states and the territories of Alaska and Hawaii; that it was bounded by Canada on the north and Mexico on the south, had never fought a war except in self-defense, and never lost a war.

He knew the world was round like an orange, slightly flattened at the poles, and revolved upon its axis once in twenty-four hours and around the sun once a year. Or was it once a month? Well, one or the other. It had two hemispheres and five zones and the capital of New York was Albany.

Columbus set out to prove the world was round and discovered America in 1492 but nothing much happened until 1620 when the Pilgrims landed on Plymouth Rock. The English put a tax on tea and sent over hired soldiers to collect the tax so the colonies went to war and George Washington, at the head of an army of ragged men who left bloody footprints in the snow, whipped the British, who rested awhile and had another go at the Americans in 1812 but were walloped again. In 1848 the Mexicans—the Mexicans—they got fresh and we cleaned them up. The Southern states insisted on having slaves, so the rest of the country whipped them and Lincoln freed the slaves. Then the Spanish blew up the battleship *Maine* while everybody was asleep on it, so we pitched in and licked them, and what use Marvin ever made of that knowledge except to satisfy the Board of Education's arbitrary standards is not demonstrable.

"Gee, what's the use of school? Heck, now I got to start out an learn somethin else, start learnin all over again."

So much for culture. His real education had been less painfully acquired outside of school hours. Of course he learned a lot of stuff in Sunday school, without which he would have got along all right up to the time he died, but after that . . . !

God lived in heaven where all good people went, and kept terribly strict track of His people here on earth; He was a Loving Father but quick to deal out famines, war, disease, broken legs, bad marks in school and thunderstorms to those who displeased Him.

God gave His Only Begotten Son because He so loved the world that . . . that . . . Jesus was born in a stable on Christmas Eve and went around telling stories and some of them were pretty

good, too. He was nailed to a cross by the Jews and the Romans; the Jews still thought he was a fake but the Romans had taken him up and practically claimed a monopoly on him. If you believed in Jesus you went to heaven and if you didn't you went to hell, a hot place full of fire. The Devil was the boss of hell. The Devil went around tempting you to have fun and if you weren't sorry for it afterward and mended your ways you burned.

Heaven was up in the sky somewheres. On Mars, maybe. Hell was underground, and there was plenty of proof of that. Volcanoes and things.

The main thing in life was to make money. Some people robbed the poor and ground the working people down and got rich without work. They were a bunch of dirty bastards but somehow you had to admire them.

You grew up and got married.

When you got married you slept in the same bed with a woman. Women were made different from men. They had bigger behinds and bigger chests but were deficient in whiskers, strength, and you know what. Once a month they got sick. It even said in the Bible you didn't dare touch a woman then because you got dirty.

To touch a girl before you were married was dirty too, but gee!

Smoking stunted your growth and whisky and masturbation made you nuts.

You had to have muscle to knock down any stiff who got too flip.

By putting your forefingers in your mouth a certain way you could whistle so they'd hear you a mile.

Sheenies, wops, dagoes, polacks and Chinese were fair game for any American. All rules were off as regards foreigners.

Marvin was thoroughly educated.

BOY WANTED: to run errands and learn business in printing plant. Address in own handwriting. Apply Banner Office.

BOY: strong, willing, Gentile, willing work small pay for chance rapid advancement. XYZ Box 14.

BOYS: make money selling perfumes, self threading needles, flavoring extracts. Go like hotcakes. Housewives buy on sight. 100% profit. Write for samples enclosing dime to cover mailing and packing. Home Needs Co. Dept 4-B, ii; 32 Dearborn Street, Chicago.

BOY: strong, intelligent, trustworthy, helper on milk route. \$4 to start. Kleins Dairy, New Dorp.

BOY, opportunity for smart strong boy. Good future for right applicant. Adams Express Co. R.R.

BUSHELMAN: expert on mohair—

"Well, Marvin, you been out of school goin onto two weeks now. What do you expect, somebody to come around an offer you a job on a silver platter?"

"Gee whiz, pop—"

"What? Where do you get this 'pop' business?"

"I mean, father. I've been lookin. I've read all through the papers. I can get a job in New York—an Old Man Schreck said he'd take me back an he'll pay me four bucks in the fall if I stick."

"A soda jerker, hah?"

"Well, anyhow, he wants me to go to night school."

"That's a good idea."

"Wha-at? Work all day an go to school nights? Gee, cant a fellow have any fun?"

"You'll find out soon your fun's all over. I was talkin to Goldschmidt about you. He said he could use a good steady boy who knew the town and the people. You can drive the delivery wagon and he'll learn you the butcher business."

"What'll he pay?"

"Three an a half to begin with. If you drum up trade he'll raise you. And when you can help on the block he'll raise you. You can earn fifteen a week in no time if you have any ambition."

"Gee, that aint so bad now, is it?"

"It looks like a ready-made job for you."

"What did Mother say about it?"

"She's afraid you'll cut yourself an have the horse run away on you."

"A-a-ah, go on; I'm no babay."

"Well, remember now, this is a serious decision you got to make. Do you want to be a butcher?"

"I'd rather be a butcher than a bricklayer."

"Bricklayers get more money."

"Yeah, but they got to work for somebody always. An anyhow, they're laid off in the wintertime mostly."

"Good boy! You got a head on you even if you just use it to hang a hat on, only."

"I guess it aint stuffed with sawdust."

Mr. Goldschmidt, ruddy, stout, blond. Sitting on his back steps in the dark, his big, gray tomcat on his lap. Sitting in his under-shirt and stocking feet.

Marvin reached him by following Mrs. Goldschmidt, plump, ruddy, blonde, through the flat over the shop. Louie Goldschmidt, son and helper, six years Marvin's senior, was shaving in the kitchen. Pink, blond, husky Louie.

The second story piazza was cool and pleasant. The light from the kitchen windows showed a fern ball, a canary cage and a pot with a vine sprawling over its edge hanging from the roof.

"Hello, young man."

"Hello, Mr. Goldschmidt. My father said you were looking for a boy."

"Mm, no! Not exactly. But should a good, ambitious boy look for me, I'm not past reasoning."

"I'd like the job, Mr. Goldschmidt. I know all the streets and the people real good. Gee, if some of Pop's customers don't buy from you I know them all and I'll get their trade."

"So?"

"Sure thing. I'm pretty strong. And I can make change and figure prices. I guess I could just about run Pop's business."

"Hm-m! Can you drive a horse yet?"

"I guess I can learn that, all right."

"The job means you should get here at seven o'clock anyhow and clean stable, curry the horse. And the wagon, you wash it once a week, anyhow."

"Just try me."

"All right, you come around tomorrow morning."

"Gee, an I'll bring my own apron."

"So good."

Mother was proud of her son; she got up extra early to make his breakfast. Marvin was sitting at the butcher's stable door before seven o'clock. Louie came down the back stairs, yawning and scratching his head and arms.

"Hlo, kid. Look, here's where we hide the key . . .

"First thing you do you turn the horse out for a drink, hey, Bismarck? Then you shake down some hay and fill the measure with oats . . .

"Grab a pitchfork and throw all the manure through the window . . ."

Louie sat on the oatbin, directing Marvin. Marvin worked willingly, awkwardly. He liked the pungent ammoniac odor of the stable.

"That's the straw pile over there. You leave the stall air an put down the beddin at night when you turn the horse in. Do you know how to harness? I guess not. Well, now lets go see if Pop opened the store. Pop wont let me or nobody open the store but him."

Pop had opened the store. He was coming out of the icebox with a quarter of beef on his shoulders.

"Hello, Marfin. Ach, by golly, you smell from horse-piss. Wash your hands in the horse barrel."

Abashed, Marvin retreated, made his ablutions in Bismarck's fountain, returned.

"Now you sawdust the floor."

"I know how to do that! Where's the barrel an rake?"

Louie hung hams on a row of hooks and Old Man Goldschmidt set out trays of brains and tripe.

"Now you better get ice from the deepo. Get two hundert whole and two hundert broken."

"In the wagon," said Louie. "I'll help you harness."

Louie showed Marvin how to hold the bit in the palm of his left hand and hold the leather headstraps in his right to bridle Bismarck. Marvin was pretty sure he couldn't ever take the jumble of straps and buckles from the hook and toss them on Bismarck's back as nonchalantly as Louie did, suddenly resolving order from chaos by reaching under the horse's veined belly and passing a strap through a buckle.

"Then you pull his tail through this, see? Now, then, Bismarck! Backup!"

Bismarck becupped between the shafts of the wagon.

"Now one thing I warn you, dont you ever hit Bismarck. If I hear you hit Bismarck I'll wallop hell outen you.

"And another thing. See this weight on a rope, here? Where you sit. Looka. You hitch this end into the bit. Then every time you get out you throw the weight on the ground, see? That holds him."

Marvin mounted the seat, gathered up the reins and jerked. Bismarck threw up his head, backed suddenly.

"No, you dummhead. Take it easy. Just hold the reins an he goes by himself."

Marvin held the reins loosely. Bismarck fell into a doze.

"Giddup, Bismarck," Louie said sharply. Bismarck started. He went down the ash-covered drive, rattled over the flagging, and turned of his own accord in the street.

"He knows the way himself already," Louie grinned. "Now you hold the reins like this."

At the ice depot Louie took the reins, backed Bismarck to the platform. "Hello, Andrew. Two of cake an two busted."

Andrew slid two big chunks of ice into the wagon and then an assortment of smaller pieces.

"Giddap, Bismarck," said Marvin.

Bismarck clop-clopped on the asphalt; Ben Hur never felt as Marvin did.

Marvin helped Louie unload the ice and lug it to the box. The smaller pieces were put in a barrel and Marvin chopped them into egg-sized chunks with an ice spade, to put into the display counter.

"Louie," said Goldschmidt, "you show Marfin the route."

"Git your apron on, Marv. Here's an order book. Got a pencil?"

Up one street and down another Marvin drove, stopping at house after house as Louie indicated. The housewives gave their orders—two pounds of chuck; about a pound and a half of flank cut thin; a pound of pork chops. Two pounds of flank cut for rollmops. A pound of liver ground for dumplings.

Marvin knew most of the women for customers, steady or occasional, at the delicatessen.

"He'll come for your orders after this," Louie would say, "but he wont be cuttin your meat yet, you neednt worry."

Marvin wrote the orders in his book. The covers fastened with an elastic band, under which he tucked his pencil.

Ten o'clock and back at the store. Goldschmidt, his sleeves tucked up, basketwork protectors on his forearms, the brim of a straw hat on his head, was chopping hamburger. Goldschmidt scorned the meat grinders. He used two cleavers to reduce the beef to a butterlike mince; clip-clop-clop-a-clop-clop-clip-clop.

"I can do that I bet," said Marvin.

"Yes? You try it."

The tune Marvin played was uneven. In five minutes his wrists and shoulders burned. "I guess there's a nack to it," he admitted.

"I guess there certainly is a nack to it," Goldschmidt laughed. "By golly, look at the hunks you leaved."

"Marv, go into the shed an bring out the baskets piled up at the door. Put a sheet of fresh paper in the bottoms. Ready, pop? Mrs. Gerstmeier wants a six-pound breast of veal for stuffin—"

Marvin lined up the delivery baskets, heavy, zinc-bound hickory-strip affairs, while cleavers clopped, saws hissed through bone. The two Goldschmidts worked deliberately, knowingly, tidily.

Marvin saw the animal carcasses cunningly dismembered, cut apart at certain places for no reason evident to his eyes. The scales

creaked as slabs of beef, veal, pork, lamb, were slapped on, steadied with a pink hand, studied, removed.

By noon half the orders were filled and put in the wagon. For safety's sake Louie rode with Marvin to watch, not to help. Marvin drove Bismarck, delivered the parcels. He was violently hungry when he drove back to the store but Goldschmidt had most of the remaining orders wrapped. Louie helped make out the rest.

"Wanna try it alone this time?"

"Sure thing."

Marvin drove off by himself, completed his deliveries without mishap or incident. As he delivered his last bloody bundle Louie came up on a bicycle.

"I trailed you just to make sure for certain," he grinned, putting his bike into the wagon. "But you'll do."

Marvin thrilled at the implied compliment. He drove back to the store, nonchalantly swinging one foot over the dashboard, scanning the streets for friends or acquaintances of his childhood, a few days back.

"Well, now we eat," Goldschmidt announced. "You give Bismarck a drink and a forkful hay in his stall."

Chores finished, Marvin climbed to the flat above the store where Goldschmidt sat at a kitchen table over a bowl, noodles streaming over his chin.

"Fill yourself a bowl from soup, Marfin," he directed, with a wave of his spoon toward the stove. Marvin filled a bowl with steaming noodle soup, flavored with nutmeg and bay, great yellow eyes of fat afloat. With the soup went bread and butter, chunks of soupmeat with horseradish from a bottle. A big pot of coffee simmered on the stove; thin coffee which milk turned a livery gray. Goldschmidt dipped his bread in it and finished his meal with stewed peaches.

"Eat plenty," he urged. "You must make meat on your bones."

Louie joined them, silently. Like his father, he ate slowly, seriously—but not silently.

"Now I nap," announced Goldschmidt. "Louie, you show Marfin how to skin a veal. And you could cut some rib roasts an let Marfin tie them schon."

Butchering!

Not just a delivery boy; not just hostler to a sleepy old plug. Butchering! Louie took Marvin into the icebox, sweet with the smell of blooded meat. A calf, minus limbs from the knees, minus head, hung from a big hook, its pathetic little tail stiffly inverted, revealing in the shamelessness of death its pink anus.

"We'll carry it into the shed," said Louie. "You get the little knives."

Marvin worked on one side of the calf carcass, Louie on the other. It wasn't hard work, skinning a veal. As they worked Louie coached Marvin in prices. Marvin had more trouble remembering the names of the cuts of beef: shin, rump, chuck, top round, bottom round, brisket, prime rib, short ribs, sirloin, porterhouse, delmonico, flank—endless names; veal was easier: breast, shoulder, leg, chops, cutlets. Then there were lamb and pork. Poultry, thank goodness, didn't have cuts, although Louie said Marvin would have to learn to cut up friers and fricassees.

Two or three orders came in during the afternoon over the telephone. The only other telephone Marvin had seen in use was at 'Schreck's, and he had yet to use one. He had another lesson in harnessing, and delivered the meats by himself this time. Goldschmidt came down at four o'clock and set Marvin to work scraping down the block with a wire brush.

"You think maybe you like butcher busness?"

"You bet!"

"We see maybe."

At seven o'clock Goldschmidt closed the shop.

"Now you water Bismarck again, give him straw and hay and a measure of oats an lock the stable," Louie instructed. "Then you're off."

Marvin followed out the orders under Louie's amiably critical eye. At 7:30 he finished, and walked home. It seemed he had been gone from it for weeks. After a day in the butchershop the delicatessen looked strange.

"Hello, Marvin, how's the job?"

"My big-man son! Do you like it at Goldschmidt's?"

"You bet. They're swell. Supper ready?"

The Man had come home from Work, *his* Work.

It was arranged that Marvin should give his parents \$3 from his salary each week. They would charge him \$2 for board and put the dollar aside toward buying him clothes. The half dollar remaining *was his to spend*.

Marvin learned the pattern of appetites. Saturday, the big day of course, a chicken and beef roast day. Monday was dull, just as in the delicatessen business.

Marvin learned the various cuts of meat. He disemboweled chickens. It was always sickening work to thrust hand into the

cold carcass and claw out the greasy, clammy entrails. Chickens had a bad smell; alone of all meats, an offal smell.

Marvin was proud the day he brought in a new customer. He had trailed a moving van from Stapleton to its destination and cinched the trade of the newcomers before the beds were unroped from the back of the van.

Not so successful was he in persuading established residents to change their custom to Goldschmidt's.

"Me try Goldschmidt's? Say, I know that old skinflinter. I used to trade with him till I couldnt stand it the way he short-weighted me."

Or: "I've traded with Guldensuppe ever since we've lived here an he always treats me right so why should I change?"

As autumn matured, politics became the ordinary subject of conversation. It supplanted the weather as an introductory remark.

"Now hold on a minnit. Teddy's all right, let me tell you. He's done more for this country than any man since Lincoln an he'll go down in histry with Lincoln an Washinton, while Taft, the big, fat, stuffed—"

"Who said anything about Taft? Wilson's the man. There's a reformer for the people's intrests. Look what he done in Jersey—" "Jersey! *Jersey!*"

The Lang family was firm in its Roosevelt religion. There were no Democrats among the German-Americans. The Goldschmidts saw the issue as the orthodox Republican faith and its god, Roosevelt, oddly torn asunder. They debated Taft or Roosevelt in an effort to thresh out their own conflict. Wilson was a horse-faced Englishman and a male schoolteacher. That settled *Wilson*.

Taft was jolly, Taft was fat; Taft was a Republican and that's all you could say for him.

But Teddy was a two-fisted he-man who had been President and knew what it was about; he made the world sit up when he sent the fleet on its tour. Teddy went to Africa and shot lions and tigers and elephants and gave them to museums for the people to look at. He hobnobbed with kings and emperors and here's a picture of him standing with the Kaiser with his hat on, by golly!

Didn't Teddy outwit the French and outsmart the spiggoty dagoes in South America when he built the Panama Canal so our fleet could go from east to west when war with Japan came? What about his busting up the trusts, hey? The big stick?

There were torchlight parades, mass meetings in vacant lots,

red fire processions. Marvin wore a Roosevelt button on the peak of his cap.

"And I say to you, my fellow Americans, that just as sure as the sun will rise Tuesday morning it will rise upon a nation acclaiming with unconfined joy the return of its hero Prezz-i-dunt Thee-ay-dore ROOZ-ER-VELT!"

"Yi yippee hooray Roosevelt hipp hipp three cheers for yay . . ."

It was grand to be alive, to be a man, to be an American.

The *Banner* announced it would display bulletins in its windows as soon as the returns started to arrive. The crowd grew so dense Editor Brannigan, instead, yelled the results through an improvised megaphone from a second-story window.

"Well, whaddaya expect? Brannigan's a Irish Democrat. He's just readin ony the favorable Democrat figgers."

Marvin went home at midnight, shocked, grieved, burdened with a sense of personal loss. Mother was waiting for her men.

"Who won?"

"Wilson, evrybody says. Of course all the votes aint counted yet."

"Well, I guess it dont make any difference to ordinary folks who is elected."

"Dont make any difference? Gee, that's all women know about things. Dont make any difference if Roosevelt or *Wilson* is elected!"

Father came in. Marvin expected to see a crushed, haggard, broken man, bitter and grieved. Father didnt look any different at all as he locked the doors, hung up his damp coat.

"The Republican votes got divided between Taft and Tee-Are. More Republican votes cast but the Democrat got elected. Let that be a lesson to you, young man. A house divided against itself dont stand."

"Well, gee whizzo, if more people was against Wilson than for him how can he have the nerve to be President?"

"Dont ask crazy questions. Would *you* give it the turndown?"

The idea of being able to turn down a presidency was new to Marvin. He went to bed cogitating. President Marvin Lang. Lang for President.

Now Marvin's days began with darkness. He dressed shiveringly and hurriedly by squealing gaslight and stumbled downstairs to open the draft on the furnace. Mother was already bent over

the range, Father was opening the store, and taking in the bread and rolls.

"You neednt kick about it's being early. Spose you worked for the bakery and had to be on the job at two?"

The Langs wasted no time in the morning greetings. The two men sat in silence at the kitchen table, drumming with their spoons. It was cozy in the kitchen, what with the ruddy range, the scentful garrulity of the boiling coffeepot, the whisper of buckwheat cakes on the griddle.

Mother slid the cakes from the pan to the plates, and the men sprinkled them with sugar, ate them in two bites each. Coffee in saucerless cups made gray-gold with condensed milk poured thickly from the can which had two holes punched in the top.

The oilcloth on the table was chipped and the fabric showed through the scabrous patches, reminding Marvin of maps in geography books laid aside forever, or of queer animals, misshapen faces. The coffee cups left rings on the oilcloth, greasy sugar fell from the pancakes en route to mouth, and Mother paused in her labors over the stove to wipe the table from time to time with a mocha-colored dishrag that Marvin recognized as the salvaged leg from worn-out underwear.

Waste not, want not.

Marvin pushed back his plate, regurgitated his last mouthful of pancake and coffee, went to the furnace and adjusted the drafts. Upstairs again, he put on his galoshes, wrapped throat and chest in a woolen muffler, pulled on overcoat and woolen gloves.

Dark streets, and cold and wet. Gaunt naked branches glistening in the street lights, sodden leaves slippery on the sidewalks.

The key in its hiding place, and the cheerful stamp of Bismarck's hoofs. Marvin's heart warmed at the greeting, first good morning of the day. The hot, aromatic stable, and Bismarck's whinny, the miaur-rau of the stable cat. Rustling hay and sibilant oats, and then nose-clearing forkfuls of manure. The currycomb knocked clean of dandruff on a joist.

Git over, Bismarck, you ole bum. Git!

Dirty-yellow dawn.

Thanksgiving. Rows of turkeys on the hooks in the shop.

"I spose you'll be wanting a turkey, Mis' Stuhldreher?"

"How much are they now?"

"Twenny-eight."

"Twenny-eight? Herr Gott!"

Thanksgiving, and in the stationery stores rows of cardboard

masks, fish horns striped in blue and red. Like Pan pipes summoning for some Bacchic rite the fish horns sounded unseen in back yards and vestibules, surreptitiously blown by advance customers.

New York's queer adaptation of the puritanical feast. Ragamuffins and beggary. Marvin accepted it. That was the way things were. Why masks and costumes, why fish horns and flour-scattering stockings? No one asked, nor asks today. Thanksgiving. That's the way it is. No one ever pondered the name of the day. Thanksgiving. A day for giving thanks. It wasn't so evaluated, analyzed. Three syllables without meaning, making a name. What did Marvin mean? Or Carl? Names. Labels.

Thanksgiving and the store open extra late Wednesday to accommodate customers. Bismarck clop-clopped wearily on extra rounds. A hint of snow in the air.

"Here, Marvin, is for you. Take it home and tell your papa my compliments."

"Gee, Mr. Goldschmidt! Holy gee! What a whopper!"

"Vierzehn pound, but that dont make nodding. Enjoy yourself und come back Friday. A easy day, Friday. Everybody full from yesterday and plenty left over too. Good night."

Proudly Marvin bore the turkey home.

"Look what I got."

"Oh, my God! Do I have to clean that awstrich now, and me dead on my feet."

"Did Goldschmidt give it to you? Couldn sell it, I guess. Here, lemme smell it—seems fresh."

Thanksgiving.

Kids trooping through the streets in masks. Girls in boys' clothes, and boys in their mothers' old skirts. Pink and green and purple faces staring in the store window out of hollow eyes, gaudy death's-heads. Kids trooping into the store, mutely holding out baskets. Fish horns in full blast, in windy chorus.

The fish horns woke Marvin and stirred his entrails with desire. He could taste the pulpy cardboard, that furry taste that comes only from sticking one's tongue too often through the slot-mouth of a Thanksgiving mask. He felt again the thrill of the weighted basket brimming with specked apples, bruised oranges, stale doughnuts, broken candy and some pennies.

"Oh, them goddam kids wakin a feller up," Marvin yawned, and rolled out of bed. "Jeez, them kids. What consideration they got for folks who got to work!"

Marvin was a man—almost.

Once there had been four big days in every year.

There was the Fourth of July.

(Marvin, your fingers. My lands, I knew a boy once who—Dont go near it! Lockjore! If we still have a roof over our heads when the day is over we can thank our lucky stars. Marvin . . . ! Go put some butter on it and I'll open the blister. Get me a pin.)

Stiff-limp packages, flatly wrapped in thin red paper, with Chinese characters in gold—real gold. It came off on your fingers. Yee Ming Co. Hong Kong. Loud Noisy Flashing Firecrackers. The package unwrapped in red layers, pink layers, a final white layer, from which unfolded a Siamese Twin string of half-inch-long red cardboard tubes umbilically hitched to a braided paper the very devil to unwrap. Two hundred firecrackers. The fuses came out of fifty, fifty were sizzers and didnt explode, fifty didnt unhitch at all and were set off at once with a tongue-cleaving siss-pop—pop-pruppity-pop-fzzz, with a nose-prickling smell. Incense to the great American ancestral gods. Very proper to use Chinese products to honor the great all-father of his country.

Then there was the Birthday, and when Grandma was alive Marvin was called the Geburtstagskind—*gay-butz-tox-kint*. Hard to say, but bringing a reward when said. A day of new neckties and a cake with candles, of new stockings and games in flat, brightly lithographed boxes: "Around the World in Eighty Days" and "The Kentucky Derby." "Lotto" and "Old Maid." A reasonably outstanding day, always marked by being measured against a doorframe to see how much Marvin had grown and a disputatious search for the mark made the preceding year.

Thanksgiving—old clothes from the ragbag and penny false faces, tribute exacted from shopkeepers and neighbors. A satisfying day, if senseless. Maybe the more satisfying because of that.

And Christmas, a sort of bigger birthday, only it was a day to give gifts as well as to receive. A ten-cent celluloid comb for Mother and a card of collar buttons for Father. In return a new shirt, a new tie, a new set of underwear, games, six lead soldiers sewed in a box. A train of cars with a locomotive whose coalcart was attached and had no wheels of its own, that went around and around on a round track. And the track came apart suddenly and the locomotive toppled over buzzing like a June bug caught in the lamp. . . .

Kid stuff, now.

Marvin was a man—almost.

1913

MARVIN KNEW a hundred kitchens of the community and not half a dozen parlors. He knew a hundred women as only their husbands knew them, in wrappers and shapeless slippers, hair in curlers, in braids, in lacy caps with silk rosebuds dangling from a thread.

Marvin knew the intestinal processes of a quarter of the community. He knew its finances. He knew its sicknesses. Had Marvin realized it, he knew more about people than the editor of the paper or the politicians who annually proclaimed that their hearts throbbed in unison with the pulse of the proletariat. He knew who had roaches phlegmatically and who had meatballs from yesterday's soup meat.

Marvin knew that Mrs. Rappaby didnt get along with her mother-in-law who lived with her and that Mrs. Sundquist beat her husband.

Marvin knew that Mrs. Fleischer had stomach trouble and the gas crowded up around her heart something awful, and that Mrs. Horan drank.

The social life of the Lang family was limited. Father twice a month left the store to Mother while he performed the rites of the P.O.S.O.A. Mother talked over the back fence on washdays to the neighbors on either side. Marvin was usually too tired to go anywhere. Why go anywhere when folks came to you? Besides, you could always use what some previous caller had said as comment to a newcomer.

"I tell you, Lang, times is getting harder again. Wouldnt surprise me if we was in for another panic, no, sir! Notice any building being done? Nope! How's your business? Punk, hey? Jus as soon as the Demercrats comes in, out goes good times. Ever

know it to fail? Looka this pound a butter you jus sold me. Two cents highern last week. Why? Mark my words, we better put our cash aside and not in banks neither. Well, gnight. Gnight to you, Mis Lang."

Gloomy silence and Marvin chewed on a hunk of bacon rind. "Oh, good evning, Mr. Ritter. How's the cold weather suit you? Well, we can thank our stars we got roofs over our heads anyhow. What'll it be? Marvin, hand me a jar a mustard—Gulden's, Mr. Ritter? Howsa missus fixed for sugar? I expect it's gonna go up again. Everything's going up, except incomes. It's the Demercrats, I tell you. Ever see it to fail, just as soon they come in out goes good times. Busness is slow in all lines. Wouldn surprise me if we had another panic. Believe me what little I can put aside dont go in no banks this time, no, sir."

Marvin read a *Journal* somebody had left on the counter. He liked T. E. Powers's little cartoon figures of Joy and Gloom, and the funny page strip about Eaglebeak Spruder and the one about Desperate Desmond, and on the sports page Tad's Indoor Sports. He thought of writing to Tad and telling him some of the funny things that happened in the store, the queer people that came in and the funny things they said. But he couldnt remember just what had struck him so funny the time it happened.

"Marvin, are you asleep? Get Dolph a can of Carnation milk. Well, Dolph, how's tricks?"

"Say, didj hear about the trick Larry played on the new cop over at the lunchroom? This cop, now, he comes in there to use the toilet and he's always picking up something like a handful of sugar or a norange from the window and yesterday Larry he gets a box of these here now new chocolate laxative candies and when the cop comes out of the can Larry he has the candies out on the counter with a little sign he made on the back of a card, see. It said 'For Our Customers Only, Take One,' see, an the cop takes em all an sticks em in his mouth—ha-ha-ha holy gee! Larry said he near busted a jaw keepin his face straight but the cop he-he—oh god—ha-ha-ha—he never showed up today at all. New cop on beat today. Ha-ha-ha, holy gee, can you eemagine I bet that cop thinks he-he—oh god."

Marvin and Father doubled up, roared purple-faced, pounded the counter in time to Dolph's gasping giggles. Mother smiled behind a lifted apron corner.

"At Larry's a scream. He's a card, all right! Dja hear the time he took a button into Feinberg the tailor? Oh god! At was rich.

He takes in a button he found in a gutter, face straight as a undertaker, an he says, he says Mr. Feinberg, here's a button. Can ya-yu—oh god, ha ha ha—can you—sew a pair a pants on it for me—ha ha ha oh goddlemighty, he's a card, at Larry."

Things like that. Tad wouldnt use them, though, probably.

Besides there was the usual exchange of news as men and women trickled in and out, lingered to chat with an acquaintance surprised in the act of buying delicatessen.

Krueger's on a tear again and if I was his wife I wouldn stay with him another week . . . Tony's got a new barber and he's a dummy; cant hear or speak . . . My Carrie's expectin again. It'll be her fift in only six years I says to her aint you never heard of a sponge . . . Well, my little Louie has the mumps suppose you send your Carrie's man around and Louie'll fix him . . . So she wasnt in the flat ten minnits before she sends her little boy up to borrow a hammer and nails but she had beautiful furnichure . . . That Waner girl's no bettern she should be . . . Shovelin his dirty snow over my properdy line, the bum! I told him where he got off . . . So I sez Mr. Binfaden if you cant wait on me I guess I know where my patronage is appreciated an the dirty kike sez . . . The iceman used to hitch his horse outside that house an go in with the foolishhest grin on his face, an not come out for haffen hour an all the time his ice just drippin out his wagon . . . Well, if you cut a baby's fingernails he'll be apt to grow up into a thief I sez I sez I'm ony tellin you for your own good an she . . . Well, it stands to reason if the moon can make tides on somethin as big an powerful as the ocean it's gotta have some effect on hyumans . . . Sure cats sucks people's breath my grandmother . . . Well, the eighth month she's carryin her Leonard her man brung home two rabbits an left em in the icebox an when she goes to put her hand in for the milk she touches the fur you know an faints dead away an that's how the child come to have harelip, poor thing, he never forgive himself . . . The Gerstmeiers have a new phonograft cabinet model . . .

When the Langs did go calling they took along six dill pickles in a cardboard "boat" and half a pound of sliced ham or a wedge of cheese. When they were hosts the company usually brought six bottles of beer in damp newspaper. The adults played pinochle or skat. Marvin sat in a corner and looked at books or dozed. None of the intimates had children his age. Marvin looked at "premium" books such as lithographed collections of Alma-Tadema's paintings

or Frederic Remington's Wild West pictures that came with a year's subscription to *Collier's*. The Thomases had Chambers's Encyclopaedia and Marvin warily read the articles on Uterus, Circumcision ("Circumcision of females is practised in . . ."), Parturition and Reproduction.

The Loehrs had a phonograph and Marvin used to play it while grownups discussed cards, neighbors and beer. They had the "Merry Widow Waltz" and the "Barcarolle" from *The Tales of Hoffmann*, the "Poet and Peasant Overture" and a "Medley of Patriotic Airs." Marvin liked the singing records best, like

Meet me at Saint Lou-ee, Lou-ee,
Meet me at the Fair
That is where the lights are shick-shick
Shick-shick-shick-shick-shick-shick-

until Father would say for gossakes to move the needle off that crack, did he want to drive everybody crazy?

There was one song about a little girl who waited for the postman to take a letter to her mamma, but she didnt know where her mamma was, or her old man for that matter, because

Papa and Mamma are parted
I'm all alone, broken hearted
I guess that's why they all call me
Nobody's little girl.

Well, that made Marvin's eyes blur a little, even though it turned out that the postman was really the little girl's father and he dropped his bag and took the darling in his arms, promising her love and care forever after.

Then there were new records in paper envelopes that had not yet been torn, such as

I kissed you and placed a yellow tulip
In your hair;
Upon my coat you pinned a rose
So rare:

When you caressed me
'Twas then Heaven blessed me,
What a blessing nobody knows!
You made me cheery when you called me dearie
Down where the blue grass grows,

Your lips were sweeter than julep
When you wore a tulip
And I wore a big red rose!

It made Marvin think of—what was her name, again? Gee!
And then Mr. Loehr would spoil it all by singing

When you wore a harelip
An I wore a big red nose . . .

When the Loehrs or the Sommers or the Thomases came over to call on the Langs, Marvin kept store by himself and closed it a little earlier than usual. Then he made sandwiches, cutting slices of sour rye and spreading them thickly with butter; ham and Swiss combinations, liverwurst and headcheese. He brought them in on the big breadboard with the cold beer from the icebox sweating in his pockets and under his arms.

"Well, here's the handsome waiter. Marv, you sure are a sight for sore eyes but not sore bellies, hah?"

"Oh, my lands, Marvin, wait, lemme get the plates an napkins before you set them down."

"Napkins for gossakes? You'd think we was compny, or are you tryin to chuck a bluff?"

The gang that hung around the drugstore corner summer evenings moved inside the lunchroom across the street when winter came. There a nickel for a cup of coffee paid admission for an hour's badinage and boasting, subdued when customers were being served at long counter or tables, breaking out hilariously when the place was empty. Such stories as were told there!

Marvin didn't have much chance to foregather with the gang. On the rare occasions he did join he hung at the outskirts, laughing uproariously at the jokes, nursing his cup of coffee until it was cold and filmed.

"—when she seen she'd got my eye, see, she pertends to look outa the window. So I moves over next to her an pertends I had to cough sort of but she dont gimme a tumble. But I seen her mouth sorta twitch so I sez Scuse me, miss, but havent I seen you somewheres before? An she turns around an she sez she dont think so because she would remember a pan like mine an in fact she sez she wouldn be able to sleep nights thinkin about it, see? Pretty fresh, see? So I sez, If you aint gonna sleep just thinkin about me think how awake you'd stay if I was really with you. Honest

I told her that, just like that. I sez, If you aint gonna sleep thinkin about me think how awake you'd be if I was there an that sort of floors her, see? She makes out she's mad an sez who do you think you are? she sez. So I sez madame, I'm the chicken inspector on this line an then I flashes my badge like this, see?"

"Lessee, Chuck!"

"Jimminy creepers, look! It says Chicken Inspector."

"Quitcher pushin an let a guy see, woncha?"

"An then what did she say, Chuck?"

"Oh, she got off. I coulda got off too. I bet I'da made that dame but what the hell, I wannid to get home."

"Hay, Pete! Here's Pete. Come on over, Pete."

"Yay-ay, Pete. Workin steady?"

"Na-ah, got laid off yestiddy. Laid off twenny of us. Cawfee, Larry."

"Hear any new ones lately?"

"Cripes, where should I hear any new ones?"

"Hey, Larry, tell em about the two tramps, the white guy an the nig, who was bathin inna fountain when the young widow—"

"Holy gee, I heard that when I was inna fit grade."

"Well, didja hear the one about the Scotchman who was crazy about fishin so he marries a girl with the worms?"

"Not so bad, Larry. Gimme the sugar."

Strong talk, man's talk. But Marvin wasn't quite a man yet. The jokes, when he understood them, made him sweaty and sort of jiggly inside, and he laughed his head off at every one.

He wasn't a man yet.

Orders were delivered by sleigh, now that the snow was deep and lasting. Kids hitched on, some standing on the runners, others looping the ropes of their belly-whoppers and Flexible Flyers over the tailboard.

"Whip behind!"

Some little snitcher. The kids would drop off. If the sleigh was outwardbound Marvin would lash back with his whip after giving the kids a decent chance to hop off, but if it was empty and on the home trip he let the kids hitch all they wanted to. It made him feel big, and old, and generous.

Hot kitchen, icy seat. Hot kitchen, icy seat. That was the routine, taking orders and delivering them, from one hot kitchen to another.

"You look frozen, Marvin. Have a cuppa cawfee."

"Gee, thanks, Mis Bickel. That hits the spot all right."

"I always say there's nothin like a good cuppa hot cawfee to warm a person up. Dont never take whisky, Marvin. It makes false heat."

Bismarck wore a blanket that fastened under his belly and across his chest. Twin jets of steam from his nostrils; when he stood outside a door where the driver lingered Bismarck scraped the snow from under his feet. Good old horse, Bismarck. Never knew what fun was, didja, old horse? Work, work, work. What a life, Bismarck. What would you do if a nice young lady horse come along? Bismarck, you poor old bastard, you couldn't do a thing, could you? They fixed you! Whoa-whup!

"Hlo, Mis Deecker."

"Hlo, Marvy. Shut that door, quick. Gee, it's cold."

"Oh, you dont mind it when you get into it."

"I guess you get used to it but gimme the kitchen range, I always say."

"Well, what'll it be today? Nice weather for a stew."

"No, I cant afford to get stewed. Ha ha ha. How's your liver today?"

"My liver's all right but I cant recommend my brains . . ."

"How's your sweetbreads?"

"I—they—gee whizzo! Ha ha ha."

Mis Deecker would put her hands on her hips and laugh with her head back. She was sort of old, in the thirties, but she was pretty. Even in the sloppy old brown bathrobe. When she leaned over the range to shake it a bit she held the bathrobe tight at her stomach and that made the top bulge out so Marvin could see between her breasts. If he—suppose now—if—

"Well, kiddo, bring me two pounds a chuck for potroast."

The cold air, and it felt good again. Supposing he had said his hands were cold, and he stepped up to her and put one hand down the front of her bathrobe and looked her in the eyes and then he—and then he—next he would—what?

"Giddap, Bismarck, you! Get a wiggle on. Hi-yip!"

Christmas came with a rush and in every basket Marvin put a calendar made of embossed cardboard, pretty and artistic. Made to look like wood with the bark on, it was, and there was a sort of basket thing of embossed cardboard like pine cones, handy to keep combs and pencils in. The calendar pad was stuck on underneath this basket or pocket, and over it was a picture of a girl with yellow braids and a red sunbonnet on her arm, laying her

cheek up against a horse's face but smiling out at you. The horse looked awfully natural, with the veins so realistic you'd swear they stuck out. Everybody liked Goldschmidt's calendars very much.

Carl Lang gave away calendars too. They weren't as *fancy* as the butcher's, but they were lots bigger. Father got them for nothing, which was smart. They were red, this year, with a beautiful woman in a fur coat; it was snowing in the picture and the snowflakes looked so real on the fur you liked to have blown them off. The woman was smiling and her eyes looked out straight at you with the jolliest look—almost a fresh look. She carried a big shopping basket in which was a ham and a slab of bacon and a can of leaf lard, each prominently labeled "Finck's Pork Products—Best By Taste," and under the picture was printed: When you think of good delicatessen think of Lang's, 38 Schurz Ave. Finck's Pork Products Our Specialty.

"Marvin, when you go out with the orders today why dont you stop in here an get a load of our calendars an give em out along the way?"

"Gee, maybe he wouldn like for me to do it on his time."

"Aw, the Dutchman wont know about it. When you go in a house just stick one of our calendars in your pocket an say: 'Here, maybe you'd like one of my father's calendars too.'"

"Awright, I'll do it."

Marvin was showered with Christmas gifts all along his route. Dimes and quarters, even; bags of candy, some oranges, a few cigars, a pair of mittens, three penwipers, five neckties, an occasional drink of homemade wine, lebkuchen, pfeffernuesse, nuts and a pair of velvet earmuffs.

Marvin cautiously divided the money among several pockets. He ought to give Father some because business wasnt so good and every little bit helped; Louie claimed a share; Marvin wanted to buy Mother a gift at Schreck's. The rest was for his secret lunchroom fund, so he could stand treat once in a while for coffee and sinkers.

"We stay open extra late tonight," Louie reminded him on Christmas Eve. "Lotsa people get money presents an come around to buy a goose at the last minute."

"You ged maybe a liddle somedings eggstra," Old Man Goldschmidt said with a wink. "Now glean oudt dese geoses."

His face was flushed, his smile expansive. He had been decanting wine—grape, elderberry, dandelion and wild cherry, down cellar.

Mamma Goldschmidt stayed out of the shop. She was busy

baking. Odors of cinnamon and cloves, molasses and ginger, wafted down the stairs. She made mountains of pfeffernuesse, lebkuchen, springeles; Hanover cake in fluted forms; stollen, sprinkled while hot with coarse sugar, bulging with hazelnuts and candied cherries.

Marvin gave Goldschmidt the cigars he had collected on the route and when he went upstairs for his supper he gave Mrs. Goldschmidt a penwiper and the oranges. To his horror she kissed him sweatily and shoved him to a chair at the littered table. A plateful of fried pork roll and fried potatoes, a dish of prunes and a little box. In it a pair of Roman Gold cuff links; lions' heads with green eyes.

"Ach, and a glass wine, Marfin! Froehliche Weinachten!"

Marvin drank the tumblerful of sweet, heavy wine. Now for the last deliveries. Fourteen baskets, each with a stark pair of fowl feet clutching the air above the handle. Turkeys, ducks, geese, chickens. Bismarck was hitched, brought around front, the sleigh loaded.

"Hey, dont ferget to light the lantin. Wanna get pinched drivin without a light at night?"

Christmas trees in bay windows, candles alight. In every home a smell of spruce and spices, with muffled squeals coming from distant parlors where hysterical children ran from gift to gift, rejoicing and fighting. The sound of toy trains buzzing, toy cows lowing, dolls yammering maa-maa.

"Merry Chrismus, Mis Gardner. Here's the goose."

"Merry Chrismus, Marvin. Waida minnit. Oh Ed—Ed! Here's the butcher boy. Bring im a glassa wine."

Marvin's stomach glowed and he began to perspire before his route was half covered. Fourteen stops, and fourteen glasses of wine—thimble-sized wine glasses most of the time; grape, wild cherry, dandelion. . . .

"Merry Chrismus, Mis Fleischer."

"Well, here you are at last. Merry Chrismus, Marvin. Have a glass of my elderberry. It settles your stummick. I guess I'd be dead now from the gas crowdin around my heart if I din take a glass of it after meals."

Marvin smiled as he put the empty glass down. His face felt stiff. He wondered if it was frozen. When he turned to leave he blundered into the half-open door. He laughed, waved his hand, tried to say something, but belched a mouthful of wine, sharp and tear-provoking, which he reswallowed with difficulty.

"I musta eaten somethin," said Marvin to Bismarck, who

started for the stable without reply. Pretty soon Marvin climbed off the seat and sat in the bed of the sleigh. His head rolled on his shoulders. The street lights hurt his eyes. Bismarck trotted past the delicatessen, and Marvin reached for the lines: "Whup, Bishmarck. Whush!"

He stopped the horse near the corner, marched into Schreck's, very erect.

"Gimme boll clone."

"Wait your turn, Marvin. Now what else, Mis Schleiermacher?"

Marvin turned his back to the counter, propped on back-thrust elbows. He smiled at Mrs. Schleiermacher, hiccupped loudly, and in mortification tried to whistle but his lips wouldn't pucker. The counter opposite began to rise toward the ceiling.

"Now, Marvin? What's the matter? Been drinkin'?"

"Merry Chrishum. Gimme boll clone, Misser Schreck. Quoller boll. Twenny-fi center Colgate."

"Cologne a bottle? You better drink it to take that smell from your breath. Nice young feller like you! Here's your cologne, an lissen, you go over an get a cup hot coffee."

"Minja own busnesh, Ole Man Schreck. Merry Chrishmsh."

Marvin fell down the wooden steps on his backside. He lifted himself over the tailboard of the sleigh, and slept.

He was awakened when Louie shoved a handful of snow down his collar. Louie was laughing: "God, you got a skinful! If the ole man hears you was drivin while you was drunk he'd fire you."

"Louie, I like you. Put smore snow on me."

"Get the hell outen the sleigh. I'll unhitch Bismarck for you. Well, to think of a snotty liddle pissant like you gettin a skinful!"

Marvin crawled over the tailboard and tried to stand up. He sat down forcefully in the horse-soiled snow. Louie left him there while he went about the business of unhitching.

"I heard Bismarck trottin in twenny minutes ago. I thought maybe you let him get away. He aint used to workin so late. An I comes out here an you snorin away! God! You might of froze to death. Here, stannup! Dont forget your Christmas presents. I'll stick em in your pocket. You better get some cawfee good an black before you go home."

Marvin headed for the street. He felt as if his head was twelve feet above the ground, a balloon tugging him forward; his head, his feet a ton-weight each holding him back. The street was still bright with shop lights. He kept close to the store fronts as

he headed home, steadying himself occasionally against a frost-covered pane. Suddenly he was at his own corner and the lunch-room doorknob in his hand. Marvin sat down at a table, and gripped his head.

"Gimme cawfee," he said to the white apron that swam into view.

There was a spot of egg on the cloth just under his eyes. It expanded and contracted as he gazed unwinkingly at it.

"Here y'are."

The egg spot was eclipsed by a dark-brown disk. Marvin blinked, and realized he was looking into a cup of black coffee. Propping his head in one hand, firmly, he lifted the cup. Steam enveloped his face, pungent with coffee odor, and suddenly Marvin's viscera knotted and turned over.

In panic he put down the cup, sloshing the hot fluid over his hand. He scrambled to his feet, and headed for the door, but blundered into tables. A lot of people were laughing, far away, and then somebody took his arm and jerked him forward. Cold air struck his face like a blow from an icy-wet towel.

"No, stan over here. Now lean over an puke. Go ahead."

Marvin shook his head and tried to stand erect. Somebody was behind him, somebody who pressed a hand against the back of his neck and another against his stomach. Suddenly Marvin's mouth filled with vinegar. He spat, and a purple stream gushed into the gutter.

"Adda boy, keep it up. Out with it."

Marvin wiped a slobber of wine and froth from his lips, retched heavily but unproductively.

"Awright now, I guess," he panted.

"Now the cawfee'll help." It was Larry, good old Larry. Larry had steered him outside and was now guiding him back.

"Yi, Marv, howsa boy now? Howya feel?"

Two or three faceless forms gathered about. His shoulder was clasped, and a voice said in his ear: He oughta have a noyster stew. That'll sober him up quickest.

Naw a tomader sanwich.

Give him a ham sannidge with lotsa mustard.

Black cawfee. Nothin better. Mugs of it.

Leddim alone. Howya feel, Marv?

Marvin felt a lot better. If not physically better, then every other way. The gang was talking to him. By his fall he had soared. Man among men.

"Hlo, kid. This is me, Pete. Brace up, fella. Drink this cawfee. Atta boy, lil sips. I know it's hot. Fresh outen the pot."

Marvin drank and felt better, but his head was still a red-hot metal bowl which was being struck with a hammer, and his tongue was cat's skin.

"Good ole Pete. Jeez, but I hadda skinful! Hey, everybody have one on me. Chrismus!"

Marvin pulled a handful of change from his coat pocket, heaped it on the marble counter.

"Yea, Marvin's treat. How much is there, Larry?"

"Dollar thirdy five. Hey, kid, you better take some back."

"Glots more, glots more," Marvin sighed. "Smy treat."

"Well, fellas, this'll pay for scrammeled eggs an cawfee all around."

"Adda boy, Marv."

Triumph and manhood. Drunkenness and adulation. Man among men. Marvin looked up hazily to meet grins. "Have a smoke, Marv?" He took the Mecca and put it in his mouth. The coffee in his stomach stirred and he waved aside the match.

"Godda get home," said Marvin.

"Stick around! Night's young yet. Ainchu gonna eat with us?"

Eggs sputtered in a pan and the smell of scorching grease descended Marvin's throat. He swallowed.

"Godda go, Chrismus—ole woman—"

Cold air again, like a Christmas gift. Marvin opened his coat, took off his hat. Slowly he turned the corner. Father was just closing up.

"What did you get for workin overtime?"

"Nothin."

Mother, tucking wisps of hair behind her ears, turned from a two-foot tree she was trimming. "Come here an kiss your ole mother Merry Chris—why, Marvin! You—you been drinkin!"

"Only a lil wine. Jeez, you cant say you wont take a lil glass wine."

"Whatsa matter?" from Father.

"Gee, I hadda take a lil glass a wine here an there an now Ma thinks I'm drunk."

"You didn have to take no wine. If you didn wanta drink it nobody could of made you."

"Yeah, an what a swell sissy I'd be. Oh, no, thank you, I cant drink no wine cause Momma will be mad. A lodd—"

"Careful! Careful! Easy now. Remember you're talkin to your parents."

"Well, it's a hell of a way on Chrismus to be bawled out for wine when you drink beer alla time—"

"Nobody bawled you out. Did you bawl him out, Margaret?"

"No, I jus said he looked funny."

"Did I bawl him out? No! Seems to me a certain young party is gettin mighty uppity. Cant say a civil word any more."

Marvin blinked and put his hands in his pockets. He felt unfamiliar objects and pulled them forth. One was a bottle of perfume.

"Gee, I nearly forgot," he exclaimed. "Here, I got this for you."

He thrust the vial at his mother.

"Why, Marvy-boy, thank you. Cologne! Merry Chrismus, Marvin, an—"

"An here's some candy too. I guess some of it busted. An here for you. Couple neckties and some sno—hankerchiffs."

"Well, well, now. Very thoughtful of you, son. Merry Chrismus. Now look on the table. There's some things you might like."

Well, they were. They were things he liked. A nickeled automatic pencil, with extra leads in the handle and a clip to hold it in his pocket. Woolen socks. A big tube of toothpaste—gee, he had run out of it away back around Thanksgiving some time; Marvin wondered if he could find his toothbrush. And a stick of shaving soap and a Gem razor!

"Jumpin jimminy! Thanks a lot. Gosh, this is swell."

"An looka the set of dishes your father give me."

"An looka my present from her. She musta stole outen the cash drawer."

"Hey, Marv, wanna see some pitchers?"

"What kind of?"

"French pitchers."

"What are they? French pitchers?"

"Looka!"

Pete took three postcards from his pocket and stepped back to watch the effect on Marvin. The first one showed a man who wore drooping mustaches and nothing else. He was surrounded by four exceedingly plump young women limited to high-heeled pumps and lace stockings. One reclined at his feet, one sat on either arm of his chair, one leaned over his shoulder.

Marvin gasped. His throat seemed to swell inwardly and he backed up against a wall.

The second card showed the same man leering over the shoulder of an unidentifiable young woman who bestrode his knees. Marvin's hands began to sweat and his vision blurred. The third card showed a tangle of arms and legs. He blinked sweat-stung eyes and handed the cards to their owner.

"Hot stuff, hey?"

"Gee, I'll say so. Hot stuff."

"Make me wanna go see Daisy."

Marvin did not answer. His heart was still pounding. Women with no clothes on. Men and women together.

"Ever had a woman, kid?"

Marvin shook his head, nodded, shook it again.

"I—I seen a girl undressin once an I spooned a lot with a girl who lived here once. But her ole woman watched her too hard. I coulda had her." Marvin, the seducer of womanhood, despoiler of maidens!

"But you never had a woman, hey?"

Marvin did not answer immediately. *Had a woman!* "I guess you had plenty, Pete," he said. "I guess you had three an four at a time like in the French pitchers."

Pete snorted. "If we had two bucks now, we could go see Daisy."

"I'm down to my last quarter."

"Well, it's too bad. Any time you wanna have a good time lemme know. Two bucks an twenny cents carfare."

Maybe after payday. *Ever had a woman, kid?* That was being a man, to be like that guy in the pictures. Two dollars. Maybe Goldschmidt would raise him, and he wouldn't have to tell about it at home the first week. He cut meat as well as Louie. He could gauge half a pound of steak before cutting.

Marvin got raised without asking for it, in this way. One balmy day he came out of the Holmquist house and found a man sitting on the driver's seat of the wagon, smoking a cigarette. He had a bandaged thumb, and the hair, where it showed under his cap, was clipped to a pink plush. The man's face was very red. Marvin climbed up in the wagon and didn't know what to say, so he said nothing. There were no orders in the wagon so the man couldn't have taken anything.

"Say, bub," said the man. "You work for Goldschmidt?"

"Yeah, why?"

"Dya cut meat?"

"Yeah, why?"

"You got a card?"

"What kinda card?"

"Prentice card."

"Dunno whatcha mean. Giddap, Bismarck."

"You know what I mean, awright. Anybody else cut meat frim?"

"Louie, his son. The unmarried one. The other's got a shop of his own over to St. George."

"Goldschmidt runs a scab shop, you know."

"Know nothin."

"Lissen, bub. I'm talkin for your own good. Whaddaya get a week?"

"Fordy dollars."

"You're a goddam liar. Betcha dont get ten."

"I been gettin eight now."

"It oughta be twelve."

"I get my lunch thrown in."

"Lissen, bub. I'm gonna organize this section."

"Go ahead an see whadda I care."

"You gotta quit Goldschmidt's."

"Yeah, an what'll my old man say?"

"What's he do? Is he a workinman?"

"He's got the delicatessen."

"Well, anyhow, we gonna clean the scab shops outa Richmond. You gotta join the union, see?"

"Yeah?"

"Dont get snotty, bub. I'm tellin ya. You gotta quit. Us workinmen, we gotta git our rights, see? If we aint all organized the bosses can pay us what they dam please, see? If we do get organized we can tell em what we gonna get paid or they dont get no work done."

"What about my job?"

"You quit for a week an when you go back you'll get higher wages, enough to make up for the week inside a two weeks."

"Why dontya try some of the other shops first?"

"Cause Goldschmidt's got the classy trade. We gotta break him first an then the others fall into line soon enough."

"Yeah?"

"Think it over. I'll see you again."

The man lit another cigarette and jumped over the wheel of

the wagon. Well, there was sense in what the fellow said. Marvin put Bismarck in the stable and entered the store slowly. Louie was out. Goldschmidt was reading *Simplicissimus*.

"Two veals to skin, Marfin."

That was like a boss, for you. He sat on his fat ass reading and Marvin skinned the veals after he came off the route. Well, the union might fix that. Or would Goldschmidt make Marvin work harder for more money? Marvin tried to think up all the things Goldschmidt could make him do in a day, and thought so hard he cut the ball of his thumb and it made him sick.

He went upstairs and Mrs. Goldschmidt washed out the wound with yellow soap and put some vaseline on it. "Dog spit iss good for cuts, so you see a dog." She told Marvin he looked white and for him to sit down awhile and have some coffee.

The red-faced stranger was in the store arguing with Goldschmidt when Marvin came down. His face was redder and he was pounding the glass-topped showcase, sticking his face out. Goldschmidt was swelling up. His face got redder and redder and his neck bulged over his collar band.

Then Goldschmidt started. He opened his mouth and began to roar. All his words ran together so it sounded like one big word. It sounded like a steamboat whistle trying to talk. There were German swear words and English swear words all mixed together, dirty words, but God how swell they sounded. The stranger didnt flinch. He pulled his head back very slowly and he lit a cigarette and said, "All right, you poor louse!" and went out of the store slowly.

Goldschmidt continued to roar long after the man left, and then muttering he picked up his magazine, threw it to the floor, went to the icebox, cut off a thick chuck steak and began to mince it with two cleavers. Clip-clop-clop-clip-clippity-clop-clop. Marvin could see he was really chopping up the union organizer.

It was with some doubts that Marvin started on his rounds next morning but he didnt see the stranger until he started making deliveries. He was standing next to the wagon when Marvin came out of a house and he asked Marvin how about it? Marvin said his old man wouldnt let him join any union because Goldschmidt was a family friend, although he hadnt mentioned the matter at home at all.

"You'll be outa a job anyhow," the man said. "See?"

He took a flask out of his pocket and pulled the cork, and Marvin smelled kerosene. He hauled back his arm to throw the oil all over the loaded baskets inside. Marvin had the horse-weight

on the end of its leather strap dangling from his hand, ready to toss into the wagon, but instead he let it fly higher and caught the man in the small of the back. The man hollered Jesus Christ! and the kerosene went all over Bismarck's back. It trickled under the horse's tail and with a sharp squeal Bismarck lunged forward. The man fell back and a hind wheel went over his thighs. Marvin gave him a scared look and took out after Bismarck. The pain-crazed animal had cut across the sidewalk at the corner and a wheel had come off the wagon on the fire hydrant.

"Runaway horse!"

Somebody yelled and a lot of kids poured into the street. The axle of the wagon was striking sparks from the macadam. Marvin caught the tailboard and hauled himself inside the wagon, crawled to the seat over the tangle of beef and baskets, seized the reins and sawed on them. Bismarck would yaw across the street and then lash back with his heels. The dashboard was splintered. Finally a cop grabbed the bridle and Bismarck, the pain eased, stopped stock-still. He trembled all over, and was white with lather; his mouth drooled long ropes of slobber.

Marvin told the cop what had happened and he ran back to where a little crowd had gathered at the spot of Marvin's encounter with the man. The smashed wheel was looped over the hydrant, and Marvin wondered what he was going to do with the busted wagon full of orders. He stood there soothing Bismarck and then the cop came back with the man, who was limping badly. The cop had a length of fine chain looped about the man's wrist.

"Is this the guy?" he asked Marvin, as the crowd closed in.

Marvin nodded. The men, women and children looked from Marvin to the captive, and somebody said, "Gee, Marvin, you sure socked him one."

The cop dragged the man back to the corner to call for the wagon and Marvin continued to wipe Bismarck and wonder what he was going to do next, when Louie, his apron and straw cuffs still on, came tearing up on his bike.

"You goddam fool, I knew you'd bust things sooner or later," he hollered, jumping off the bike and letting it fall. He punched Marvin on the shoulder.

"Here, hold on, you big slob," a man cried out. "This feller here was savin your propiddy. A guy tried to pour karosene on the meat an the kid socked him a beauty, but the horse got the karosene under his tail an run. But the kid knocked the guy out an the cops just took him off in the pie wagon."

A chorus of trebles and basses confirmed the story. Louie said

he was sorry he hit Marvin but somebody had just telephoned and reported the horse running away and the wagon smashed, and that's all he knew.

Louie rode off on Bismarck to get a livery wagon, and the crowd hung around telling Marvin how brave he was. The orders were transferred to the hired wagon, and Goldschmidt's was left where it was for the blacksmith to come and fix.

"He'll put a wheel on, here," said Louie. "So when the orders are all delivered you come back here an hitch up to the tail of this wagon, see? You take this one to the livery and leave ours to have the dash fixed up."

So it was nearly closing time when Marvin drove Bismarck to the stable, and Marvin was very, very hungry. But Goldschmidt and his old woman were waiting for Marvin and they shook hands with him and praised him and Goldschmidt said he was raising Marvin two bucks a week.

Of course Mother and Father knew all about it before Marvin reached home, and Father said he was glad Marvin had some spunk and that Grandpa, who had been through the war, would be happy to know his grandson had guts. Mother, though, was scared. She was afraid the union men would gang Marvin and kill him in revenge. That seemed entirely probable to Marvin, now that she mentioned it. So the next morning *he* mentioned it to Goldschmidt.

"Vell, Louie could ride along mit, maybe," the butcher said. "Aber I need him here."

Marvin had an idea. "Looka here, I bet Pete would ride with me. He's a husky guy and he aint workin'."

"Vell, you ged him."

So Marvin brought Pete to the shop.

"I been offered a couple jobs, see?" Pete said. "But they aint my style. I strained myself over to the factry. But I'd like a job where there's a chanst to take a poke at a guy. Just ride in the wagon, hey? Whaddaya pay?"

"Vell, I gif fife dollars a week."

"You gimme a pain. Dollar a day."

"Vell, alride."

"An all I do is ride around an take pokes at guys. No luggin baskets!"

"You chust bokes guys, dot's all."

While Marvin was hitching up, Pete went poking around the stable until he found a length of rusted water pipe. He whittled

a plug of wood to cork one end, and then poured in sand and pebbles. He made another plug of wood and drove it in the open end as far as he could. Then he swung the club around his head.

"Let em come," said Pete.

A cop came, however, and said Marvin and Goldschmidt had to come to the station house to make charges against the kerosene thrower, so the store was closed and Louie drove with Pete hiding inside the wagon. Marvin and Goldschmidt walked to the police station and were told to sit on a bench of varnished yellow wood with holes in the seat. Some other people were there. A man came in and a cop yelled for everybody to stand up. Another man started reading from a sheet of paper and then called out a name. The cops brought in a fellow who had stubby whiskers and very dirty clothes.

"Wilemacandrews—chodge vagrancy—howyaplead?"

"Huh?"

"Guilty, he says, yr honor."

"Thirty days and lets be a warnin tyu keep outa sneighborhood next."

"Augustadler—chodge malicious mischief—Adler!"

A man got up from a front row seat and another got up and stood beside him. Marvin recognized the second man as his antagonist.

"Goldschmidt?"

"Ya—here!" Goldschmidt stood up.

"You the plaintiff in this case?"

"Me, I'm der butcher in dis case. Is dot der man who puts karosene on my meat an my horse?" Goldschmidt's voice rose to a roar.

"At's the guy," Marvin said, pointing.

"Order! Sit down!" shouted the judge. "Clerk, take the plea."

"Not guilty, your honor," said the man beside the kerosene thrower.

"Hey, he aint the guy," Marvin said, waving one arm school-boy-style. "It's the other fellow."

"Sit down or I'll have you up for contempt!" cried the judge. "Witnesses?"

"Come on, Goldschmidt," ordered the clerk. "You're the complainant; come up here. Hollup your rihand. Ya swear ya tella whole truth anuthin butta truth swelpya God?"

"Vell, dis feller tried to put karosene on my meat in my wagon an Marfin, my helper, he seen him an—"

"Did you see him do it?"

"Ach, no. I was in mine store. I don't know nothing until—"

"Then you know nothing about this whole affair?" the man with the union man asked, smiling. "You saw none of it."

"Himmel, how should I see? I'm in mine store und der Marfin var mit dem wagon—"

"Oh, get down," snapped the magistrate. "Where's your driver? What's his name?"

"Marfin Lang," said Goldschmidt, still speaking German.

"Muffin Lonk!" shouted the clerk. Marvin came forward. The clerk ordered his hand up, extended a book which Marvin started to take, but the clerk wouldn't let go. He gabbled his ritual, paused, looked at Marvin, asked, "Well, do you?"

"What?"

"Good God," snapped the judge. "Do you swear?"

"I—not much," Marvin stammered. "Not really bad—"

"They don't really come that dumb," the magistrate said, with a shake of his bald head. "It isn't possible."

"Your honor," said the union man's companion, "I suggest the witness does not know the nature of an oath and cannot be sworn."

"Do you know the nature of an oath, young man?" the judge asked, frowning at the bewildered Marvin. Marvin shook his head.

"Case dismissed," the magistrate said. "Next case?"

The union man shook hands with his companion and started for the door.

"Hey, don't he get nothin' done to him for tryin' to put kerosene on my orders?" Marvin cried.

"You had your chance; get out now," said the clerk. "An quietly."

A policeman took Marvin by the arm and led him to the door, Goldschmidt following, sputtering. "Go on now, youse," said the cop. "Nex time git a loryer."

The union man and his friend went away in an automobile, around which a knot of policemen and idlers had gathered. He rode off in an auto, while Marvin had to walk back with Goldschmidt. Well, the unions sure had pull; maybe there was something to joining the union . . .

Pete rode inside the wagon and Marvin rode on the seat and for two days nothing happened. Then on the third afternoon Marvin heard a yell as he was emptying his basket in the Ritter kitchen. He dashed out and saw a Negro running down the street and Pete climbing out of the wagon laughing.

"I fixed that basted, the dirty black sonovabitch," Pete yelled. "Looka here!"

He pointed to the seat of the wagon and Marvin saw a great gout of blood and a spatter of tiny drops fanning out from it. And on the floor of the wagon was a handful of waste smelling of oil.

"I was sittin in here when I seen at ole black paw creepin over acrost the seat with at junk in it. So I ups with my pipe an smashes down on it. Boy, you shoul'da heard his fingernails crack! I got a squirt a blood in my eye. I betcha his hands wont need manicurin for muncel!"

Marvin felt a little sick. Mrs. Ritter came out and Pete told her all about it, and she turned white and ran inside again in a hurry.

"Wipe it off, willya, Pete?" Marvin begged, eyes averted.

"Wipe, hell, we'll leave it for the old man to see." Pete laughed. "At dinge was gonna burn the wagon up."

Marvin completed the rounds with queasy stomach, never looking at the bloodstain. When Goldschmidt was led out to see, it had dried black. Pete retold the story with repetition of detail, and Goldschmidt gave him a quarter tip.

"At makes me feel good," Pete told Marvin. "I'm a fightin guy, I am. When I get a snift a blood I'm rarin. I'm gonna buy me a drink a red eye with at two bits."

"Adda boy."

"An as soon as I git my dough from the old beezer I'm gonna git me a woman. Howsat?"

"Swell," said Marvin, scrubbing at the bloodstain with an all-concealing broom.

"Whaddaya say we make a party out of it, just you an me? You got me this job, Marvy ole boy, so I wanna treat you right. Whaddaya say?"

"I got to work late Saddaday," Marvin explained, a little panicky. "An I go home an help in the delicatessen soon's I'm through."

"An Sunday I spose you gotta passa plate in Sunny school an pick pansies for the centerpiece, hah?"

"Sunday I do what I damn well please," Marvin muttered.

"Well, whaddaya say? What'll we do Sunday?"

"Anything you say," said Marvin, feeling as if he had agreed to blow up a church, shoot the magistrate or—or—

"Addaboy! We'll paint a ole town red, you an me. You got me this job an I'm gonna show ya I appreciate it, kiddo!"

1914

SUNDAYS MARVIN liked to lie in bed until ten. Then he came down for a breakfast of warmed-over coffee and bread-and-jelly. Usually Father had brought the *American* in, already, unless it happened to rain and then Marvin got it at the candy store. Marvin liked Opper's Happy Hooligan best of the comics. There was Happy and Gloomy Gus and Si and his mule Maud, and Alphonse an' Gaston, the polite Frenchmen who always got into trouble being polite. Gee, foreigners were funny!

Father set great store by the editorial page and once in a while he made Marvin read it, standing over him the while, but it was always about the Trusts and the Common People and didnt make much sense to Marvin, even with McKay's cartoon.

Mother liked the magazine section best, and so did Marvin. That was as good as a college education, all about buried cities and the Sargasso Sea and divers trapped by big octopuses or giant clams, and cannibals and the man who married fourteen women in different cities and girls who disappeared and were never seen again, with photographs and drawings.

But this Sunday Marvin was up at nine and took a bath. He told his surprised parents he was going out for a trolley ride with Pete and maybe they would go on the ferry to New York, and back, just for the ride.

"I dont want you runnin around New York no Sunday mornin'," Father said. "Why dont you go to church any more?"

"I'm not gonna run around New York," Marvin said. "We wont get offen the ferryboat even if we get on it at all."

Marvin put on his blue serge suit and a stiff collar that shut up so tight in front it was a hard job to hook the four-in-hand on the collar button. He put on his Sunday shoes, tan ones with big bumpy toes, college style. He had a checked cap on his head and \$3.65 in his pockets.

Marvin went around to the poolroom behind the barbershop. Dolph and Chuck were shooting rotation in a lazy sort of way and Pete was shaving in the back room. He waved his razor and said, "Hi, kiddo. You sure come early enough!" Marvin sat down and looked at the old *Police Gazettes*. Most of the actresses and bathing beauties had penciled mustaches and other hirsute adornment added by members of the crowd with a creative urge.

Pete finished shaving and began squeezing blackheads; then he powdered his cheeks and throat and said he was going up to Larry's for a cup of coffee. Marvin hung around watching Chuck and Dolph play different kinds of pool, and then trailed Pete who had finished his coffee and was arguing that Chief Bender was a better pitcher than Christy Matthewson.

At last Pete heard a trolley coming and he said, "Lets go, Marv!" so Marvin hurried out to flag the car, suddenly very excited. He paid the fares and Pete sat silent, using a toothpick while Marvin watched out the window. He saw his reflection in the dusty glass and pulled his cap more to one side. Today he was going to achieve manhood! His mind went blank.

They rode past Midland Beach and then Pete jumped up and pulled the bell cord. He led the way around a corner, toward the bay, and then around another corner to point out a factory where he had worked once. There were little frame houses, mostly yellow or green, with men working in the front yards and spading and spreading manure.

Pete stopped in front of a store that had yellow curtains over the windows. In one window was a picture of a man's head all divided up into little squares with pictures in each square, and in the other window was a picture of a great big hand with the lines marked heavily in black. On the door was a sign: Madame Marguerite.

"Whaddaya goin in here for?" Marvin asked. "Whaddaya want your forchin told for?"

"This is the dump," Pete said, reaching to push a bell button high on the inside frame of the door. Pretty soon there were steps inside and the curtain was pulled back from the door.

"Hi, kid, it's me, Pete!" And a key sounded in the lock.

"Well, ya woke up after a winter's sleep, hey?" a hoarse female voice asked as the door swung open. "Come in, you an your friend. Howsa boy?"

"So-so," answered Pete. "Come in, Marv. Wantcha meet Daisy."

Daisy was a large woman with very black hair and very black

eyebrows that went up in a big curve. Her face was pretty, kind of fat but with a little button nose and big blue eyes, and extraordinary coloring—blue *around* the eyes, and not shiners, either, and very red lips and pink cheeks.

"Please to meetchu," said Daisy, holding a purple wrapper to her throat with fingers that made Marvin bat his eyes, the nails were so red. She led the way through the shop, which was divided in half by a yellow curtain, the front half a sort of sitting room and then beyond a part fixed up to look like a tent with a table on which was a glass ball on a pedestal, and packs of new cards.

"Same old layout, hey, kid?" Pete asked.

Daisy tripped on ahead, slipslopping in high-heeled pink slippers with no backs to them. She pushed the striped tent material to one side and opened a door and the boys followed her into a sitting room with a chandelier, a round oak table, which had a lace centerpiece and some paper roses in a blue vase.

"Find a seat, an make yourselves comfortable," Daisy said. Marvin sat down in the nearest chair, an oak rocker with a pressed leather seat. Pete plopped down on a green sofa and pulled Daisy over to him. He slapped her on the bottom and asked her if she had missed him.

"Gawd, if I had to worry about you," Daisy laughed. "Ya workin'?"

"Got a swell job," Pete said. "Ridin around on a butcher wagon knockin off some yeggs tryin to unionize the joint. Marv, here, is the butcher. I ride with him. He got one guy with one of them iron things they use for a horse anchor an I got a nigger with a pipe end. Fun!"

"Well, so long as you're workin'," said Daisy, and sat down next to Pete. Her gown opened and Marvin saw she was bare as far as he could see under it. Daisy pulled Pete's head over and kissed him, and Pete put his hand on her leg, but she got up and said what about a drinkee?

"Sure," said Pete, getting up too, and taking off his vest and coat, in one motion.

"Is your friend gonna treat?"

"Neaw, I brang him here. I'll buy," Pete said.

Marvin jumped up. "Lemme get it," he said. "Where do I go?"

"I'll get it awright," Daisy said. "I just wanna make sure you boys is heeled."

"Marv's all right," laughed Pete. "He's a good guy, ony he's a virgin."

Marvin laughed at that. He didnt quite see the point but he knew what a virgin was, and it made him laugh to think of himself as a sorrowful woman with a halo and a baby.

Daisy laughed too, looking hard at Marvin.

"A big guy like him?" she asked. "I'd sooner think he was a morphodice."

Marvin stopped laughing. "What's that, a morphodice?"

"A half a man, half a woman," Pete replied. "Nothin to get sore at. Get the beer, willya, Daisy? You aint alone here, are you?"

"I got a new partner. Tony Maranelli sent her aroun. She's my opposite so we ought to do good. Suit anybody's taste. Hey, Muriel!"

"Comin," from behind one of the closed doors.

"Wantchu meet a frienda mine," Daisy yelled, while Pete winked at Marvin. "Wanna beer?"

"Like a uno wants a wotzis," announced Muriel, emerging. She was tall and thin; her hair was frizzy and very yellow. She showed big white teeth in a broad, red-lipped smile but the startling thing was her eyes; they were such a light gray all you saw at first were the big black pupils swimming in the whites. Muriel had on a silk wrapper trimmed with ostrich feathers.

"Hlo, boys," she said. "Which un's Daisy's friend?"

Marvin knew she was a stranger to these parts because she spoke funny, sort of like a nigger.

"Hello, kiddo," said Pete. "I'm the ole reliable Pete an this here is Marvin, a nice guy even if he is a virgin an a butcher."

"Ya don say?" said Muriel, trying to imitate Pete's way of talking, and then Daisy came in with four beers on a tray, and a bowl of pretzels.

"Gonna be mah new boyfriend?" Muriel asked Marvin, sitting on the arm of Marvin's rocker and ruffling his hair. Marvin turned very red and Daisy and Pete laughed.

"Ja kidnap him from the orphint asylum?" Daisy asked. "Hey, Muriel, let the kid alone."

Muriel drained her drink. She turned on Marvin, hands on hips, pulling the kimono up a little so it gaped above and below. "So you're a bootchah! Gee, ah loves that. Ah loves to cut. Eee, the way the knife goes thoo meat, slick an smooth, an the meat open up—boy, hot damn!"

Marvin stared at the woman, a little frightened. She turned to the others and her voice grew deeper.

"Ah cut a nigger wunce, down in Jacksonville. Cut im with

he own razzer! An the meat jest o-o-open up wide an red on at bla-ack hide, an blood—eyee!” Muriel hugged herself and drew her underlip between her teeth.

“Shut up, Muriel!” Daisy laughed shrilly. “You gimme the creeps. How about another beer? You buyin, Pete?”

“Yeah, I’ll stand this round,” Pete said, leaning forward and grabbing Muriel by an elbow. “Say, you must be a hot baby.”

“Ah say so, plenny boys git burned on Muriel,” the blonde said.

“Whaddaya say, kid?”

“Another drink first.”

“Aw, les not. Cmon.”

Pete jumped to his feet and kissed Muriel. Without another word they went into her room. Marvin sat alone and frightened. He didn’t know what to do, but he knew he would no more have gone in a room alone with Muriel than he would have kicked a cop. He was very unhappy and mad at himself for being unhappy. He started, when Daisy came back with the beers.

“Well, I mighta known it,” she chuckled. She put down the tray and patted the sofa beside her. “Cmon sit down, kid.” And because Marvin did not know how to avoid it he crossed the room and sat beside Daisy.

“Was the big bum kiddin me when he said—nope, he wasnt. I can see. You never had a girl, did you, kid? God love you! Gee, I’m glad you come to Daisy instead of some old hoor. You like me, kid?”

Marvin’s mouth was dry, his hands wet. He breathed in deeply of Daisy’s perfume, and nodded his head jerkily. Goddammit he felt like a kid in knee pants.

“Come on, drink up your beer,” Daisy urged, her arm around Marvin, her free hand holding the glass for him. “Poor kid, you aint even learned to take your beer. Your momma must of kept tabs on you. How old are you? Sixteen—eighteen? Come along, nice boy.”

She look Marvin by the hand and led him into a bedroom. There was a big brass bed in it, almost like Mother’s. Daisy lifted a box of peppermints from it and straightened the sheet, while Marvin glimpsed himself white-faced, stiff-kneed, in a big pier glass.

Daisy came up from behind and hugged him. Her breasts were big and soft.

“This aint gonna cost you a penny, boy,” Daisy whispered in

his ear. She unfastened Marvin's collar, peeled off his coat. "Gee, I love you, kid. I'm so damn glad some old hoor didn't get you."

She tossed off her wrapper and Marvin saw a naked woman for the first time. Paralysis. He jerked his head aside, crimsoning.

"Whatsamatter? Don't you like me?" Daisy clasped him. "I'll help you."

Marvin, secure in the knowledge he was a man and had proved it, was happier than he had been in his life. He had had a woman and had beaten a guy bigger than himself. Lots of fellows would have run away and let the big slob pour kerosene on the meats. And not many guys had heard Daisy say, "That's enough, now. My lands, let a body rest." Not many—not ma-a-any!

Marvin kept his raise to himself. He hid the slowly accumulating wad of bills in the toes of his shoes at night, and carried them folded in his watch pocket by day. Pete quit after three weeks of peace and boredom, to Goldschmidt's relief, but Marvin bummed around with him.

Evenings he and Pete would go down along the beach, maybe with a couple of others of the bunch, to look the girls over. Marvin studied Pete's easy gait, his looks askance, the way he rolled his cigarette between his lips before lighting it.

Thus it was one Sunday afternoon. A couple of chickens strolled past, and when Pete whistled softly one of them looked back.

"Come along, kid," said Pete to Marvin, and began trailing the girls. Marvin loafed along with him. One of the girls kept looking at the view with enough twist of the neck so she could keep an eye, or the corner of one, on the boys, so Pete asked Marvin if he had a buck.

Proudly Marvin handed Pete a dollar. He felt two inches taller. The girls had stopped to look at the wonders of a cotton-candy machine which spun a fluff of vivid pink sweetness. Pete paused beside them.

"Lousy stuff, Marv," he said loudly. "They make it outa girls' old pink drors."

A sharp giggle from the young women as they started forward again, their knees hampered by tight skirts which became constricted at the ankles again, bellying in the intervening space.

Next a roly-poly game brought the girls to a strategic halt. A Jap chanted his spiel. One rolled a ball up an inclined board pierced with holes numbered from ten to five hundred. According

to the score you amassed by dropping balls into the holes you were rewarded with brass ash trays, china beads, teacups and bamboo back-scratchers.

"Gimme a board an my frien here too," Pete demanded. Marvin ranged up beside him. The youths rolled carelessly, making certain the girls lingered to watch.

Marvin won a tiny plaster Japanese doll in crepe-paper costume and Pete won a back-scratcher.

"This aint no good to me," he complained. "Need somebody to use it on. Hello, girlie! Hey, you scratch my back and I'll scratch yourn."

The girls giggled and swayed on their high heels.

"We aint so lousy," one said, chewing her gum vigorously.

"Say, whaddaya say to a beer?"

The girl made a face.

"Dont like it. I drink sodas."

"Well, how about a soda?"

"Whaddaya say, Mayme? Feel like a drink?"

Mayme studied her toes and mumbled something. She was shorter than her companion, and quite plump. Her round face was honestly freckled, and on her upper lip Marvin saw a row of tiny beads of perspiration. The adventurous one of the pair was dark, with a prominent nose well powdered, a good-looking kid anyhow.

"No, maybe we dowanna drink."

"Stoo bad, cause my frien here used to have a swell job inventin new drinks an frappays."

"Yeah? What's he do for a livin now? Livin on his intrest?"

"He's too tough a guy to fool aroun with frappays. He's a butcher now. Ya oughta see him stick a pig. Swoosh!"

"I think you're too disgustin for words. Gwan, skidoo!"

"Ish kabibble. But you look like strangers, here. Better let us show yaround."

"Whaddaya say, Mayme, yawanna drink?"

Mayme looked at her shoetips and mumbled again.

"Awright, freshie! Where to?"

Pete confidently took the dark girl by the arm. Her name, it developed immediately, was Oima and she lived in Washinton Street, Nyawk. Mayme and her woiked in Hoin's.

Mayme clung to her friend's arm, too, and Marvin wandered along beside her, sometimes a step in advance, sometimes a step in the rear.

He poked the Jap doll at her, but she shook her head.

"Les go on the roller coaster," Pete proposed.

"Oh, I'm scared to death of them things," Oima said, veering toward the serpentine structure.

"Excuse me a minute, I wanna talk to my frien," Pete said, and dropped back with Marvin.

"I paid for the Jap ball game, so when I start to buy the tickets for this business you shove ahead an pay for em, see? Even if I put up a kick you go ahead an pay, see? En I'll pay for the sodas," Pete said earnestly.

"Yeah, but it was my buck you borrowed," Marvin protested, to be at once overcome with shame as Pete's lips tightened and he replied, "I know it. I know it. Jesus, I aint gonna fergit it with you remindin me alla time."

The girls were waiting at the ticket booth. Pete took out a handful of change but Marvin shouldered him aside.

"My treat," he said.

"Nix on that," Pete cried. "Your money aint no good here. Lemme pay for em tickets."

"Four tickets," Marvin announced loudly, shoving a half dollar through the wicket.

When the car slid up to the platform Pete got in with the good-looking one, of course, and after a frightened glance all around her Mayme got in a seat with Marvin. Marvin saw that Pete had put his arm around Oima—funny name—right away, so he put his arm over the back of the seat behind Mayme, and then when the car started he dropped it sort of casually over her shoulders. The car climbed up a steep incline with a clucking of gears, poised for an instant at the peak and then toppled. Oima threw her arms around Pete and screeched, but Mayme just hung on to the iron bar in front and pressed her lips together, her freckles very evident.

When they got out Mayme tucked her hand into the crook of his arm, surprisingly enough.

"I been on lots worse than that," she said, and then, "Thanks for not gettin fresh."

After that Pete bought sodas and Marvin bought popcorn, and they all went down on the hard beach, the girls hanging onto the boys' arms because their high heels sunk into the sand. The sun was down behind the hills and it was getting dark and cool. Farther down the beach some folks were gathering driftwood for a fire, and, nearer, on the other side, some boys were dressing under the old pier. Oima said it was awful and a cop ought to get em.

but Pete said hell, no, he went in swimmin there almost every night with no clothes on.

"Dija ever swim with nothin on?"

"No, freshie!" Oima pulled Pete's hair.

"Well, ya missed a lot. Whaddaya say we wait till it's dark an go in, hey?"

"Ooh, you doity thing! Mayme, lissen to im."

A man came along with a big basket with a zinc lid, chanting: "Getcher hot franks wit kraut!"

Marvin beckoned him over and bought four franks on rolls with sauerkraut and mustard, and four bottles of lemon soda. Oima shifted over and leaned against his knee.

"Gee, I like a feller aint afraid to spend his dough," she said.

That nettled Pete. He got up, brushed the sand off his trousers and stalked away.

"I hope your frien aint insulted," Oima commented.

"Nah, he's sorta restless," Marvin explained. "He's a president of our social an athaletic club. We gonna have a big clambake next week, an it's a responsibility on him."

"Gee, I love clambakes," Oima said.

Pete came back with four ice cream cones and passed them around silently.

"Your frien was tellin me about what a responsibility you got," Oima said, shifting over to rest on Pete's knee. "Gee, president of a club an everything."

"It takes a fella's time," Pete admitted, looking gratefully at Marvin. He put his arm over Oima's chest. She pushed it away, so he put it back, and she let it stay. Pete tried to put his hand inside the top of her dress, so Oima rolled over on her stomach. Pretty soon she hiked herself up so she had her head on Pete's chest, and he patted her on the behind.

It was quite dark now. Marvin put his arm around Mayme's waist. Mayme was sitting up cross-legged. She didnt budge. Pretty soon it was all dark and Marvin couldnt see anything of Pete and Oima except shadows, and couldn't hear much except sounds that made him sure they were kissing, so he sat up and kissed Mayme on the neck. She turned her head; he put a hand on her knee and felt the calf of her leg. Mayme sat very still, so Marvin put both arms around her waist and dragged her down. She struggled for a minute and then lay very still. He kissed her on the mouth, but she didnt respond.

Marvin put a hand under the net top of her dress and got one

finger under the edge of her corset. Her flesh yielded pneumatically, and Mayme began to tremble in a rhythmic sort of way. Marvin said to himself, 'I've got her going'; but pretty soon Mayme began to snuffle and he knew she was crying. He sat up, taking his hands away from her hurriedly. Mayme sat up too, and blew her nose.

"Oi-Oima, we gotter go."

"Shut up," Pete said.

"Oima!"

Oima emerged from a slow struggle and straightened her hat which was on the back of her head. Her hair had come down too.

"Gee, it's late. We gotter go!"

"Aw, for gossakes. It's early yet."

The girls stood up, brushing their skirts, fixing their hair.

"I lost my rat," Oima said.

It wasnt to be found, so Oima fixed her hair as best she could and then the four shoved through the sand toward the boardwalk, and so to Schurz Avenue and the trolley line.

"Pleased to have met you," Mayme said, sticking out her hand.

When the war came Marvin discovered newspapers.

He had heard nothing about a duke being shot anywhere in Europe. When Austria declared war on Serbia he read the headlines but Austrians were just imitation Germans, and included bohunks, polacks and hunyaks. Even Goldschmidt was unmoved.

The *American* on the Sunday morning of August 2 changed everything. Germany was invading France, Russian troops were in Germany. War, war, war! Pictures of the Kaiser, of the Czar, of a Zeppelin airship. War, war, war!

War had been in the air. In April the United States Marines had landed at Vera Cruz to make the dagoes take back their insult to the American flag, but that had died out before it really started. Now there was real war. Goldschmidt was elated. There was a picture of the Kaiser in the shop window when Marvin came to work Monday morning, and the butcher and his family were reading the *New Yorker Herold*, which had big headlines in curly type.

"Now ve show dem verdammte Franzosen," Goldschmidt roared. "By gollies, in six veeks it iss ofer! Now ve show dem!"

All along Marvin's route he found the German-American families in the throes of greater excitement than Christmas or New Year's had ever brought. He couldnt understand why the womenfolk were so excited.

"My father was in the war in '71," Mrs. Krueger said. "He told how them French buggers acted! They made German prisoners eat rats!"

"Who won?" Marvin asked.

"Who won? Who do you suppose won? Germany never lost a war—like the United States," Mrs. Krueger cried. "You, a good German boy, ask that."

"I am not a German," Marvin denied. "My grampaw was in the Civil War, that's the war he was in."

"Well, you got German blood in you, all right," Mrs. Krueger said. "I want two pounds of breast of veal for stuffing. By golly, I make like a holiday, and if Krueger comes home drunk I dont care."

The Irish and Scotch and unidentifiable families on the route just asked Marvin what was the latest about the war. But when England entered, Marvin had to be wary. The Irish sided with the Germans, mostly, although O'Hara, who had been laid off at the dyeworks when a near-panic swept the country the first few days of the war, said from behind the teapot on the breakfast table that it went against his grain to stick up for the Dutch.

"I'm a nootral, like Prisident Wilson, by Jasus," he swore. "But I hope the English gits the ass trimmed offn em."

Times were getting still harder. Jobless men stood at the corners and talked about the war and the coming winter. The cost of food soared. The high cost of living and the fall of Paris were the main topics of debate.

At the delicatessen the *American* was delivered every morning now, and Marvin read it at night when he came home from work. The stories of the big guns pounding the Belgian forts fascinated him, and the marvels of the German army, in which every man jack had two sets of suspender buttons to his pants, so no time would be lost if a button popped off.

One Saturday Goldschmidt told Marvin he had to take a dollar off his wages.

"I'm sorry, Marfin," he said sincerely. "You know how it is mit collections. If so I din like you like a son I lay you off. Look vere is beef prices. Und look vere nobody has a chob."

Marvin shrugged his shoulders, and reported the decrease at home.

"Goldschmidt hasnt a thing to worry about, with no mortgage and a big business," Father grouched. "Suppose he was in my shoes? I ofn think what a fool I was to go into delicatessen.

Luxuries, nothin but luxuries. Straight groceries I shoulda gone into. But a fat lot of advice I get from my family."

"I suppose that dig was meant for me!" Mother cried. "Here I slave away makin salads an bakin beans an washin stacks a dishes an roastin chickens, summer an winter, over a hot stove an doin a family washin besides, an I get nothin but criticism! Well, get yourself a nigger servant then. I quit."

"Oh, shut up," Father said. "You'd think you done all the work. Aint I on my feet all day, waitin on people an keepin books an payin out money? I got brain work to do as well as muscle work."

"Yeah, with half the town owin you an you givin more credit on top of it all an afraid to say boo to a soul," Mother raged. "If that's brain work your brains is in your pants."

When his parents fought like that Marvin knew they were worried about money.

The Germans were beaten back from Paris, and Goldschmidt, who had been expecting the end of the war with confidence, almost went into decline.

"Maybe they run out of bullets," Marvin suggested.

"Aber ja! Marfin, you haf brains. Dey come so fast, dey leaf de slow freight behind! Der Frenchman, he blows up railroads und britches ven he runs. De German truppen run to keep op und leaf der cannons und pullets away in back!"

And when the various military experts of the *American* reasoned out the German defeat on the Marne along the same lines, Goldschmidt told Marvin he should have been a soldier.

"He hass solcher blood in him," he told customers. "His gram-paw vas mit Schurz in der Tsivil Var."

The customers looked at Marvin with interest and asked him when he thought the war would be over.

"Of course it will take a little longer now," Marvin said, whetting a knife. "But maybe by Chrismus. Dja see that the Germans is swingin up along the English canal, now? They'll fix it so the English cant land any more soldiers in France an then—pft!"

"I guess you're right," some said, but others would ask, "How about Russia, hey?"

"Aw, they're a lot of kikes an kikes cant fight."

"Yeah? How about Abe Attell?"

"Abe Attell? Who'd he ever shoot?"

And Marvin would whet his knife—twee-eet twee-eet.

Of course everybody talked about the war all the time.

"Dya think we'll get into it?"

"An American cn lick any two of them furriners with one hand tied behind his back."

"Sposin now the English win the war all of a suddint. What's to stop em from comin over here? Aint they sore at us for lickin em twicet before? Looka Canada right next to us. All em Canadian soldiers. Why, the English fleet could come sailin up the bay here an the Canadian army march right down the Albany Post Road, an where's New York? With a English flag flyin over it, thas where."

"Well, New York aint America," Marvin contributed. "Besides, looka Fort Wadsworth an Fort Hamilton an Governor's Island right here."

"New York aint America? Ya crazy! Aint all the money here an all the headquarters of the big companies? The English could take Washinton an all they'd have would be a lot of monuments an congressmen cause they wouldn wake up in time to get out."

"Ha ha ha ha ha!"

"Well, they wouldn, would they? If an enemy fleet sailed up to Washinton that wouldn wake up Congress. They just wouldn wake—hello, Len! I was just tellin the folks here that if a enemy fleet capcterhd Washinton all they'd have would be a lot of monuments an congressmen cause the congressmen wouldn wake up in time to git out."

"Ha ha ha. Thas pretty rich. Wouldn wake up in time, hah?"

"But if they capcterhd New York, why, the whole country would go blah."

"I guess you're right. Gimme six cans a Cammel soup, Lang, willya?"

"Well, ya needn worry about England comin over here cause Germany's gonna win," Marvin said. "Like I just pointed out—"

"Howsat? How's Germany gonna win? They cant get nothin, no food an no supplies, with the British fleet there."

"Marvin! It's cold in here. Give the furnace a look," Father said.

When Marvin came back from the cellar Father laid him out good and proper.

"Lissen, busness is busness an dont you poke in your two cents' worth about one side or another gonna win this war, young man, see? I'm nootral an dont you get that outa your mind. First thing you know any Germans will buy here, an they aint the spendin kind. You shut up."

"Well, holy gee, aint Germany gonna win—"

"Howda I know?"

"Well, it stans to reason. Looka—"

"For gosh sakes, shut up! All I hear is war, war, war, an now ya wanna argue with me."

"I'm gonna go to bed. I feel dopy."

"Oh, ya beginnin to feel it now, hey? I always knew it."

"Bushwa."

The Lang materia medica varied with the newspaper advertisements, but some items were standard. A bottle of peroxide, a box of bicarbonate of soda, Sloan's liniment, and cholera drops to supplement the bicarb in especially grievous cases. There was always an assortment of laxatives, from Eno's Fruit Salts to Ex-Lax. Riker's Expectorant for colds, and a round box of quinine capsules.

When Marvin didnt want any breakfast next morning he was given a dose of salts.

"He looks feverish. Lemme feel your head. He *has* fever, Carl."

"Probably went out in the night air without his coat."

"Do you feel like you was catchin a cold?"

"Aw, I just feel rotten."

"Tell Goldschmidt. If you dont feel better by noon come home."

Marvin did come home at noon. He was having shivering spells. Mother put him to bed with a hot flatiron wrapped in a towel at his feet, and a couple of hot stove lids wrapped in newspapers on either side.

"Oh, Jeez, I'm hot. I'm boilin."

"Sweat it out. That's the only way. I'll make you a hot lemonade."

"With sugar in it!"

"An gargle with peroxide. I'll bring you the pot to spit in. Now keep the covers over your shoulders."

"Gosh, I'm hot."

"I'll send out the first kid I can find for a porous plaster. It'll open up your chest. Does it hurt?"

"Yes, everythin hurts. I feel lousy."

Marvin dozed off, awoke to hands on his face.

"My, you're hotter, and you aint sweatin. How do you feel, Marvy?"

"I feel sick."

"Poor Marvin, lemme turn your pillow for you, son. Dont move, I can do it. Just lift your head, so—my baby. Still my baby, Marvin. Such a big baby, sweet boy. Would you like some ice cream?"

"Gee, yes; I'm hot."

Father came up after a while.

"Whatsamatter? Feelin low, Marvin?"

"I feel rotten."

"Your mother sent out for a porous plaster an some ice cream."

Father pulled the shades down and stood around awkwardly, jingling the change in his trousers pockets, retying the string of his apron.

"Well, I guess I'll go back down . . . I hope ya feel better soon, Marvin. I'll send a kid around to tell Goldschmidt."

When Mother came back she had old Mrs. Rappaby along, the one whom young Mrs. Rappaby didnt get along with.

"Well, the stairs catches my heart—*wheef*—but I just take it slow an—*wheef*—one step at a time—*wheef*—now where is the young man?"

Marvin turned his head away. Jeez, a strange woman, and him in his underwear, an the pot standin right out there in plain sight.

"Marvy, I got Mrs. Rappaby with me. She said not to use no porous plaster. Are you asleep, Marvin?"

"If he's asleep it's the best thin for him. I raised five boys, Mrs. Lang—*wheef*—and what I've been through the Lord ony knows. Diptheria and mumps and measles and whooping cough and pneumonia and broken legs. I always said that a woman that's raised a family knows more about medicine—practical medicine, I mean—than any doctor and more about the human soul than—*wheef*—any preacher."

"I guess you're right at that. Sit down in the rocker, wont you, because I guess he's dozed off."

"Well, dont wake him up. Sleep's the best medicine. I know. But what you ought to do is put cloths wrung out in witch hazel on his head and on his wrists, to cool his blood. And a musted plaster front or back, maybe both, and a hot musted footbath."

"He always was delicate. He hasnt had many sick days because I took good care of him. I din think he'd live when he was a tot. Nobody expected him to live."

"Well, he's healthy-lookin enough of a lad now."

"Well, we never spared any pains on him. Always the best of

food and warm clothes. He's our only child and why shouldnt we take good care of him?"

"So long as you dont spoil him. I'm for big families myself. I always say if there's five or six kids around and one more on the way, well, the big ones take care of the little ones an that teaches em responsibility an if the worst happens an you lose one you dont miss him as much as if he was your only. I tell my daughter-in-law that. Six years married an no chick nor child. I tell her, you'll be sorry. I know she could have em if she wanted because I ast my boy if there was anything wrong."

"Well, I had three miscarriages before Marvin come, an the doctor said I couldn have any more."

"Dear, dear, that's hard on a woman. A miss is as weakenin as a birth an I always said what's the use of it. You get em along that far an have all the trouble an not even a cemetery lot to show for it."

The conversation made Marvin uncomfortable. He abandoned his pretext of sleep, rolled over on his back, moaned a little, not only for effect but because he felt like moaning.

"Marvin, boy, how do you feel now?" Mother asked in her company voice.

"Not good," Marvin answered weakly.

"Mrs. Rappaby came up. You know Mrs. Rappaby."

"Hlo, Mis Rapby."

"Now, there, Marvin. Are you sick? He's feverish, Mis Lang, but he's sweatin a little. I think it's a little congestion. Does your chest hurt, Marvin? Here? I'd use a musted plaster if I was you, Mis Lang, an the witch hazel. An if he starts to cough, I got the ressipay for a cough medicine."

"My mothernlaw used to boil an onion in sugar."

"That's good, but it's better if you use honey an add a table-spoon a flaxseeds an a little whisky."

"I'll make some up."

"I guess I better be goin. Be good, Marvin. Hurry an get well."

"Gby, Mis Rapby."

"Now dont you bother comin all the way down with me, Mis Lang. I can find my way."

"I'll go down an make the plaster."

The voices dwindled as they descended. Marvin dozed off until his mother came with the mustard plaster, icy cold and so wet at first, a purgatory of clinging heat in a few minutes.

"Dont take it off. Lemme see—no, your skin aint red yet. I put an egg white in it so it wont blister you. Lay still, now, my big boy baby, my Marvin."

Later Father came up and sat down on the side of the bed. He took Marvin's hand and held it awhile. Then he cleared his throat and started to say something, but remained silent.

"Any war news?" Marvin asked.

"Nn-erah-hem!—no, nothin new."

"Goldschmidt say anything?"

"No, he said not to worry."

A long silence.

"Whaddaya think ya got, grippe?"

"I dunno, I jus feel lousy."

"Too much stayin out in the night air, I guess. Maybe too many cigarettes."

"I dont smoke—much."

"Well, you got to learn by experience. I guess all kids are alike. Think the old folks are slowpokes an dumb an buttin in always. I guess I was like that too."

For three days Marvin's fever didnt break.

"I think we oughta get a doctor, Carl."

"Suit yourself, Margaret. I wanna do what's right. Ony he dont seem any worse."

"But he's got so thin."

"Gee, mom, I'm all right. Jus gimme another drinka cold water."

"Here, son. Goldschmidt got a new man in."

"I don care."

"He's a older man than you, oldern Louie. But Goldschmidt said you can have your job back when you want it."

"Oh, I dowanna think of work."

"That's all right, Marvin. Just you get better."

The windows were always shut to keep out the damp, cold air. The cough medicine suggested by Mrs. Rappaby was brewed and administered; mustard plasters were applied twice a day, front and back; and then on the fourth day Marvin began to sweat. He soaked the sheet and the mattress, the pillow and pillowcase.

"Thank God," Mother said. "If you'd have kept on I'da had the doctor in, an Lord knows what he woulda said it was. Like as not he'd a shipped you off to the hospital."

"I'm all right."

"You are now, son. Mmm, Marvin baby. You look just like

you did when you was a tot, you're so skinny. Except for the whiskers. To think *my* Marvin should be all full of whiskers like that."

Mrs. Rappaby was brought in the next day to see the fruits of her prescription.

"Cool as a cucumber, practicky—*weeef*—a little peakit to be sure but at's to be expected—*weeef*—go to sit down. I guess it was a congestion but it might of gone into the newmonia if it wasnt ketched in time."

"I'm glad we didn hafta have a doctor."

"Oh, my lands, yes. They always like to make a thing out worsen it is. Double newmonia, they'da said."

"An shipped him off to a hospital."

"Like as not. An what they do in them horsepitals. It's a caution. It's the only way them young doctors can get their trainin, so I guess they try out everythin. I heard ony the other day of a man went into a horsepital. His throat was swelled shut an the doctor wouldn't treat him at home. They kep him nearly a month, an when he come out his wife din know him. They cut out his tonsils an his appendix while he was there an circumcised him."

"My lands, what for? What's at got to do with his throat?"

"I dunno. Ast the doctors. Said he needed it, that's what they told him."

"Well, I always say that God put your body together the way it ought to be an choppin it up dont get you anywhere. If they had no use for tonsils or appendixes or—or—well, if they hadnt a use for em they wouldn be there."

"Exactly, Mis Lang. Exactly what I said time and time again."

Two days later Marvin got out of bed.

"Just like a baby learnin to walk again, Marvin. My baby!"

"Oh, quit callin me baby. Jeez! Shut up, willya, mom?"

"Why, Marvy, I—God help me for sayin it but I injoyed you bein sick. I was so glad to have you in the house alla time, so glad to take care of you, like you was my little boy again."

Father was glad to see him up.

"Drink lotsa milk an get back some a that meat you lost."

"I'm always hungry now."

"That's a good sign. Never mind the expense. You can have anything you want. A steak for supper if you say so."

1915

HARD TIMES, which is "what one can expect from Democrats!" The high cost of living, and bread lines in New York. Three million people out of jobs just before Christmas. Goldschmidt laid off his butcher and he and Louie did the work themselves without trouble. Christmas passed almost unnoticed. Then the soap factory suddenly reopened, making glycerin. The machine shops began to make parts for guns. Up on the Kills, it was rumored, shipyards were going to be built to make warships, gunboats, submarines, airplanes, torpedo boats.

Food prices continued to rise, but whoever wanted a job could have one, and at bigger wages than ever before. Thirty-five and forty dollars a week was nothing at all. People started to settle their bills. Henry Ford's \$5 a day minimum was at hand for everybody. Even Pete got a job as timekeeper in the glycerin works.

Marvin went to the old machine shop and stood in line outside the gate waiting for the 7-o'clock whistle. Old Man Krueger was even there, with a tin lunch pail. "Workin, Marv?" "No, I'm gonna try for a job here."

He was put to work without ceremony. A timekeeper took his name and filled out a card. An assistant took him into a huge room smelling of oil and hot metal and turned him over to a foreman. The man said his name was Steve Lomski, asked Marvin if he had overalls and said he could lend him an old pair. Then he led him over to a complicated-looking machine, eight feet high, from the upper works of which three shining steel arms with a cutting edge depended.

Steve stood up to the breast-high iron table over which the arms were poised. There were three round depressions in the table, one under each arm.

"Hey, Mike, send over a mess," Steve bellowed.

From out the confusion of men and machines a grimy figure came trundling a grease-blackened packing box on wheels.

"Thousan," Mike said.

"Thousan right," said Steve. "Now look, fella."

He turned a switch and the steel arms began to revolve rapidly.

"Now watch me."

The packing box was filled with things that looked like shallow metal saucers to Marvin. Steve slipped one into each of the three depressions on the table, pulled a lever and the whirling arms descended, biting into the metal disks. A thin squeal rose and fell, Steve swept the three disks into an empty box on the other side of the machine, turned off the switch. The arms had risen automatically to their original height.

"Think you can do that?"

"Sure, but what is it?"

"Cuttin base plugs. Ya get a fit ova cent apiece, an if you cant do bettern five hundred an hour—ya git out."

Marvin looked around him. On his left was another machine, the duplicate of his, and beyond that another. A small, bent old man was at work at the one next to Marvin, and a woman on the other. They didnt look up. Rhythmically they slid their disks under the whirling bits—zup-buzz-z-zeeeeeeeeeyuz-z-z-z-zung—three-fifths of a cent.

Steve came up with a pair of tattered overalls on his arm.

"Here y'are. An remember this, if you dont keep the filns swept off the table they'll get under your pieces an gum up the works. Keep the cups swep clean an the table too."

Three more disks—zup-buzz-z-zeeeyuz-z-z-z—a cent and a fifth.

Marvin looked at the clock. He had been at work half an hour—seven and a half to go, and only a penny earned.

Three more disks.

By ten o'clock his shoulders ached from unaccustomed motions. His eyes smarted from watching the shining revolving bits, and his fingers were raw from sweeping the sharp shavings off the table and out of the depressions.

Steve came up.

"Ya catchin on?" He looked critically into the box where the cut bases were tossed. "Well, you'll do better. Wyncher use your broom to sweep the table?"

Marvin looked around for a broom. He stopped his machine

and walked over to his neighbor's. The old man didnt look up. Rhythmically he worked, rhythmically he chewed tobacco, rhythmically he swept the shavings away with a wire brush, with which he also flipped his completed pieces into their box.

"Where can I get a brush like that?" Marvin yelled.

"Hangin right under your machine," the old man said, without lifting his head or moving an eye. Sure enough the brush was there. Marvin turned the switch, and slid three disks into place.

Marvin worked. He had forgotten to keep count. The finished pieces didnt cover the bottom of their box, and the pile in the box of blanks hadnt decreased visibly. He tried to hurry.

He rushed home at eleven, his lunch hour.

"Got a swell job. Ought to make forty a week anyhow," he announced, slicing himself some ham and Swiss cheese. "Any coffee? Think I'll take my lunch after this."

When the noon whistles acclaimed the meridian with insane hoots and maniacal screeches, as if crazed at the flight of time, Marvin touched the switch of his machine and the old man at the next one turned his machine off.

Zup—buzz-z-z-zeeeyuz-z-z—three-fifths of a cent.

By five o'clock Marvin was a mass of twinges from his waist up. His fingers felt as if they had been sandpapered. His neck was stiff, and his eyes watered unceasingly. But he had finished one box of a thousand pieces and was well on his way through a second. That was—why, holy gee, that was only about \$3! He took a long breath and bent doggedly to work again. Stoop, reach, bend, zup-buzz-z-zeeeyuz-z-z, sweep, stoop, reach, bend, over and over again. Now he could see bottom in the box. Stoop, reach, bend—and suddenly all the machines in the shop yowled into silence, the lights blinked and shone brighter, and in the sudden hush isolated sounds such as a sneeze, a dropped tool, sounded piercingly loud.

Marvin took his jacket, coat and hat from under the machine. When he started to walk out he realized that his feet and legs hurt too. But here it was, only a little after five o'clock, and he was through for the day. And even if he hadnt done very well, he had earned more than a long day's work at Goldschmidt's brought him.

"Gee, I'm tired," was his greeting.

"Better take a bath," Mother said. "Water's hot."

"A bath? Gee, I only had one two days ago."

"Well, you're not gettin into any bed I wash the sheets of in that state," Mother said. "You scrub yourself good."

After the store was closed Marvin, clean to his mother's satisfaction, told about his job.

"I have a machine about as high as this room an as long as this table. It sort of curves over, an three big things stick out of the curved-over part, see? And under em is a shelf, like, with three holes into it. Well, a feller brings a big box of round things like saucers, and I put them in these holes an these long things come down and bore holes into the bottom of em."

"I dont quite see," Mother said.

"What's the point of the whole thing?" Father wanted to know. "What is it called doin'?"

"Cuttin base plugs," Marvin said.

"For what?"

"Jeez, I dunno. Cuttin base plugs, that's what I was told it was. It's a part of makin shells, I guess. The factory makes shells."

"How much they pay yaweek?"

"It's piecework. I cant keep track of it. I wont make so much till I catch on."

"Piecework you get cheated," Father said. "They'll tell you a lot of work was no good. Ya wanna watch ya step."

"I wasn born yestiddy," Marvin said. "I'm tired. Gnight."

"Marvin had \$32.11 in his pay envelope on Saturday."

"Now that you're earnin good money," his father said, "we ought to make a businesslike arrangement. Sposin you pay \$21 a week board an your mother'll still do your washin. You keep the rest but ya gotta buy yer own clothes an shoes, an youghta take out insurance."

"Suits me," Marvin said. "Ony now I can buy what I like to wear an not what Mom picks out for me."

"You can be your own boss if you like an profit by experience," Father said. "Your mother knows materials an a bargain when she sees one. She buys all my things."

"Well, if I earn the money I'm gonna buy what I like with it," Marvin said. "An I dont hafta work in the store, either."

"Dammit, you dont hafta do anything if you dont like," Father shouted. "Yad thing we was slave drivers the way you talk. If ya dont like what we do for you get another boardinhouse."

"Aw, snuts," said Marvin. He went out and, finding no one in Larry's, went to the movies. Now he was really a man. Why, he could support a wife! Why, if he learned to work twice as fast he could buy himself an automobile in a month or two.

Meanwhile there was the movie. It had a dago name and was written by a sheeny or a polack, but everybody said it was good,

with lions eating up Christian martyrs. It was called *Quo Vaydis*.

Well, it turned out to be a lousy picture with never a laugh in it and sort of religious. The moving pictures weren't what they used to be, when there were vaudeville acts between and all the movies were funny ones, Mack Sennett comedies and John Bunny.

The next week Marvin made \$42, just twice his board money. He thought it best to report \$10 less. He bought a suit, paying \$15 down, with \$12 due next payday when he took possession of the clothing.

"It's an easy job," he boasted. "Just stickin things under a machine and taking em out again. It's a cinch. Of course it's dangerous, electristy and all that an if them drills ever come down on your hand they'd cut a hole in em before you could say boo."

There were some good guys at the factory. Walter Molen and Garret Higgins, who were toolmakers and older than Marvin, and Charley Prawitz, who worked on a power press that stamped out the disks Marvin handled all day. They were all good dressers, and ganged around together. Walter was going steady with a girl in Perth Amboy, over in Jersey, and every Saturday he took the trolley and the ferry for hours on end to see his woman.

Walter and Garry boarded in the same house but Charley's folks had moved into Belle Bay. Charley's old man was dead, and he and a sister worked to support his mother and a couple of younger children. But he made good money, keeping his end up when they bought beers or evenings at Larry's when they had coffee and wheatcakes.

"But it's a dead town for girls," Garry said. "All these blonde Heinie girls are too good for anything but knittin. Every once in a while I need me a woman."

"Nothin doin in this berg," Marvin said with disgust. "I used to go down on the trolley to see a jane called Daisy, but that was before I was sick."

"What a jane if she made you sick! God, thanks for the tip."

"Aw, she din make me sick. I got a congestion."

"Well, what's a use of having money in ya pocket if you can't git a girl? What's money for, anyhow?" from Charley.

"Livin an lovin, I always say," Garry decided.

"Livin an lovin is right!"

Marvin pondered that while he sipped his coffee. By God, that Garry had a head on him. Marvin had never figured things out before, but wasn't Garry right? Why did a man work? To live—

to buy food, clothes, shelter; and to love—either steady or just getting women. That's all there is, there aint no more. It all boiled down to that, living and loving.

"I think I'll look for a job in Jersey," Walter said. "This dump is getting on my nerves. There's bigger money in Jersey. Get a job in the fuse works, frinstance. It's dangerous as hell, but my girl's brother told me ya make ya sevenny-five or eighty dollars a week. They strip ya naked when ya go in to make sure you aint got a match or a scrap a metal on ya."

"Hot damn, boy! I want a job seein the girls dont bring in no matches."

"Or over in the powderworks in Morgan. Hunnerd dollars a week flat."

"Yeah, but all jobs like that's filled."

"I'm gonna try anyhow."

The three of them—Charley couldnt very well—went to Perth Amboy Saturday afternoon, to look over jobs. Marvin had on a new suit and shoes. He wished he had a silk shirt and a benny with a fur collar like Garry. Walter's girl lived in a flat over a store. She was all dressed up waiting for Walter and seemed sort of disappointed when she saw his friends, but said she was pleased to meet them and introduced them to her brother, Jimmie, who was dozing on the sofa in the dining room with his shirt and shoes off. Jimmie was on the night shift in the shipyards, and didnt have to go to work until the next night.

"There's lots of jobs around. Me, I aint lookin for none. I get good dough an no danger of my head blowed off. I'm a riverter. Its hard to learn, but steady work afterward. Les look the town over, maybe we'll meet somebody who knows sunthin."

Walter stayed with his girl, Norma. Mrs. Anderson, her mother, asked the boys all to stay for supper but Jimmie said no, they would probably eat in some hash house.

The first stop was at the Amboy Social Club and Wheelmen, where two pool tables were busy and a stud game was in progress.

"There's more jobs in aroun Newark," was the advice most freely given. "They're puttin up a shipyard, an the country's lousy with powderworks."

Two rounds of beer and the trio started out again.

"Ever been down to the shore?" Jimmie asked.

"I live on the shore," Marvin said.

"Oh, hell, I mean Long Branch an Asbury an places like that. At's a place to get swell janes. Ya pick em like berries."

"Speakin of janes, how about a lil wine, women an song?" Garry wanted to know.

"Wanna go to a house?"

Jimmie took them to a red-brick house, one of a row of identical bay-windowed, high-stoooped structures. A colored maid opened the door.

"I guess you know me, you black bitch," Jimmie said. "Come on in, you bucks."

"Yassuh, come right in, gemmen," the darky girl bobbed and giggled. "You might welcome."

"Anybody ever had you, cutie?" Garry asked, grabbing the girl by the breast. "I never had dark meat. How much for you?"

"You tak yo hans offn me," the negress spat, pulling back. "Ahm respectful! Don you tech me."

From the foyer the three men passed into a larger hall where an imitation Venetian lantern of pierced metal threw a checkered light on a sofa from which arose a tall, big-busted woman with yellow hair, a black ribbon around her throat, an old-rose evening gown with a train.

"Hello, Violet," said Jimmie.

"Why, it's Mr. Annerson! Come right into the parlor. I think the young ladies are all engaged just now."

She rapped on the folding doors, as the Negro maid took the men's hats and coats. The doors were opened by a Negro in a light-blue suit cut full-dress style, with flat silver buttons.

Marvin walked into the room behind the others. The floor was covered with a thick carpet, rose-red. The room was lighted with pink-shaded lamps, few and far between, and furnished with half a dozen small couches backed against the walls. There was an upright piano, and pictures of naked women on the walls; they were good, Marvin thought, as well he might because some of them were prints of famous works of art. One picture of a nude wench stretched out appealed most of all to Marvin; he didnt know that it was Mark Twain's favorite Titian, too. He didnt know who Mark Twain was, either.

Another maid came through a curtained door and asked if the gentlemen would have something to drink. Jimmie said quickly that they'd wait for the girls.

It was the most luxurious place Marvin had ever been in. The great big rug, the satin-covered couches, the smoothly painted walls, the lamps, the piano, the pictures, the warmth and the rich perfume; this, certainly, is the way dukes and millionaires live, although certainly without the naked women on the walls.

Then there were voices on the other side of the curtain and two girls came in. One was tall and luscious, the other more winsome and petite. The tall one had red hair and wore a brassiere of green sequins and a short skirt of green that didnt come to her knees, and red slippers with high green heels. The other girl had her hair cut to her shoulders, dark straight hair, and on one side was a big red bow. She had on red sateen rompers tied with big bows on the shoulders, and red slippers.

"Wantcher meet some friens a mine," Jimmie said. "This is Garry an this is Marv. They're both farmers from Staten Ilin, and never had a woman. That big wench is Ruby, boys, an little innocence here is Pearl. All the girls here has jewelry names, but they're all from the Woolworth counter."

Pearl went over to Jimmie.

"I guess your waitin for Goldie," she said.

"Yeah, I'll wait for Goldie." Jimmie nodded.

So Pearl turned around and sat next to Marvin. She put her arms around his neck and said, "Do you like me, kid?"

"I sure do," said Marvin, so Pearl asked if he'd buy her a drink, and called over to the piano player, who struck a loud chord. The other maid came in.

"Highballs?" Pearl asked.

"Yeah," said Marvin, and Garry yelled. "Make it four—no, five."

Pearl led Marvin up a back stairs to a hall lined with closed doors. Pearl stopped in front of one door and opened it. Inside was a bed with just a sheet stretched taut over it, a vanity table with a great big mirror, and a bench and a rocking chair without arms.

"Have you got five bucks?" Pearl asked, her hand on the door-knob.

"Holy cats, five bucks!" Marvin said, in the act of paying.

"All right, feller, make it snappy. This is Saddaday."

On the way to the ferry Garry stopped at a drugstore and bought two tubes of something which he called Safety Last, and in the toilet of the ferryhouse he showed Marvin how to use it.

"Gee, that was a swell dump," Marvin said. "But it cost like hell. I thought them drinks was thrown in, but half a dollar for a highball!"

"Well, what's money for if it aint for a good time?" Garry wanted to know. "Some ya gotta put in ya belly, an some on your back, an what's left over is for a good time while you're young."

"That's what I always said," said Marvin.

Marvin wore his good clothes to work the next Saturday and as soon as he was paid and had washed and changed he waited for Garry, and the two of them took the trolley to the Bayonne ferry and then the trolley to Jersey City. There they changed for the car to Newark, and rode over the salt meadows.

"Gee, no wonder Jersey aint healthy," Marvin observed. "Looka all the swamps."

"At's where the moskeeters comes from," Garry said.

Newark proved to be a pretty big town, with two or three tall buildings and also taxicabs.

"Lets hire a cab," Garry suggested. "Hey, you! Whaddaya charge?"

"Three bucks an hour," the cab driver said, taking the printed sign "Taxi" from his windshield and jumping down to open the door. Garry and Marvin looked at each other and then climbed in. The man cranked his car.

Marvin and Garry leaned back on the upholstered seats, and lit cigarettes.

"Where to?"

"Home, James," said Garry.

"Yeah, I hear that *evry* day," the driver said. "Wanna ride around the park?"

"Nah, we're lookin for jobs," Garry said. "Take us where they pay the highest wages."

"Not till I see if you got any money," the driver announced.

Marvin and Garry flashed their rolls, and the driver got in and started the car moving. The streets were crowded, with the sidewalks—broad as they were—filled to the curb with shuffling people.

"Pretty big place, Naw-wark," Garry said to the driver.

"Hell, this is only a corner of it," the man said. "Noork goes way up to them mountains, there. What kinda work you fellers lookin for?"

"Dangerous work," Garry said. "Hittin bombs with hammers to see if they's any good."

"Well, say, now, there's a place just startin in. It aint in town but they been advertisin for help. They goner make a new kinder bomb, I hear. It's out on the meadows, past Belleville. I'll take you out n' back for six bucks."

"Allright here," Garry said. "So long's they pay high."

"I bet they pay high. If my woman would let me I'd have a job like that, but when a man's got kids . . ."

The big, broad main street tapered into a narrower thorough-

fare, lined with trees. Dwellings and small shops replaced the big stores. The driver's chatter changed from: "That's Plaut's Beehive, that's Hahne's Twelve Acre Store an Trinddy Church acrost the street, that's the Lackawanner Railroad" to "That's Mount Pleasant Cemetry, that's the Passaic River, that's the Erie, now we're outa Noork."

They crossed a river, followed its bank for a while and then turned into a dirt road. They were in a line of cars now, going slowly, and pretty soon they stopped.

"I'll pull up to the side here an you can walk ahead," the cab driver said.

The cab driver pulled up on the frozen, bumpy ground and Garry and Marvin got out. A short distance ahead of them they saw a high wire fence and tall poles at intervals with searchlights on them. The fence went right across the road. A locomotive stood inside the fence, and there were piles of raw lumber in sight.

"Jeez, looka the guy with a gun," Marvin said. A sentry of some kind was patrolling the fence line.

Scattered all over the huge area within the fence were little buildings seemingly not over four feet high with shallow, sloping roofs piled with sandbags. Where the fence crossed the road there were two big wooden buildings which were being painted gray. There was a cluster of men in semimilitary uniforms at the gate and all had rifles over their arms. A line of men and women stood in front of the gate and the guards let them in two or three at a time and shunted them into one of the buildings.

When Marvin and Garry's turn came the guard closed the door, so Marvin was left behind. He tried to push the gate open.

"Lemme go with my pal, there, willya?" he protested.

"You can go back to the end of the line," one guard said. "Hold ya jore."

Pretty soon Garry reappeared and was let out of another gate. He yelled to Marvin that he would wait for him in the cab and that it was a cinch. Then Marvin was guided up three wooden steps and into one of the buildings. It was unfinished inside, and smelled of pine. All down one side was a partition of wood about six feet high and steel mesh from there to the plank ceiling. There were doors with ground-glass windows in the partition.

Marvin walked up to a desk where a man wearing a fur overcoat and a derby hat was sitting, with two girls.

One of the girls gave Marvin a card and a pen.

"Write your name, age and address down," she said.

Marvin gave the card to the girl who gave it to the man who asked Marvin what experience he had.

"I been cuttin base plugs in a shell plant," Marvin said. "With a power drill."

"What did you do before that?" the man asked.

"I was a butcher."

The man made a notation on the card and said, "Take this over to that door there with 51 on it and see Mr. Klein."

Klein was a little, fat, blond Jew. Marvin gave him the card.

"Thank God," said Mr. Klein. "A butcher!"

"What about it?" Marvin asked. "What's bein a butcher got to do with it?"

"Lissen, young fella," Mr. Klein said. "Such a factory as this is you never saw. I am the commissary chief. We feed our help. But everybody wants to be in the big money so if we have any butchers or cooks come here they say they are all mechanics."

"Well, so do I wanna be in the big money," Marvin said.

"Lissen, my son, how much was—were you getting in your last job?"

"Las week I made forty-eight bucks sixty."

"Piecework, hey? Well, here, workin in the powder, maybe you'd make sevenny-five a week, I dunno. An you might get your head blowed off the first day. An maybe they would put you on pushin loaded trucks along the tracks at fifty bucks, an somebody bumps a truck and we will send to your mother your clothes from your locker to have a funeral with, maybe. There wouldn't be nothin else.

"You come on as a butcher. We give you sixty bucks a week steady. You get your dinner at noon, an if you wanna eat again, nobody will kick. If you wanna come here an get your breakfast, will anybody say no? An sixty bucks a week steady, no piecework, no danger. Um Gottes Willen, two years ago vice-presidents from banks didnt get sixty bucks."

"All right," Marvin said. "I'll be a butcher. When do I begin?"

"Monday mornin. Better come at seven. I'll give you a badge."

Klein opened a drawer, pulled out a box of celluloid badges, and gave one to Marvin. It was yellow with a white band. On the yellow was printed Mills Unit No. 4 and on the white 355.

"Without that badge you dont get in an you dont get out, so you shouldn't lose it," Mr. Klein said.

Back up the road again Marvin found the cab turned around and Garry and the driver talking to two men.

"These guys is from boardin'houses. Wanna look the dumps over?" Garry asked.

"Gee, thas right, we hafta live near here," Marvin exclaimed. "I fergot all about it."

"Company bus goes right past our door," one of the runners said. "Two bathrooms, hot water all night."

"Ours is a brannew house, no bugs," the other runner said. "Two baths an a extra toilet. Steam heat in evry room."

"How much?" Marvin asked.

"Lets go look at the new dump," Garry said. "Hop in, feller."

The other runner turned away without protest to approach new prospects. The cab shot off, following the runner's directions. Ten minutes' drive, half of it through a small, compact community which had a movie, brought the party to a two-story frame building, a stark oblong of wood, yellow clapboard below and brown shingles above, patently new.

The runner opened the cab door and ran up the steps of the house ahead of Marvin and Garry. He opened the door and yelled, "Miz Katzen, oh, Miz Katzen."

A woman in a blue house dress with a tan sweater over it came to the door. "Here's two," the runner said and ran down the steps and started off up the street.

"Come in, boys," Mrs. Katzen said. "You would be rooming together I guess? I got a nice double front room, close to the bath."

She led the way to the second floor. Mrs. Katzen opened a door that looked like any one of ten doors. She stepped inside. It was very hot in the room and the floor smelled of varnish and was sticky to the feet. There was a new white iron bed in the room, with the covers turned down and the stripes on the pillow ticking showing through the cotton slips. A wicker rocker and a straight-backed, varnished chair completed the furnishings except for a wastebasket and a yellow bureau with a wavy mirror. On the wall were two towel racks, one Turkish and one plain towel on each.

"It's the best room in the place, except the corner ones which are rented already," Mrs. Katzen said. "You can move right in."

"It's a damn little hole," Garry said. "How much?"

"Well, for the two of you together in it, twelve dollars," Mrs. Katzen said.

"That's six bucks each. How about it, Marv?"

"No, twelve dollars each," Mrs. Katzen said.

"Holy Jesus," said Garry. "Who ya think we are?"

"Maybe that's with meals," Marvin suggested.

"I only serve breakfus," Mrs. Katzen said. "That's five a week extra."

"You mus be tryin to get rich quick," Garry said. "But you wont because you wont get no roomers at em prices."

"I only have three rooms vacant besides this one," Mrs. Katzen said. "I'll tell you, you look nice quiet boys, I make it ten a week each."

"With breakfist," Garry said.

"My God, no," Mrs. Katzen said. "I cant do any better."

"Cmon, Marv," said Garry. "It's gettin dark."

They tramped down the stairs and to the door.

"For the last time," Mrs. Katzen said. "Will you pay twelve each with breakfast?"

"Whaddaya say, Marv?"

"Sure, I guess at's all right."

"Allright, lady, that's a bargain," Garry said. "We'll move in tomorrer."

"Thank you very much," Mrs. Katzen said. "I'm sure I'll do all I can to make it pleasant for you. This is Liberty Hall."

The boys gave the cab driver a dollar and a half extra for waiting, when he left them in Newark. They had beer and hot steak sandwiches in a whopping big saloon called Murray's, which was crowded and gay, and then started the long trip back to Belle Bay.

The store was closed by the time Marvin reached home, and he had to hammer at the door before Father opened it.

"A nice hour to be coming in," he said. "Where were you?"

"I got another job."

"Another—you gonna have two jobs?"

"What's all this, Marvin?" Mother asked from upstairs. She came down in her old gray cotton flannel wrapper. "Oh, where have you been? You got me worried sick. I was gonna call the police."

"Gee criminy, you'd think I was a baby," Marvin snapped. "I tolja I was goin to Jersey, din I? Well, I'm gonna go back to Jersey. I got a job there."

"Howya gonna get back an forth from here to Jersey?" his father demanded. "You wont get any sleep."

"I hired a room in a boardinhouse, with Garry."

"Oh, Marvin!" Mother began to cry. She leaned against the

table, and Marvin saw how gray her hair was. Funny, how it had changed without his noticing it. Her chin was puckered, and tears ran down the side of her nose.

"What's the matter, aint we good enough for ya any more?" Father shouted. "Got too big for the old home, hey? An we came out here for your own health an good, an now first chanst you got you light out. That's a son for you. That's gratitude!"

"Oh, lemme alone," Marvin growled. "I aint a baby. I got a job at sixty bucks. When did you ever make sixty bucks?"

"Sixty bucks! What doin?"

"Oh, Marvin, you'll be killed."

"I got a job as a butcher, that's what. In a big factory where they got a thousand help and feed em. The boss told me everybody wanted the big money, he calls it, in the dangerous parts, but nobody wants to be a butcher or a cook. So I get sixty bucks for cuttin meat an my meals free, an I pay twelve bucks a week for room and breakfast. That leaves forty-eight over. An if you're squawkin because you're afraid you wont get nothin outa me, I'll keep on bringin ya twenny a week an my laundry."

"Oh, Marvin, will you come faithfully every Saturday?"

"Gee, mom, sure I will. Jesus, yad think I was runnin away."

"I'll have to go right down an wash you out some underwear, if you're goin tomorrow."

"To hell with it, I'll buy some more. I'm tired."

He went to bed without another word. Marvin was indeed a man now. He had a home of his own. He had had women, had won a fair fight, and now he was in a room of his own making more money than his old man ever dreamed of making.

Six o'clock. The alarm clock on the bureau woke up, and waking, brought animation to the two in bed. Marvin kicked back the covers, pulled the chain hanging from the electric light fixture, and Garry said, Ow-unkh and shut off the alarm clock.

Marvin pulled on his socks and shoes and peered out the window. His underwear had twisted around his belly and legs during the night and as he straightened it he scratched himself. He put on his pants, took a towel and went out of the room. The bathroom was locked. When Marvin got inside he washed his hands and doused his head, combed his hair with a comb he always carried in a leatherette case. He used the toilet and waited until Garry rattled the door, then went back to the room, put on

shoes, shirt, vest and jacket, took his overcoat and cap from a hook and so downstairs.

Four or five men were eating at the long table and the cloth had fresh coffee stains on it already, overlapping last night's coffee, ketchup and gravy spots. Mrs. Katzen opened the kitchen door to see who was down, then came in with a tray on which were two dishes of applesauce and two dishes of oatmeal.

"Passa milk, please," Marvin said.

A man farther down the table shoved a pitcher of milk toward him. Marvin poured some of the bluish liquid on his applesauce and some on his oatmeal, and sugared both dishes heavily. Then Garry came down and sat beside him and began to eat too.

Mrs Katzen brought in two cups of coffee and a plate with two sugary crullers. Marvin and Garry stirred two heaping spoonfuls of sugar in their coffee. The sugar bowl was full of brown crystalline lumps.

When finished Marvin and Garry put on their caps and coats and went out into the hall, lighting cigarettes as they went. It was still dark outside.

"Here comes the bus," said Marvin, breaking the morning's silence.

He opened the door between the hall and the living room and yelled, "Bus!" and the others in the dining room came piling out, some still chewing. The bus was crowded, and Marvin and Garry shoved and pushed, using their elbows. Nobody got mad. The men fell into line and the women made a line of their own. The plant was brilliantly illuminated by searchlights and the guards made long shadows on the flat ground.

Each person showed his badge going through the gate and then the men went along one barbed-wire chute to one door in the wooden building and the women into the other door. Their badges were examined again at the door.

It was good and warm in the buildings. From the other side of the matchboard partition came the shrill voices of women joking and disputing. There were long rows of steel lockers with numbers on them corresponding to the numbers on the badges, and each man opened his locker by a secret combination. Marvin's was right to E, left to N¼.

Everybody put on rubber-soled sneakers and coveralls, some of khaki and some of white, purchased from the company. They had no pockets in them.

Then they filed out a back door, showing their badges to another guard. Marvin pinned his badge on his white coveralls; he went through a side door which led directly into the commissary building. All over, everywhere, were big signs: Safety First, No Smoking, and Possession of Matches Means Instant Dismissal.

The cafeteria was dimly lighted and on the hundred tables stood four hundred chairs. The lights were burning under the big coffee percolators, and two women were busy behind the counter piling up dishes. They said good morning to Marvin as he passed behind the counter. They wore white coveralls with skirts instead of pants, and aprons over that, and white caps.

Marvin went into the kitchen, and the chef, a big wop, said good morning to Marvin and Marvin answered him politely. He took his apron from a hook and put it on; and a square white cap of starched linen. The chef's assistants were peeling potatoes out of bushel baskets into dishpans.

Marvin opened the icebox and lit the light inside. It was three times as big as Goldschmidt's icebox, and even cleaner. Mr. Klein inspected it every morning and every afternoon. Marvin saw that everything was in order and took his cleavers and knives to the chopping block just outside the door.

Tony, the chef, whose name was really Guglielmo, came to Marvin with a slip of paper.

"Forty pounds lamb stew meat, two good legs lamb, eighty pork chops," he read. That meant the regular lunch was going to be lamb stew. Each week the company gave every worker a ticket entitling the bearer to six lunches, but the workers could buy extras, like the pork chops or roast lamb. Marvin got right to work. He lugged out lamb carcasses and chopped up breasts and necks into huge mounds which he loaded on his scales. There was always plenty of meat in the box. He didnt know how it got there.

He worked steadily until nine o'clock, when Mr. Klein came in. By that time the kitchen was full of steam and savory with the odor of roasts and stew. Marvin scraped his block and said good morning to Mr. Klein, who poked around the icebox and fingered some of the meat without saying anything. When he had gone Marvin walked over to the big range and took a package of Camels from behind it. He lit one at the gas flame and took two or three deep drags on it. Then he threw the butt into a garbage pail, mashing it up with carrot tops and potato peelings

beyond identification. The cooks and the chef didnt say anything because the chef sold the cigarettes at thirty cents a pack. Nobody knew how he got them into the place.

At eleven o'clock he had finished. He ate a plate of stew and drank two cups of coffee. From beyond the partition came the clatter of trays and crockery and the hum of voices as the first shift came in for lunch. Marvin wiped the sweat off his face on his apron and went out a back door to stand on the steps above the garbage pails to cool off. It was good and cold, but it felt good.

Men were pushing wooden carts with flanged wooden wheels along narrow-gauge tracks from one small, semisubterranean building to another, and to the railroad siding a quarter of a mile distant. The ground was covered with black cinders, packed hard. There were puddles with a skim of ice all over. Men and women were straggling from the little buildings toward the cafeteria, walking clumsily.

The plant made "hangrenades," bombs, according to a new invention. They looked like little pineapples of cast iron, Garry said. The castings were brought from some foundry, and here they were packed with mechanisms and high explosive.

The talk in the papers now was that the war might last ten years. The Germans were clever, though. They were scientists, and the papers were telling already how they were making all sorts of food and explosives and clothing out of garbage and junk.

It *was* a good job.

And each Saturday at noon Marvin got his sixty bucks. At first he used to go home right after he was paid. He put ten dollars in the savings bank; that is, he gave it to his mother to put in for him and she showed him the bankbook. She thought it was perfectly wonderful for Marvin to save like he did but she didnt know he was saving to buy an automobile. He gave his mother twenty dollars, and twelve to his landlady. He brought home his wash in a suitcase and took back his clean laundry that his mother had washed and ironed for him. Usually it was three shirts, two handkerchiefs and a suit of underwear. The company washed his aprons and coveralls for him.

It was fun to come home and be greeted like a welcome guest. Mother laid herself out to make a good dinner, chicken stew with dumplings often enough, because chicken was one thing they didn't have at the plant. Father shook hands with him like one man to another, and asked his opinions about things. People

would come into the store just as usual and gossip, and Marvin would be one who was consulted. He traveled a long way, through Jersey, and he was in a position to know things. (This is my boy, Marvin. He's a good son, a fine boy. He gets his sixty a week over in Jersey and comes home regular as clockwork, puts his money in a bank and shares some with the old folks. Not that we need it, but he's a good boy. And he aint making bullets; no, sir, he's working at his trade, cutting meat. Well, we gave him every advantage we could, a good home and a good education.)

"A man cant do no more than that, Lang. Dya know, somebody was telling me the other day that no other language has a word for home except the American. Intrestin fact, aint it? Not even the Germans. It goes to show what America is. I tell you, the home and public school is the foundation of our civilization."

"You're absolutely right. The home and the school, that's what makes our country the greatest there is."

"You got right, Mr. Lang. There aint a country in the world supports sports like we do. It shows we're a sport-lovin country. Looka baseball, an collidge football. Not another country in a world supports sports like we do. An boxin. Ever hear of a French boxer or a wop or a Greek?"

"An looka the Erlimpic games."

"Sure, we won them too, din we?"

"But we lost the tennis champeenship to Austria."

"Australia, wasnt it? Oh, hell, who gives a damn about tennis? At sissy game. Tennis an golf, let em have it, I says. They aint sports. White-pants games. Let the millionaires play em an lose em. They aint American games. Forty love! Jesus, imagine a game where ya say that. Forty love! Christ. Excuse me, Mis Lang. Excuse my French."

The weather got warmer and it stayed light longer so you could see a girl without standing under a lamppost. . . .

The cold, raw evenings of winter and spring had to be killed by playing cards, poker or pinochle. Marvin scarcely ever won, so he didnt care much for cards. Or else one read the paper in bed and went to sleep. Or went to the movies. Sometimes one could pick up a girl at the movies. If the picture wasn't very good she would let you feel her legs or her breasts, but if it was good and if she had paid her own way in, then she used her elbows to stop the advances. And where could you go, anyhow, after the show? Buy a hot chocolate, maybe, and where did that get you?

But when the weather got warmer and the girls walked along the streets in twos, with their arms around each other, well, then life got a little more interest in it.

There were three kinds of girls. There were good girls, who wouldnt even let a fellow kiss them hard, although most of them didnt mind having an arm around them. And there were others who went a little bit further. They didnt mind where a fellow put his hands, so long as he was gentle and didnt concentrate too much. And there were the others who went the limit.

Marvin knew a lot about women.

Marvin was making hamburger with an electric chopper that was a beauty. All of a sudden there was a funny feeling in his ears, like something was sucking on the drums and right after that one hell of a noise, and one of the kitchen workers dropped a crate of eggs. Everybody stood still a minute and then the sirens began to blow, and everybody rushed outside.

There was a great big smoke ring going up slowly, and whirling around gently, and a bigger cloud of dust and smoke. The guards kept everybody back. Marvin was scared sick that Garry might have been in it, but Garry hailed him from the crowd.

"I picked up a guy's hand," Garry said. "Chopped off like you'd a done it with a knife, Marv. It was still warm."

"Watcha do with it?"

"Hell, I trun it down again. It gimme the creeps."

The ambulance came, and some cops, but there **wasnt** any use. The bosses chased everybody back to work again, and when Marvin went into the kitchen Tony was looking at a hole in the wall just over the range, about as big as a marble, where a piece of bomb had gone through with nobody knowing anything about it. There was a hole on the other side where it had gone out. Nobody ever found the piece.

It was agreed that German spies had done it, somehow. There had been explosions in ammunition plants all over the country, and German spies were generally blamed. Well, you couldnt really blame them. They were doing their duty saving the lives of German soldiers, but they had a hell of a nerve killing American citizens and interfering with their jobs.

Just the same, that piece of scrap iron could have killed Marvin if it had been a little lower and come from another direction. Or if he had gone over to take a drag on a cigarette, and

the piece had come through just a little lower without any difference in direction, he might have been killed.

"Every Road is a Maxwell Road. . . . The Car That Laughs at Hills"—\$635.

"Paige . . . The Standard of Val . . ."

\$1,095! Holy gee!

Winton Six—Briscoe—Dollar for dollar, was anything so good as the Ford?

The Saxon—with Stanweld demountable rims the same as used in the Fiat, the Dodge, the Peerless and the Reo even. Cantilever springs, yacht-line body, 3-speed sliding transmission, ventilating winter windshield, honeycomb radiator—\$395! And for \$50 extra electric lights and electric engine starter!

Marvin trimmed a 12-pound standing rib roast mechanically for the night crew's dinner, his mind on the new waitress. There was a new chef too, a Swede. The girl was no Swede.

Martha—that was a funny name. Not many girls called Martha. But she was a swell little piece. Smart as a steel trap, with a quick comeback, and easy to look at too. Of course you couldn't tell much in the white cafeteria uniform but she had neat ankles and a swell pair of tits. She lived in Weehawken, though. Tad made fun of Weehawken in his "Indoor Sports" in the *Journal*. A little bug in the lower right-hand corner always was hollering "And her father had a barber shop in Wee-haw-kin." With musical notes, like it was a song. Where the hell was Weehawken? She said she didnt go out with boys, but that was the old guff they all handed out. She was a swell piece, though. Martha Bachmann. Nice color and long eyelashes. And she looked so cool. She must have thought he wasnt so bad himself, the way she brought over the glass of water to start up an acquaintance. But no chippy. No pick-me-up. Now he had to get that car. Gee, it would be nice to drive out into the country with Martha and a picnic lunch or maybe down to the seashore. It would cost just about \$500 for a car, and he would have more than half of that next payday. He should have a raise. He'd strike Klein for a transfer to one of the assembly units or someplace where he could make more money. All the papers were full of the big money ammunition plants paid but here he was getting a lousy \$60. Garry made over a hundred some weeks. There were strikes all over the country and the owners always gave in and

paid bigger wages. If the guys *here* had the guts to strike! At a hundred a week he could have the car in three weeks. If he didn't give his mother the twenty bucks he could have the money in twelve weeks even at \$60. The thing to do was to go to Newark and see the Saxon dealer. With a car he could have his pick of any girl but Martha was about the nicest piece.

"Well, I sure like it a lot but I guess I'll look around awhile."

The salesman clapped Marvin on the back.

"Sure, sure. Go ahead. At's what we want you to do. Compare this job with any other on the market at any price. Course I dont say its a Packard or a Pierce Arrow or anything like that. It aint loaded up with a lot of junk that looks pretty but dont help run the machine. It aint built so you can drop it off the Palisades but you dont buy a car to drop it off the Palisades ha ha ha."

Marvin laughed.

"Well, I'll be back I guess."

"Just look at the motor again. How's that for a sweet engine? An that body—yacht lines, brother! Yacht lines."

"Well, to tell the truth I just dont have the jack just now."

"Jack? Brother, this car dont cost any jack. Four hunnerd ninety-two dollars an she's yours with electric starter an lights."

"I got to wait a couple of mo—weeks. I only got about two hunnerd an fifty."

"You got a job?"

"You're damn right."

"How much could you pay a month?"

"I been savin twenny a week."

"Couldja pay—sixty a month?"

"Sure thing."

"Then she's as good as yours, brother. Gimme the two anna haf, sign on the dotted line an drive her home."

Marvin felt a little sick at his stomach.

"Ya mean, I could get it on time?"

"Brother, even millionaires buy their cars that way, an if any-body offered me cash I'd drop dead."

"Gee whiz! But I don know how to drive. You'd hafta learn me."

"Brother, that's simple."

"I havent got the jack here. I'll bring it nex Saddady."

"Well, jus talk to Mr. Jack—he's our credit man. Good name, what? Oh, Jack. Got a minnit?"

Gray flannels, a very white shirt and a red tie.

"Mister—mister—didn't get the name, brother. Lang! Mr. Lang, here, sintrested in a stannard job complete."

"There isn't a better car on the road, Mr. Lang, except our big Six."

"I know that."

"Just step over to this desk, Mr. Lang. Now, how much would you be able to pay down?"

"I got two hunnerd an fifty bucks."

"Hm. What is your business?"

"Meat cutter. I work for the Mills Compny in the commissary."

"How long?"

"Ever since it opened."

"Married?"

"No." (Gee, Martha!)

"Where did you work before?"

"Goldschmidt's, in Belle Bay, Staten Island. My folks live there. Got a store."

"Any references? I mean, would somebody with a responsible job sign a statement, just to protect us?"

"I don't know. Hell, I'm honest, aint I?"

"Mr. Lang, Mister Lang! We don't question your honesty for a minute. You misunderstand us. How much would you pay a month?"

"Sixty bucks, anyhow."

"Oh, indeed? That makes it easier. You could wipe out the note in six months?"

The flannel suit took out a yellow printed form and filled in a lot of blanks. He asked Marvin many personal questions, made him sign the paper, shook hands with him and called over the salesman who also shook hands with Marvin.

"Now you're one of the Saxon famly, happiest famly on wheels," the credit man said.

"Can I start learning tonight?"

"Well—how about it, Al?"

"I got a couple more prospects comin in, Jack."

"See if Bill's busy."

Bill came out of a back door with the salesman. He wore greasy overalls. He was introduced without saying a word, beckoned to Marvin. Out another door to an alley, where Bill motioned Marvin to a roadster and got in behind the wheel.

"Know anythin at all?"

Marvin, hot with shame, had to admit complete ignorance.

"At's good. Better'n teachin a guy who thinks he knows sunthin. Here, put your hand on top of mine, an watch my feet."

The car roared into life, moved smoothly out of the alley into a crowded street. Bill named names. Broad Street, Lincoln Park, Clinton Avenue; up easy with the left foot and down easy with the right.

"Wanna take her for a coupla minutes?"

Marvin slid over under the wheel. His heart was hammering harder than it had that night he had put his hand under Ruby's clothes.

"Now, push down the clutch—your left foot on the left pedal, fella. Pull the lever into low; Christ, no, the opposite way. Now easy up on the left foot an give her the—Jesus!"

The car jumped ten feet and proceeded in a series of hops and bucks, then came to an abrupt and silent halt in the middle of the street.

"Listen, fella! Now watch me—"

They had a couple of beers before returning to the agency and Bill thought better of Marvin's chances. He agreed to give Marvin another lesson the next night, and Marvin took the trolley for the boardinghouse, after buying a postage stamp and an envelope in a drugstore. He had to write home. It was the first letter he had ever written home. He wrote it on the dining-room table at the boardinghouse, on a square of clean wrapping paper, with a pencil.

"Dear Mother. Please get all my money out of the bank because I need it. See you Saturday. Respectfully your son Marvin."

"Hello, pop. How's busness?"

"Hello, Marvin my boy. No complaint. Say, what in the world do you want with all your savings?"

"It's a surprise. Did Mom get it for me?"

"I should say not. We got to know what you—good afternoon, Mis Schleiermacher."

Marvin stalked through the store, his feet heavy, his mouth dry, his hands perspiring.

Mother was in the kitchen making potato salad. She wiped her hands on her apron and held out her arms to her son.

"Hey, why didnt you take my money out?"

"But, Marvin! I—"

"God damn it, it's my money, aint it? I worked for it an I got a right to it. Dont I give you twenny bucks a week for nothin

but doin a lousy two-bits worth of laundry? What the hell do you an the old man think I put that money away for, for you to spend? I bet you did spend it. I—"

Mother took another step and slapped Marvin on the cheek, a stinging blow more shocking in its unexpectedness than in its pain. Then she sat down on the unpainted kitchen chair and began to weep.

"For the love of Christ," Marvin sputtered. "I—gee whiz, ma, I—"

"To think my own flesh and blood that I slaved for till my hands were worn to the bone should talk to me like that," Mother sobbed. "Curse at me and accuse me of being a thief. O God, strike me dead. I dont want to live any more."

"Ma!" Marvin felt tears spilling down his cheeks. "Jesus, ma, I didnt mean it."

"I go without things so he can have everything. He gets an education, clothes, a fine home, a better home than most children have, and this is my thanks."

"Ma, I tell you I didn mean it!"

"I give in to his every whim, shield him and protect him, pamper him and pray for him, and he curses me and calls me a thief."

"Ma, I didnt!"

Marvin was on his knees, his face in his mother's lap, crying as hard as she was. After a while he felt her hand on his head, and he cleared his nose with a sharp inhalation which brought him the sour smell of soiled clothing overlaid with vinegar.

"Ma, I didnt mean what I said but I want my money. It's terribly important."

"What do you want it for?" Mother asked, blowing her nose on a corner of her apron.

"I—it's a surprise."

"You wanna get married. I see it all."

"You're crazy—no, I don mean that. I aint gettin married. I aint goin away even. It's somethin you're goin to be happy about, somethin you'll love and get good out of."

"Well, if a woman cant have her own son trust her and give her his confidence, what's the use of anything?"

"Ma, don't start off on that line."

"If you cant learn to be thrifty and to save your money at this age, what will you do when you get older?"

"Did you get the money?"

"Yes, I got the money."

Marvin jumped up with a whoop of joy. Mother got up slowly, took a teapot from the cupboard shelf and from it a roll of bills and a few silver coins.

"There it is, interest and all."

"Hooray!" Marvin yelled. "Boy, I cant wait."

"Marvin—you arent going?"

"I'll be back."

"Marvin, you forgot something."

"No, I didnt. The laundry's on the dining-room table."

The Saxon Standard Roadster, with electrical starting and lighting, nonskid tires in the rear, dry-plate clutch, honeycomb radiator, vanadium steel cantilever springs, ventilated windshield, was waiting for him, licensed and all.

It was too late to drive to Staten Island, and besides the directions werent very clear. He had to go out to Elizabeth and take the ferry, and where the hell was Frelinghuysen Avenue? Marvin followed the trolley tracks through Newark and Belleville, crossed the river, driving very slowly when he saw a bicycle cop.

He stopped the car within ten feet of the spot he wanted to in front of Katzen's, tooted the horn and climbed out before the thunderstruck crowd on the steps.

"Holy Jesus, Lang has a car!"

"For Christ's sake, Marv! Is it yours?"

"Sure, who's do you think it is, the boss's?"

"Hey, how fast can she go?"

"Come on, fellas, Marv's gonna take us for a spin."

"Hold on, she only holds two or maybe three."

"We'll stand on the step. Dont be stingy."

Six passengers clinging like flies to a horse. Marvin drove up the street, three blocks, four—honking at pedestrians, hugging the curb as other automobiles approached, until he saw an illuminated sign: GARAGE.

"Here's the end of the line, fellas."

"Whadaya mean? We gotta walk back?"

"A hot sport you are."

"I don care." Marvin was brave with importance. "I gotta get some gasoline anyhow."

He halted the car, stalling the motor. It was coaxed back into life and as the fellows dropped off the side he drove over the sidewalk into the converted livery stable still pungent with the essence of displaced horses. A man came out of the gloom and said yessir.

"Give her all the gas an oil she needs an put her up for the night," Marvin said pompously. "I'll want her early in the morning."

"Yessir."

Nobody older than himself had ever said yessir to Marvin before.

"Hey, Ma! Pop! Come here."

"Oh, Marvin, I was so worried. You said you were coming back."

"Well, I'm here, aint I? Come into the store a minute."

"I kept thinkin of you with all that money on your person."

"Yes, young man. What did you do with it?"

"Jus come on out an look."

"A wife?"

"God, no! Come on—look there."

"What? Where?"

"You dont mean the—the automobile?"

"Yes, sir, I do. Hurry up an I'll give you a ride."

"Marvin, what a waste."

"Waste, my eye. You cant make me feel bad. Think how much time an money I'll save visitin you."

"Think how much money that cost—an how much it costs to run the thing. You got a millionaire's appetite, you have."

"I don care. Come on, get in."

"Oh, I cant in these clothes, Marvin."

"To hell with the clothes. Nobody will see em. They'll all be lookin at the car."

"Look, those people are stopping. I'll get my white linen dress on."

Father stalked out and joined the group on the sidewalk. He clenched his hands behind him and rocked on his heels.

Mr. and Mrs. Kleister drove by in a Ford and they stopped to ask Lang if the car was his.

"It's a swell car. Wish we had struck oil like that."

"It's Marvin's."

"Dont say! Marvin's? Well, and it wasnt so long ago he was behind an ole plug with a quarter's worth of baloney in the wagon."

Mr. Swartz moved up beside Father.

"Say, you must be proud of your boy. Isnt that a beauty?"

"It cost \$244, by God."

"Two hunnerd an—say, does he know the presdent? At car cost five hunnerd, I guess."

"Hello, Marv. Some little chariot.

"Hello, Mr. Swartz. Not so bad."

"Your father says you got it for \$244."

Marvin looked narrowly at Swartz and then at his father.

"Get me one for that money, will ya? Half price!"

"I—no—I won half of it in a raffle," Marvin said. "Get in, ma. Come on, pop, can the grouch."

"Oh, dont drive fast, Marvin."

"Not me. I'm too careful. Hold your hat, pop."

Pop was holding it, lifting it with elaborate courtesy to every person they passed.

"Gee, did you really get it?"

"Lemme drive you home tonight an I'll show you did I really get it."

"Oh, I couldn do that. My mother'd kill me."

"What for would she kill you?"

"Drivin in a car with a strange man."

"Strange man, my a-a-eye. Hey, suppose I come aroun sometime?"

"I—I'd hafta ast her first. But—but I'll meet you."

"Where?"

"On the corner of the reservoi."

"Lissen, I don even know where Weehawkin is, let alone no reservoi."

"Well, if you cant find out you cant be so intrested."

"Lissen, kid, you know me. What time?"

Martha thought awhile, polishing glasses. She held one up to the light, breathed on it, and then said:

"Saddady afternoon, four o'clock."

"Gee, that's a long ways off yet."

"I cant help it."

"Gimme a kiss, Lou aint lookin."

"I dont give away kisses."

"After the ride maybe?"

"Maybe, if you're a good boy."

"Rats," said Marvin, and went back to his block to cut up brisket for Irish stew.

The garageman told him how to get to Weehawken by way of the Belleville Pike and Palisades Avenue. Saturday Marvin put

on a collar, hooked on a bow tie, bloused his striped silk shirt over his tan trousers' top, and set out for his first motorized rendezvous.

Hundreds of other automobiles were on the road and on the level of the pike Marvin gave her the gas until the necessity of passing a car ahead made him slow down. It was still ticklish business to head into opposing traffic, and the last time he had tried it he cut back into line too soon and the car he had passed grazed his rear left fender and there had been a profane debate. The garageman had pounded out the dents for \$2 and painted the scar so it was scarcely noticeable, but to Marvin the blemish was physical pain.

The reservoir was not hard to find and Marvin drew up to the curb and lit a cigar, letting one leg dangle over the side of the car. He arrived ten minutes before the hour, and at a quarter past, two girls in summery muslin sauntering slowly down the opposite side of the street made him narrow his eyes under the peak of his checkered cap.

Yes, one was Martha, and if she wasnt hot stuff when she was dolled up! The other girl Marvin didnt know.

The two came opposite the impatient Marvin without glancing his way. They turned and looked in a shop window. Marvin honked his horn, but they paid no attention. They resumed their promenade without looking across the street.

"To hell with her," Marvin said, refusing to look back. "I'll just drive on. I bet a hunnerd girls in this town would gimme their shirts to ride in a new car like this. I'll give her five minutes to come back."

He sat sideways in the car, both feet propped up on the door nearest the curb, and lit another cigar.

He had smoked it a quarter way down when he saw a flash of expected pink from the corner of his eye. He exhaled slowly, tapped the ash from the end of his cigar, and pretended a vast interest in an organ grinder who was playing "M is for the Million Things She Gave Me" while some kids waltzed on the sidewalk.

The girls sauntered past, giggling, their heads close together.

"Hey, Marth!"

Martha looked up, looked at the reservoir wall as if astonished that it should have addressed her, looked at the organ grinder, looked back and saw Marvin.

"Why, hello, Mar—Mr. Lang."

"Didn you see me?"

"I never dreamed I'd see you here. What are you doin in Weehawkin?"

"Oh, I'm thinkin of buyin the reservoi to make a swimming pool out of."

Martha's companion giggled shrilly. She wasn't bad-looking, but didnt come within a mile of touching Martha's good looks.

"Oh, excuse me, I wanna present my frien Miss Kunz, Mr. Lang."

"Please to meetchu, I'm sure."

Marvin raised his cap, lowered his feet.

"How about a little ride?"

The girls looked at each other.

"We-ell," said Miss Kunz.

"There's really only room for one passenger at a time," Marvin began apprehensively if falsely.

"I was gonna say I couldn go," Miss Kunz said. "I gotta help my father in the store."

"Oh, then I better not go," Martha said.

"What's the dif? Dont let me keep you," Miss Kunz protested.

"Oh, I dont think it would be right."

"Go on, dont be a goose."

"Sure, come on," Marvin said. "You wont get hurt."

"My mother'd kill me if she found out."

"I wont tell on you."

Martha looked about her, even scanning the windows across the street. Then she stepped quickly through the door Marvin held open to her.

"Oh, I'm scared to death," she said as she settled beside him. "Lizzie Kunz, if you dare tell—"

"You know me, Marth!"

"Good-bye, Miss Kunz, pleased to have metchu."

"Dont mention it. Take care of yourself, Martha."

Marvin started the car, and Martha squealed.

"Oh, let me out! Please let me out."

Marvin stopped the car.

"What's bitin you?"

"I'm scared. My mother'll kill me."

"I'll bust your ole woman on the jaw," Marvin muttered and started the car again. Martha sank back against the leatherette seat and drew a deep breath.

Marvin drove to the end of the street, turned left, found himself on Bergen Turnpike with scores of other cars.

"How do you like it, kid?" he asked without turning his head.

"Oh, I think it's just swell," Martha said, leaning against his shoulder.

Marvin drove out into the "country." He stopped at a hokey-pokey cart and bought ice cream cones and popcorn, and at a wooded stretch a mile beyond proposed that they sit under the trees to finish the confections. Martha said she would have to go back soon. It was late. Her mother would kill her, but she climbed out of the car. Marvin took her by the arm and they walked into the little forest a dozen yards. The ground was abundantly strewn with papers and empty bottles. There was a fallen tree, and Martha sat down on it. Marvin lit a cigarette and sat down beside her.

"It's a grand little car," he said. "Takes most any hill in high."

"Oh, I think it's swell, Martha said.

"Some springs, too," Marvin explained. "Steel, some special steel. Ride over a log and you don't feel it."

"It's just like flying," Martha agreed. "It's like on the merry-go-round, only straight ahead."

"You like it, kid?"

"Mmm! I should suck a lemon!"

"Like me too?"

"Maybe."

Marvin put his arm around her, and Martha did not put it away. He pressed his hand against her stomach and could feel the corset steels through her thin dress. Marvin flipped his cigarette into the underbrush and twisted himself sideways.

"Gee, I'm crazy about you," he said.

"I like you too."

"Say you love me."

"Wont."

Marvin kissed her. Martha turned her head and put down her chin, so Marvin kissed her eyebrow. He turned her head back with his hand and kissed her on the mouth. Martha kissed back. She sagged against Marvin's breast and her fingers pleated her skirt at the knee. Marvin saw that she was breathing hard, slower than the pulse that suddenly beat in her throat. His own mouth felt dry and his collar was suddenly too tight. His hands were cold and clumsy. He'd never felt like this with a girl. He reached out and put one hand over Martha's on her knee, and this time she lifted her face to be kissed.

"Martha," Marvin whispered, moistening his lips.

"Darling boy," Martha said.

Marvin let his hand slide off Martha's and clasp her knee. She pressed her legs convulsively together, catching his fingers between them.

"Jesus," said Marvin, raising the hand that rested on her stomach to her breast. Martha put her head on his shoulder, her face against his neck and began to tremble.

Automobiles and teams passing on the road just beyond the trees were unheard. Marvin heard only the blood surging in his ears. One hand found the top of Martha's dress, the other the bottom. His fingertips pressed into the full curve of her bosom, while the other hand caressed a stockinged leg, slid over the knee, tried to separate the clenched thighs.

Then suddenly Martha began to sob with great strangling intakes of breath. She slid from the log and crouched on the ground, her face in her arms, weeping painfully. Marvin felt as if he had been doused with ice water.

"For God's sake," he whispered. "God's sake. What's—Martha, kid. What's up? I wouldn't hurt you."

Martha shook her head and wept on, clutching her skirt close to her ankles. Marvin kissed her ear and she recoiled as from fire.

"Jesus, you can't figure dames out," Marvin said aloud. "Snap out of it and I'll take you home."

Martha's weeping subsided. She rubbed her eyes, and struggled to her feet, her eyes fearful under their swollen lids.

"Mu-mu-Marvin, I—I—oh, don't think I'm bad."

"For God's sake, why should I think that?"

"Marvin, I never let a boy—"

"For Pete's sake don't cry again. I know damn well you never let a boy lay you. Come on, we better go or your old woman will kill you."

"Oh, I can't look her in the face. She'll know."

"She'll know what? That you got kissed?"

"No—that I went—went—"

"You didn't even go halfway, you poor half-wit."

"Don't you call me names!"

"Oh, rats," Marvin sighed. "Come on, get a wiggle on."

It was a quarter past five when he let Martha out opposite the reservoir. She smiled brightly when she said she would see him Monday.

On the way home Marvin picked up a girl who not only went

more than halfway but taught him a new use for an automobile in a side road she pointed out as unlighted and rarely used.

Marvin had been somewhat surprised that he felt ashamed the first day he saw Martha again. He had wondered how she would act. But she just said "Hello, Marvin" in a low voice like she always had greeted him, and smiled at him and Marvin felt hot and when he mumbled hello his tongue felt too big for his mouth and he wondered if he was in love with the jane. Why? She had class, and good looks and a nice shape but she was sort of slow and her old woman must be an old bitch, Martha was so scared of her. If he asked her to go with him steady, then she'd take him up to meet the old woman, but going steady with a girl meant losing a lot of fun, even if it saved you money, because when a girl had a steady she didnt expect him to spend much money on her. She was thinking of marriage and wanted the guy to save. But you missed a lot of fun.

Every morning Martha greeted him real nicely and when he had a chance in the afternoons he sneaked out to the cafeteria to chin with her a little and drink ice water but they never mentioned what had happened on the ride and she promised to go riding again. Marvin didnt know if he would try to make her the next time or not. Because it rained he didn't find out. He drove home and spent the weekend with the old folks, and it was fun to stand in the store chewing the fat with the old neighbors who admired the car and always congratulated Father for having such a fine son.

Marvin was twenty years old, and his parents made a fuss over him although his birthday had come during the week. They said how old they were with a grown son nearly old enough to vote. Father said he would probably be a grandfather before he knew it and Mother put her arms around Marvin and said she knew he wouldnt leave her and he told Mother she was his best girl.

"We didnt know what to buy you, you have everything you want," Mother said. "You got moren we have."

But they gave him a pin-seal wallet and a belt with the initial L on the buckle, and after the store was shut Mother brought out a chocolate layer cake she had made, with twenty-one candles on it, and Father said he wished his mother was alive because she would be proud of her big grandson.

"Do you remember her, Marvin?"

"Sure I do."

Mother said nothing about her mother.

The day after Marvin paid his installment on the car, the plant went on strike.

There was an explosion in one of the assembly pits, and after the hurt workman—no one was killed this time—had been taken away in the ambulance the men and women stood around talking in little bunches. Garry came up to Marvin, who was standing on the kitchen steps with the cooks and waitresses, and said the accident had been caused because the springs that set off the fuses were soft and a lot of trash, and one had broken as everybody had expected would happen one of these days, and that was how it had happened.

"They'll try to blame it on German spies," Garry said, "but it's their own goddam greedy way of makin an extra penny on each lousy pineapple, usin inferior springs. An we poor bastards can get blown to hell."

"Oh, aint that a shame," Martha said. "The poor men."

"Yeah, the big guys who make the big dough, they sit in swell offices while us poor bastards get blown up makin em rich." Garry spat.

"Aint that right?" commented one of the cooks. A few others drifted into the shade of the kitchen and the observations were repeated. It seemed nearly everybody was talking the same way because when the foremen yelled for everybody to go to work two or three men yelled for them to go to hell.

"We wont work with no-good parts that bust an blow us up," Garry yelled and then ducked behind Marvin.

"That's right," a lot hollered.

Some of the bosses came out of the big office and a couple of the foremen went up and talked with them. One of the bosses sent a foreman into the office to get a chair for him and he climbed up on it.

"My friends," he shouted. "I beg of you to return to your work. We have contracts that must be filled and every minute counts. If you have any grievances—and I am sure no plant in the country does more for its associates—I am sure we will listen to them sympathetically. But we cant waste any more time."

"What about them lousy springs?" somebody yelled.

The boss looked puzzled and bent down to talk to the other bosses, and then he spoke to the crowd.

"If there are any defective parts we will certainly discard them and demand an explanation from the subcontractor," he shouted. "Work slowly and make sure that each part is perfect before you use it."

"What happens to our wages if we work slow?" somebody else called out. "Will you raise the piecework rate?"

The boss didnt pay any attention to that. He waved his arms like an umpire calling a man safe and asked everybody please to go back to work because the contracts would have to be filled.

"There are men in the trenches waiting for these bombs, and by refusing to work you may be causing them their death!" he shouted. "Do you want to have that on your consciences?"

"What about your own conscience?" Garry shouted. "What if we get blown up and killed?"

A lot of the workmen yelled and laughed at that and booed the boss, who bent down and talked to the other bosses once more.

"Very well," he cried out once more after the consultation. "The plant will be closed the rest of the day so an investigation can be made of the materials. Please return to your units so you can go out orderly when the whistle blows."

Marvin took off his apron but Klein said that they would all have to stay on the job and make things ready for the night shift.

"Jesus," Marvin said. "What's the idea? The night shift aint goin to work, an anyhow, we got double work since the night shift come on but our pay aint double. I still get the same lousy pay I started for."

"Quit, then," Klein snapped. "Plenty butchers will jump for your job."

Marvin started to reply, thought of the payments on his car, put on his apron and went to grinding hamburger. The meat came out of the electrical grinder like pink worms, and Marvin wondered if the worms that ate dead people looked like that from living on meat.

When his quitting time came he found quite a lot of the workers still sitting in the dusty grass outside the plant, because the buses hadnt come yet.

"Hello, Gyp the Blood," somebody yelled as Marvin checked through the gate. "You been inspectin the bum springs?"

Marvin grinned and looked around to see if Martha was coming.

"A fat lot of investigation we seen done," another voice shouted. "Nobody aint even been into thirty-two pit to fix up the damage."

The buses started to roll in then with the night shift on board, and the men in the grass rose to meet them and tell what had happened. Marvin went to the Dutchman's for a beer. The saloon was crowded with men all arguing, like any afternoon, but this

time they weren't arguing about the war. Instead they were arguing whether they ought to let the night shifts go on, and when Marvin told somebody the night shifts were coming in and the fellows still down there were talking with them, almost everybody left the saloon and went down to join the argument. But Marvin spent the rest of the daylight polishing his car with a new kind of auto soap. He liked to hang around the garage to watch the owner and his helpers monkey around motors.

Garry didnt show up at the boardinghouse; there were quite a few not on time for the first table, so Marvin ate and somebody asked him if there was going to be a strike and had anybody been killed. Marvin said he didnt know, and went to a movie to see if he could pick up a girl. They were showing the official German war movies, and Marvin was so interested he forgot about the pickup. Garry wasnt back when he got home and he went to bed thankful for having the room to himself.

But Garry was in bed and snoring when the alarm clock went off, and he smelled of liquor. When Marvin came back from the bathroom he shook Garry to wake him up, but Garry called him a name and went to sleep again. At the breakfast table half the crowd was missing again, and Marvin heard that there was a strike.

Right away he thought of the payments on his car.

When the buses came through Marvin and some of the others got on and rode down to the plant as usual. There was a big crowd waiting outside the plant, and as the people dismounted from the buses the crowd yelled, "Strike, strike!"

The throng was thickest around the gates, and the guards were alert on the other side of the wires. They did not reply to the taunts showered upon them.

Martha and Lou and one of the guinea cooks were standing together and Hjalmar, the new chef, came up just as Marvin joined them.

"Ve dont monkey vit sprinks," Hjalmar said. "Ve go in."

He marched up to the gate and showed his button, and the timekeeper let him pass. With a feeling of vast relief that his job was going to continue Marvin started after him, but somebody caught him by the arm.

"You goddam scab, are you gonna woik?"

"I'm a butcher, I'm no assembler," Marvin said, shaking the hand off his shoulder.

"What's that got to do with it?"

Martha came up and told Marvin to punch the guy.

"You shut up, sis," the man said. "Lissen, fella, are you a yallow son of a bitch of a strikebreaker or are you gonna stick with your pals?"

"Jeez," Marvin said. "I work in a kitchen. What the hell difference does it make?"

"You gonna go in to feed them bastard guards?"

"Dont let him scare you, Marv," Martha advised.

"I cant lose my pay," Marvin argued. "I got to help support my old woman an I got to make payments on things."

Quite a crowd gathered around, and Marvin looked at the faces around him and saw not a friendly one.

"Lissen, bud, I'm astin you once more. Is it fair to go in an kiss the behinds of them millionaire bosses just for a few lousy dollars an maybe get blowed up, or are you gonna stick with your pals until we have decent workin conditions?"

Marvin was silent. Somebody spoke up.

"The kid's right. What are we gonna live off of, we who got famlies to support?"

"What white-livered rat said that?"

"This guy said it."

"What's you're family gonna do when you're blowed up just because the bosses wanna make an extra penny? Is that all you value yourself at, a penny?"

"Here comes the boss!"

The crowd turned about-face and Marvin ducked through the gate. He showed his badge, punched his card, and ran for the kitchen. Pretty soon the guinea cook came in. Hjalmar was checking over his lists.

"Well," said Marvin, "what do we do?"

"Yust like every day," Hjalmar said. "Pork today, yes?"

Marvin went to the icebox and carried out six loins of pork. The guinea started to peel potatoes. Then a lot of yells sounded outside and even Hjalmar ran into the dining room to look through the windows. Over his shoulder Marvin saw the crowd milling around two automobiles, with the boss who had spoken yesterday standing up in one, looking very white.

A clod of dirt sailed over the crowd and past the head of the boss. The crowd yelled again and started to rock the cars. The boss sat down suddenly and a squad of guards ran out, swinging their rifles by the barrels, pounding a way into the crowd. With a clamor of gongs two police patrols came roaring down the road.

Cops jumped off swinging night clubs. Marvin's heart pounded in his throat and the sweat rolled down his wrists and ribs. It was better than a movie.

The fight moved back toward the gates, and Marvin could see that the guards were forcing a lane through the mob for the four bosses, with everybody trying to sock them one. Suddenly there was a spurt of gray smoke and everybody yelled and scattered. The guards rushed the bosses through the gates and then wheeled to present their rifles at the crowd, which was scattering, even the cops running back to the patrol wagons, and Marvin saw that the two automobiles were on fire. The smoke changed from blue gray to brownish black; and suddenly the smoke was wiped out by a great yellow glare, as the gasoline tanks exploded with noise ten times louder than any blowup in the plant ever made. Four or five men were lying on the ground and they were showered with little pieces of flame, but the crowd erupted a score of men who dashed in and picked up the fallen.

Then the police came charging back, but the fighting wasn't resumed. The strikers helped the cops load the wounded—or were they dead?—onto the patrol cars, and they were sped away with the gongs going, leaving policemen to march back and forth arguing with the crowd to break it up and go home.

A guard came into the kitchen and said that the three men were to come over to the guardhouse, in the main office building. When Marvin, Hjalmar and the dago walked across the cinders the crowd saw them and booed and called out dirty names.

One of the younger bosses was in the guardhouse, with the commander, who had once been a Marine sergeant. The boss had one sleeve half ripped off the shoulder of his coat and his collar and tie were off.

"Three loyal men, hey?" he said. "What a record! Well, I congratulate you. You will be rewarded for this."

"They was in the kitchen, sir," said the guard who had fetched them.

"No use working there," smiled the boss. Marvin liked him. He was a snappy dresser, and good-looking too, in the sort of way men like.

"No," the boss continued. "You men will have to help guard the plant. The C.O. here will issue you rifles and show you where you are to patrol. That crowd is ugly. If anybody tries to get inside, shoot to kill."

He turned and walked out.

Marvin felt as cold as he had been hot before. He swallowed hard. "Lissen, cap," he said. "I dowanna—say, lemme out a here."

"Yellow, hey?"

"I aint yellow, but, Jeez!"

"Well, damn your eyes, if you're scared we'll let you guard the women's can. Keegan, this guy aint to be trusted. Put him out."

"I aint," Marvin protested. "But we gotta eat. Lemme go back to the kitchen."

"We eat raw meat," the C.O. said. "Get the hell out of here." Keegan, the guard, opened the door and looked at Marvin. Marvin marched out, watching over his shoulder to see that the threatened kick wouldnt reach him. Hjalmar and the dago kept their backs to him and the commander of the guard wasnt looking up. Keegan followed Marvin down the steps.

"Where you think you're goin?"

"I gotta get my clothes."

"This way, you bastard, or I'll shove this rod up your back-side an shoot you loose."

He did have a rifle. Marvin, in his white ducks and apron, still balked for a minute.

"But all my money's in my other pants. Gimme a chanst an I'll give you a—a dollar."

"All I want's an excuse to shoot you. Git!"

He thrust his rifle at Marvin, and Marvin turned toward the gate. The guard bored the muzzle of his weapon into the small of Marvin's back, and the two guards at the gate grinned as they opened the barrier a crack, just wide enough for Marvin to wriggle through. Marvin jumped, but the expected kick grazed his seat.

The strikers, lining the road, watched the eviction with interest. The man who had tried to argue Marvin out of entering the plant beckoned to him, and under the eyes of the cops Marvin joined that group.

"So looka the thanks you got."

"They kept my clothes an my money."

"Well, an now I guess you'll be willin to join us?"

"Damn right I will," Marvin said.

"Damn right you wont, you lousy little hore!"

The man thrust out his hand and caught Marvin under the nose with the heel of his palm. Marvin staggered back and sat down heavily. The cops came running up and the crowd booed.

"Take this pile of manure outta here," the tough guy said. "He

makes a stink wherever he goes. They dowant him inside and we dowant him here."

"Come on, fella, move along."

A cop at his side, Marvin walked up the dusty road, his heart more sore than his nose. What the hell had happened all of a sudden? Jeez, a fellow didnt want to lose his job. It was all right for the fellows to strike who were being gypped by the company, but he didnt have any grudge against the bosses. Not until they expected him to take a gun and march up and down where the strikers could chuck rocks and bottles at him. What the hell? Couldnt a guy just mind his own business? Everybody was cock-eyed but himself. Did he do wrong in going in to his job as butcher? Did it hurt the strikers any? Was he taking away their work? Did it make any difference to them if he was in the kitchen earning his pay, or one of the mob? And the company—he was hired as a butcher, not a soldier. The guards got a hundred bucks a week, somebody said. The company didnt have any right to kick him out if he wanted to do the work he was hired to do and keep his clothes and his money too, did it?

"All right, fella, keep goin'."

Marvin looked up at the cop, who had come to a halt but was waving him on. The rear guard of the strikers was fifty yards behind him. Marvin trudged ahead toward town. He started to go into the Dutchman's, but remembered he had no money.

Garry was sitting on the steps of the boardinghouse. He pretended to fall over backwards when Marvin came up, dusty and sweating.

"Fought cha way in to getcha white pants, hey?"

"Sons of bitches," Marvin growled. "They robbed me."

"Spit it out, fella. Who robbed ya?"

"Aw, I checked in with Helmar an a guinea dish walloper an then there was a fight outside the gates an the gang burned up the bosses' automobiles an the cops came, so one of the bosses says me an Helmar an the dago got to take guns an shoot anybody at makes trouble so I told em to go to hell. So then they kick me out an wont let me get my suit an all my money's in a pockets."

"Gee, that's tough titty, Marv."

"Well, I aint gonna hang aroun here."

Marvin went up to his room. It looked funny, but that was because he had never seen it with the sun coming in that way, at ten o'clock in the morning. He sat on the bed and looked at the wall. He had got a dirty lousy rotten deal. His job was done for. If the company took him back the strikers would make trouble for

him, but the company wouldnt take him back. To hell! He had to get out.

A lump came into Marvin's throat and a tear ran down his nose and dropped on his white shoe.

Garry called up from downstairs that he was going down to the plant to see the fun. Marvin knew that Garry would hear all sorts of cockeyed stories about what he had done. Without any resolve he changed into his Sunday suit, and went to the garage and got his automobile. The garageman wasnt there, only his helper, so Marvin got ten gallons of gasoline and told the man to charge it.

He drove to the boardinghouse and went up to his room. He stuffed all his belongings in his suitcase, bolted downstairs, leaped into the car, and drove off.

He didnt think of Martha at all.

"Why, Marvin—is anything the matter?"

"Nope."

"Dja lose your job?"

"Aw, the dump blew up."

Father put down the New York *American* and looked at Marvin with consternation.

"Are you hurt?"

"Christ, do I look hurt?"

Mother came into the store.

"I thought I heard Marvin—why, it is Marvin! What is—it aint a holiday?"

"He says he lost his job, the place blew up."

"Oh, praise God he wasnt hurt. You arent hurt, are you?"

"Hell, no."

"Your nose looks swollen."

"Ba-aw, what the heck. You're seein things."

"Well, thank God you're out of that terrible place. I couldn't sleep nights thinking about you with all that dynamite and the papers full of explosions."

"What are you thinking of doing now, son?"

"I'm thinkin of sleepin till noon a couple of days. Christ, I been gettin up early for so damn long—"

"Poor boy."

"Goin to loaf, hey?"

"Oh, Carl, dont pick on him right away. Have you had your lunch?"

"Havent any money."

"That's the time he thinks of home, when he hasnt any money."

"Carl! Well, Marvin, I guess you know how to help yourself. Do you want I should make some soup?"

Marvin ate, drank, strolled out of the store. He walked to the old familiar corner. The lunchroom was still there, but it was being run by a Greek. The same old trolley came cantering down the same uneven tracks. He walked down to Goldschmidt's. The old man looked the same. He looked up as Marvin entered.

"Vell, sir, und vot— Ach, mein Gott! Marfin!"

"Hello, Goldschmidt."

"Und so it is really you. Du lieber Herr Je! A vacation you got it?"

"Nah, I quit."

"Gott sei dank! A nice boy like you should nod be making bums for Englishers."

"I never made no bums. I cut meat."

"For bums makers—aber now, you quit. I call Louie."

Goldschmidt walked into the rear of the shop and bellowed up the stairs.

"Mommer! Louie! Kommt a mal runter. Wir haber besuch. Marfin ist hier."

There was another butcher in the place, a little dark man with a heavy mustache and a bald spot. He looked at Marvin curiously but said nothing.

Louie came downstairs, and a long ways behind puffed Mamma Goldschmidt. Marvin was greeted like a relative, and he felt like a kid.

"He giffs up der job, unser Marfin. No more bums for Englishers! Vot you tink 'of dot, mommer?"

"Ach, Marfin always a good boy. He got sense, no?"

"Lookin for another job, Marv? Hey, Schwimmke, this guy is lookin for your job."

The other butcher grinned sourly.

"Marfin, I am afraid if you vos lookink for a chob, I dont got room for two butchers extra. You know how is it, Marfin. I like you like a son mostly, but—"

"Ferget about it. This was a social call."

None of the old gang was around. No Pete. The old dump hadnt changed much in looks, but all the lively guys had left. Marvin went back to the store.

"Wanna make yourself useful while you're here?"

"Whaddaya want?"

"I just thought—nothin now—but if you wanted to help out in the store again, you could deliver things in your car. Make a swell improvement—automobile delivery—and it would please your ma to have you home again."

"What would you pay me?"

"Well—well, I hadn't thought. I'm your father, Marvin, not a factory boss. You could—oh, we can figger that out."

"Gas costs money an tires an oil."

"Dont get so snotty with your father. I'm thinkin of your best intrests an your mother's."

After the store was closed that night a family council was held around the dining-room table.

Business was good. There were still a couple of dozen cottagers at the beach, and the summer had seen the biggest crowds ever. People were buying ready-roasted chickens even for week-days.

Marvin could come back into the store if he liked. Carl Lang & Son on the window, maybe, hey? How would that strike him?

"Of course I cant pay you like the salary you was getting but you'll have more in the end. I'll make you a business proposition. You're a man now. I'll pay for the upkeep of the car and you can have it nights and Sundays in exchange for you making deliveries an general carting. An ten dollars a week—you got that clear. No board, no laundry, no nothin. I'm doin it to please your mother. She'd like to have you home."

"Oh, all right."

There were the payments on the car—well, he more than half owned it. He'd write to them and tell them he'd lost his job but would pay something when he could. No, better say he was sick—

He slipped into the routine of his school days. It was pretty soft, at that. Lots of sitting around doing nothing. Friendly conversation, heated arguments, and technical discussions of automobiles. A few deliveries.

Marvin wondered about Martha. Some Sunday he would drive up and park in front of the old reservoir and gamble on her coming along the street—

"Forty cents' worth of cold cuts, Mrs. Lindsay? And no salami into it. Yes, mam."

Thanksgiving, and then Christmas the next big event. Funny how Christmas used to be the day one looked forward to from New Year's on. Now—

No fun driving Sundays any more. Too cold, and slippery too, in places. Frozen ruts were hell on tires, and Pop insisted the tires were still good enough even if you could see the fabric on the back ones.

"We oughta get nonskid all around."

"We'll get solid tires. They're the only sensible ones."

"Yeah, an jar all the nuts loose?"

"Drive slow and careful, then. Get a price on solid tires."

Then, one day, two strange men walked into the shop.

"I'm lookin for Marvin Lang."

"I'm his father. That's Marvin."

"Oh—Lang, I represent the Atlantic Seaboard Finance Company."

"Yeah?"

"On August twentieth, of this year, did you not contract to purchase one Saxon automobile from Malakoff Brothers of North Newark, New Jersey?"

Marvin leaned against the counter, wordless, thoughtless.

"And did you not, after making one payment according to the terms of the contract, remove from your stated address taking with you the automobile and without leaving any word with the said Malakoff Brothers or communicating with them in any way, although there was still due on the automobile the sum of two hundred and fourteen dollars and some odd cents, including interest?"

"Marvin! My God, is this man crazy?"

Marvin stared straight ahead at the fancy biscuit tins. How the hell had they found him? He had forgotten all about owing on the car, and now the tires were all going to pieces already.

"No, I'm not crazy, and this gentleman from the sheriff of Richmond County's office is sane too. Ask your son if he is crazy, maybe."

"Marvin, do you owe this man any such crazy money?"

"I dunno."

"You dont know? My God!"

"I guess I do, then."

"Listen, mister. Take the lousy car. There it is in front of the store. Take it."

"But that doesnt release Mr. Lang from his contract. I have an attachment for the car, but the contract still stands. It is a criminal offense, you know. If we want to bring charges for automobile stealing—"

"For God's sake, take the car and get out."

"I'll get out to call a cop."

"Talk lower or his mother'll hear. If she knows her son is a thief it will kill her."

"Well, what about the money?"

"Goddlemitey—what will you settle for?"

"Ha, Mr. Lang, this isnt a question of settling, except for the face amount of the notes your son signed."

"Come back tomorrow, will you please? Lemme think this over."

"All right by me. Constable, if you'll execute the writ of attachment—and Mr. Lang, will you step out with me?"

"Wha—where to?"

"Just around to the police station, that's all."

"Wait a minute, mister. Oh, Marvin, that I should live to see this day! How—how much is it?"

"Two hundred and fourteen dollars, plus the costs—say, \$225."

"God!"

Marvin still stared at the fancy cracker tins. Father was humped over the opposite counter, his face white. The constable and the collector stood near the door. They lit cigars and threw the matches on the floor.

"I'll pay," Father said. "This is the worst shock of my life. Write out a receipt."

"Very well, and we will mail the bill of sale in a day or two."

"I dont care about that. I'll choke every time I look at that automobile."

Father turned slowly and took some cans from a shelf behind him. He reached into the opening and took down a coffee tin. Marvin saw him pull out a roll of bills and with hands that trembled and jerked he began to count out yellowbacks. Marvin slipped quietly into the living quarters and went up to his room.

Marvin waited for his father to come upstairs, but the early winter twilight deepened and he remained alone. Marvin tried to think. Why the hell had he let the payments go? Why hadnt he told the company he had lost his job? They would have been easy on him, maybe reduced the payments, lengthened the time. Why hadnt he told his father he owed on the car? Why hadnt he saved his money and sent the company something, just to show he wasnt trying to steal. God, what a dumb-ass he'd been.

Pretty soon after dark he heard his mother's voice downstairs and then she came upstairs. She came into his room and in a

scared sort of voice asked Marvin what was the matter and he said nothing was the matter.

"You act so funny and your father acts so funny. Have you and him had a fight?"

"Oh, sort of."

"Marvin, why do you argue with your father? You know how he is. What was it now? Do you want something?"

"Nope. Oh, for gosh sakes, lemme alone."

"You're a regular Lang, all right. Sulky and mopey and giving short answers when kindness is intended. Well, fight it out yourself. Two stubborn Dutch."

She waited for a while and, getting no answer, went downstairs again, calling back from halfway down that supper was about ready and he should come get something hot in his belly to take the blood from his head.

Marvin thought, hell, he'd go away. There were plenty of jobs and Belle Bay was a dump and a grown-up man like himself shouldnt hang around the home folks because they thought he was a baby all the time. If he had had any sense at all he wouldnt have come home in the first place. Marvin thought back on the evenings at Katzen's and the Dutchman's, and the rides he had taken either all by himself or with some of the fellows or some girl. He thought about Martha. Gee, she was sweet. He had never gone back to Weehawken to look her up. She was a nifty number, class in every line and a swell pair of tits and ankles. He should have got himself a swell job some place at a hundred bucks and then married Martha and let the old man shift for himself.

And then Marvin thought of the money he had brought home every week and he began to feel angry. What the hell, he had given the folks as much money as he had paid down on the car and then some! Jeez God Almighty! With his anger came hunger, and he went downstairs. If the old man put up an argument he'd show him!

Marvin went into the kitchen. His mother was sitting at the table looking at the funny sheet in the *Journal*, and she had glasses on. Marvin hadnt seen her with glasses before and he asked her where she got the cheaters. She said she had got them by mail from an advertisement in the *Hearth Companion*, which had claimed to supply glasses that improved even normal vision.

"They give me a headache but I guess I'll get used to em. I paid two an a half for them an I'm gonna get my money's worth."

"Supper ready?"

"A body would think this was a restaurant," Mother said with a sigh as she pushed her glasses up on her forehead and laid the paper aside. She dished out some vegetable soup for Marvin and put a carrot-spotted chunk of soup meat on a plate for him, with sliced rye bread. While he ate, Marvin read the newspaper his mother had put aside to serve him. He refused the canned peaches, drank his coffee, and then went out into the store.

"Supper's ready," he told his father.

His father said nothing but went in to eat, and all during the evening nothing was said until closing time. Then when the store was locked Father said he expected Marvin to pay back the money he had given for the car.

"What about the twenny bucks a week I gave up all the time I was workin in Jersey? Dont I get credit for that?"

Father wheeled on Marvin.

"That's gratitude for you! What about the meals you ate here and the washing your mother did for you!"

"That wasnt no twenny bucks' worth a week."

"Did we question the expense of raising you? We give you a good education, clothe you and feed you and doctor you for twenny years. Suppose I charged you for that?"

"Well, what else could you a done? I was your kid, wasnt I? Would ja lemme starve or die?"

Father looked at Marvin and shook his head.

"Son," he said, "you are all we got. My only boy. I want you to grow up with a sense of responsibility, not thinkin the world is gonna give you anything you want. This car business ought to be a lesson to you. It aint the money, Marvin. I dont spend a cent on myself. I've worn this suit for goin on six years. All I care about money is to take care of your mother when I'm gone and to give you a little for a start in life."

"Aw, rats," gulped Marvin, tears burning his lids.

"So I'm goin to take five dollars a week out of your wages and the car is half mine until you've paid up the difference, so if you want it for Sundays you got to pay the gasoline."

"Balls," Marvin said, surprised and angered. "I'm gonna get me another job."

"Just thinkin of yourself again. You know your mother worries when you aint home. You ought to show a little considration for your mother, Marvin."

"Aw, rats," said Marvin.

1916

MARVIN DECIDED he would get a new job someplace after New Year's. Meanwhile he'd save what money he got. There was no fun driving the car Sundays in cold weather. Even if you picked up a girl, what was in it for you? Nothing.

He heard that there were swell jobs open in the shipyards that had sprung up along the Kills. High wages and no danger of explosions. He took a day off, and the car, and explored the situation, but all the jobs entailed outdoor work. Marvin picked up a man at one plant who was going back to New York, and was happy for the lift. He told Marvin he had crossed and recrossed the country, working at all sorts of war industries.

"I've built ships and helped load em. Made shells and helped load em. Bethlehem, Pittsburgh, Detroit, Chi, Duluth, Kansas City. I never paid a penny fare and never bummed a freight. I get paid to ride—with horses, cattle, ore, trains or boats. Money in the bank, a roll in the sock. This is the life. I hope the war goes on frever."

"Where ya goin now?" Marvin asked.

"I just got my time back yonder an I think I'll go over an take a look at the Frenchwomen. On account a the submarines pay is good on the ships, you live high, dont work too hard. Say, whyncher come along?"

"Not me. I cant swim."

"Well, see America first is what I always heard. With a nice little car like this you could cover the country, workin here, workin there, movin on when you like it on your own time-table."

The idea appealed to Marvin. Next time the old man started picking on him that's what he would do.

He went back to the easy routine. After all, this was the life. Good grub right at hand whenever you felt hungry. A comfortable

bed and a sound roof, warmth, security. A guy was a sucker to go bumming around in strange places.

The poplar buds burst and the maples shook out their red blossoms. Warm damp winds made a fellow feel lazy, and thunderstorms scared him. Then the headlines grew big and black to apprise all good Americans they had been foully insulted by an inferior breed of mankind. Villa had raided New Mexico. Eight American citizen civilians were dead, eight American soldiers slaughtered!

"Now maybe that goddam schoolteacher will do somethin besides writing notes."

"By God, it makes a man's blood¹boil. We ought to go down there and wipe out every basted greaser and annex Mexico."

A new general named Pershing was picked by Wilson to lead 6,000 men into Mexico to capture Villa and his carrion crew, and make an example of them. America would show them! Let Europe rest on its arms and see what an American army could do! The British, for instance. Insisting on the right to open American mail addressed to Holland! We licked England in 1812 to preserve the freedom of the seas and we could do it again. As soon as Mexico was cleaned up we ought to go to Europe and clean up that mess.

Pershing disappeared into Mexico. The newspapers had pictures of the doughboys on the border and in Mexico, doughboys marching, resting, playing with black-eyed Mexican babies, sharing their food with the peons; cavalymen riding through sagebrush and cactus. A couple of airplanes scouting. Villa couldnt escape.

People started coming to the beach Saturdays. There was a revival at the Methodist church and Marvin and some of the fellows sat on the curb outside smoking cigarettes and mimicking the ecstasies within. Marvin bought himself a spring suit for \$24. The legs of the pants were so tight he had a hard job getting his feet through, but the pinchback coat was tony.

They didnt catch Villa, so the militia of the border states was called out. Flags flew everywhere. America was going into war. Another 4,500 regulars went to the Rio Grande.

"This is all a scheme of Wilson's to get this country all pepped up and then—blip! We'll find ourselves pitched into this European mess. You mark my words."

"Well, to my way of thinking, Mr. Gobel, maybe it wouldnt be a bad idea if we did clean things up over there."

"We could stop it quickern that by shippin no more ammuni-tion or guns or food over. That would end the war."

"Yeah, an put a couple of million men back in the bread lines."

"Better a couple million men in the bread lines than in the front lines of trenches."

"Oh, well, we'll elect a real President in November."

"The Republicans ought to run General Wood."

"They could run a yeller dog an win."

The newspapers said the President might call out all the militia. All the young men went to the nearest armories to find out. Marvin drove a bunch of fellows down. They found the armory brightly lighted. Through the open doors they saw squads of recruits being drilled. Left-right-left-right. Campaign hats of khaki with blue cords; they looked like cowboys. Squads right, hrunch! Rifles snapped up to the shoulders as the eight men wheeled like clockwork.

Marvin spoke to a soldier with two inverted Vs on his sleeve who stepped out of doors to get a smoke.

"Is it hard for a guy to get into the soldiers?"

"Ya gotta be a hunnerd per cent perfect."

"What's the pay?"

"If we go into national service, fifteen bucks."

"A week or a day?"

"Holy Jee-suss! A month."

"Fifteen bucks a month?"

Marvin walked out of earshot and then laughed out loud. Oh, the suckers! Fifteen bucks—to get shot at by bandits, to sleep on a canvas cot, to eat slumgullion out of a can. The suckers!

Marvin drove home. A man *was* a sucker to work for fifteen bucks a month, but wasnt he a sucker to work in a delicatessen for twenty bucks a month, too?

Next morning Marvin told his father he was going to quit. He got back his old job cutting base plugs for shells. When pay-day came he had \$52 in his envelope.

"I'll pay board an that's all," Marvin announced at home. "Twenny-five bucks a week, an I still use the car on Sunday. That's better than fair."

Wilson named a kike to the Supreme Court, just by way of making it certain he would be re-elected. He called out all the militia to go to the border. The Mexicans were making a monkey out of him. And a man walked backward into New York City, having walked clean across the country from Seattle in reverse,

looking where he was going in a mirror. Gee, that was a stunt! That took originality and guts too.

The Republicans picked Hughes to run against Wilson, and Wilson was running on the slogan, "He Kept Us Out of War"—and Villa not caught yet! Well, Hughes would show them. He looked like a he-man. He was a he-man, and he wasnt pro-English, either.

One night Marvin awoke painfully and found himself on the floor. From the other bedroom his mother screamed, and then there was a pink light in the window and in a few minutes—or so it seemed—a boom like all the bass drums in the world going off in the armory. The sound sucked at Marvin's ears, and downstairs in the store the cans fell off the shelves.

"My God, what is it? Marvin, are you safe?"

"Yeah."

Father clattered down the stairs. Mother lit the light and came in to Marvin's room in her nightgown. Marvin still sat on the floor. There was a funny taste in his mouth and his face hurt. When Mother screamed he knew he was hurt.

"You're all bloody. Marvin, speak to me. What happened?"

Marvin put his hand to his face, and his face stung. His fingers were sticky with blood.

"Jesus, I cut myself."

Ma padded out in her bare feet, came back with a wet towel and bottle of peroxide. She dabbed at his face, and Marvin wrenched away.

"Jesus, that hurts."

"Dont say Jesus every other word. You got a cut on the bridge of your nose. You mighta put an eye out. Here, hold the cloth onto it."

"What the hell happened? It looks like New York blowed up."

"God knows. Its this awful war. Maybe they bombed New York."

"Ouch, that damn peroxide."

"Look at the poison bubbling out."

"How can I see it? Oh, looka! For the love of mike."

"What is it?"

"I landed on the pot. That's how I cut my nose, on the pot."

Father came up the stairs.

"Everything's off the shelves an in heaps on the floor. I wonder what happened."

"Maybe New York was bombed."

"Maybe we better get out of here. We might be next."

"Oh, Carl, do you think so?"

The streets were full of people. Nobody knew what had happened. Some said that the oilworks at Bayonne had exploded, others said New York had been blown up, maybe by the English, maybe by the Germans, maybe by the Mexicans, maybe by the I.W.W.

Next day the papers told how Black Tom Island had gone up by the act of German spies. Tons of explosives ready for shipment. New York streets were ankle-deep in broken glass. The militia was guarding the stores. Millions of dollars' worth of jewelry, clothing and suchlike had been stolen before the places exposed by the blast could be guarded.

Marvin was the only person hurt in Belle Bay. That made him very prominent. He didnt explain how he had suffered his wound; the impression grew that a fragment of shell had struck him. Marvin hoped he would have a scar.

It looked as though Hughes had won, but the Californians settled it and Wilson was re-elected, which made Marvin and his father and practically everybody sort of sore. Although Marvin didnt get around to voting.

Just before Christmas the government said we were getting close to war and it wanted to know just what each side was driving at, and everybody said, see, "he kept us out of war" just long enough to get himself elected again and now watch us join the Allies.

But the way it was explained, when the country cut off diplomatic relations with the Germans, it sounded sort of reasonable. It wasnt the German people, it was the Kaiser and his gang, like this von Tirpitz, who wanted everything "spurlos versenckt." The German people, why, hell's bells, nobody could say a word against them, but it was just their rotten luck they got a crazy gang in charge of them.

"Just look at the deal they was makin with the Mexicans, Pop. Give em Texas and a couple of other states."

"I know, I know."

"But, Marvin, if we have to have war, dont go into the soldiers."

"Do I look crazy? Say, I nearly went into em when they was all going into Mexico, but fifteen bucks a month and hard work and gettin shot at? Not your Marvin, Ma."

1917

WHEN WAR was finally declared it almost made—well, it *did* make a fellow proud to have German blood in him. All the newspapers like the *American* and the *Journal* said how the German-Americans were the backbone of the country and, anyhow, we wouldnt send any soldiers to Europe to fight, just put guns on our ships so the submarines couldnt sink them.

Just the same, a lot of fellows left the plant to get into the army, and men came around and made speeches that now the ammunition workers were doing a patriotic duty for the defense of their own country, and work, men, work, to keep the Hun off our shores.

"I think I'll sell out the store an move inland, Marvin. Remember that submarine that came over here? Suppose they sent over a fleet of em."

There were soldiers at the plant now, in place of the company guards. The guns, now, boy! Marvin itched to shoot one off.

And parades, and flags. Goldschmidt took down the picture of the Kaiser that he had in his window and stuck a flag into a sucking pig. Later in the season he put the little flag on a pan of headcheese. It got faded, so the blue was white and the white stripes yellow, because the dyes were no good, now that you couldnt get the German ones. So he took the flag down right after the Fourth of July.

Sundays the beach was full of soldiers and sailors, all looking tough and acting tough too. They got the pick of the girls, of course.

Marvin was paying \$10 a week on a \$500 Liberty Bond that he bought somehow; he wasnt sure how. A guy came and made a speech one noontime, and a pretty girl, a real peacherino and a real actress, offered to kiss any man who bought a bond, although

it was just like putting money in a bank, anyhow. So Marvin, who was in the front row, got pushed by somebody and he staggered toward the girl and everybody laughed, so just to show them, he climbed up on the platform and smacked her a loud one right on the mouth, and make believe she didnt kiss back! Oh, no, she didnt. In the pig's eye.

"Was that worth a hundred bucks?" the guy asked.

"You bet," said Marvin, because the girl held onto him, with her arms around his waist, grinning at the crowd over her shoulder and everybody cheered and whooped and yelled his name.

"I'm gonna ask this handsome guy to start off the list with a subscription for five hunnerd dollars," the girl said. "Will you do it, big boy?"

"Sure," said Marvin. He didnt have any five hundred dollars, so let em try and get it.

Everybody cheered, and the girl turned and kissed him three more times, real slow, and he could feel her breasts against his undershirt.

"What are you doing tonight, cutie?" Marvin asked, because he could see the girl had fallen for him.

"The same," she said, and then the guy with her gave Marvin a card to sign and before he knew it he was down off the platform and somebody else was kissing the girl, and everybody was yelling again, and one of the bosses came up and shook Marvin's hand and said the bookkeeping department would take care of all the details.

The girl stood up there and kissed the men for over an hour, and the plant subscribed to \$32,000 worth of bonds which the guy with her said was a record for a plant of that size, but Marvin never got near the girl again. When the ragtime band played "The Star-Spangled Banner," she and the guy stood up real straight, and then, pop! off they went in a big Cadillac, and on payday Marvin's envelope was \$10 short but a note explaining why was in it.

But every time the boss passed he nodded to Marvin, and he didnt to anybody else.

Congress had passed some sort of law called the Selective Service Act, which was to help pick out an army, but it was hard to make sense out of it. Everybody was going to get a free medical examination, but if you had parents you helped support or were working in some job that had to do with the war, why, you got excused. So Marvin didnt worry.

He got new tires on the Saxon, and polished it up, and it was as good as a uniform for getting girls.

The Fourth of July got so many of the fellows steamed up that some of the drill presses in the factory went unmanned, while the army and navy profited. The plant began to hire more women, mostly flat-faced Swedes and hunyaks, who wore ugly dustcaps and overalls. Women in pants, for the love of Mike! Marvin had to giggle every time he saw that one of them had forgotten to button her fly.

Marvin was promoted. He was made assistant foreman so he could break in the dames. He kidded them all, but there wasnt a goddam one he'd sleep with. But he kidded them all.

He got fifteen cents an hour added to his pay. What with piecework and overtime he got better than \$85 many a week.

But the movies werent fun any more because at every one a guy got up and hollered about the Huns and buy Liberty Bonds and save flour for the soldiers. The Greek started charging extra for bread with a dish of chili, and no butter on it either.

And then the draft. The newspapers and the speechmakers all said it wasnt a draft, but selective service and the fairest way of assigning men to the army. Of course every man in America wanted to help win the war, but if everybody was allowed to enlist in what he liked, you see how it would be! No system at all. This way the men who would make good engineers would be made engineers, although what the hell good a man driving a locomotive was in the war Marvin couldnt see. Anyhow, the men who were needed to make supplies for the soldiers wouldnt have to go. It was just as noble to stay home and do the dirty, unglorious work as it was to be in the trenches. The speakers said so.

But you had to register. Marvin got the day off and went to register. He went down to the armory, where he had gone to see the soldiers during the Mexican trouble. The building was full of men drilling again, but the draft offices were upstairs. A line of men was waiting and the man in front of Marvin was saying how he had got himself married the Sunday before, because married men wouldnt be taken.

"What's the difference between that and goin to war?" Marvin jeered. "Whyncher get yourself a job in a ammunition plant?"

Inside the office, when Marvin got that far, were a lot of shiny new tables and tall cabinets, and middle-aged men running around and asking each other, "What do you do in a case like this?" and there were papers all over and anybody could see plain as day there

was no system at all. Marvin told a fellow his name and his age and where he lived and what he did, and it was all written down and he was given a card to show he had registered.

"You'll be notified," was all the worried little man said. "Carry that card all the time, because you might be stopped by a secret-service man and arrested for a slacker if you havent got it."

Marvin put the card in his wallet, and went back to the beach instead of the factory. He hoped a secret-service fellow would stop him; just for the hell of it he wished that. He saw a jane on the sand and sat down next to her.

"Lonesome, kid?" he asked.

"I wouldn't mind if a *man* came along," she said. She had on silk stockings with her bathing suit, and the suit was black with bright green edges.

"No dame ever said she was disappointed about me," Marvin said, leaning back on his elbows and cocking one leg over the other.

"Lately?"

"Oh, last night."

"She musta been a Hun."

"What's bitin' you? Cant you be sociable?"

"I can to a regular guy. A healthy fella like you ought to be in the army."

"Maybe the army dont want me."

"I got two brothers in the army and one in the navy."

"That ought to satisfy you."

"Serious, now. You aint workin': why aint you in uniform?"

"I cant exactly tell you, but I'm doin' something more important."

"What?"

"You got to remember that there aint only soldiers in uniforms needed in this man's war. We got to have, well, like the secret service."

"Oh, are you in the secret service?"

"If I was I wouldn't tell you. It wouldn't be no secret service if the guys in it bragged about it."

"Go on, les see your badge."

"I aint got one, and if I was a secret-service man—and, mind you, I aint sayin' I am—I wouldn't have one anyhow. Suppose the badge was stolen from a guy by a spy or something?"

"Gee, did you ever catch a spy?"

"Well, not exactly. What's your name?"

"What's yours?"

"Call me Smith—Bill Smith."

"That aint your name."

"You guessed right. It aint."

"Are you a secret-service man, no foolin?"

"Shut up, dont talk so loud. Come on, I got a car."

He took Mary, if that was her name, up to Dongan Hills and she did not disappoint him.

"Marvin, you come in late last night. They didn say you hadda go into the soldiers, did they?"

"Gosh, no. Think I'd be here if they did?"

"You wont have to go, will you, son?"

"Of course not, ma. I'm in a essential industry. I don have to go less I wanna."

"But you wont want to, promise me that."

"Well, it'll be like those posters. 'What did you do in the great war, daddy?' I may wanna see some of it."

"Oh, Marvin, you torture me so."

"Marvin, I read where if you belong to the Quakers you dont have to fight."

"Yeah, I read that too. But you hadda belong before the war. Besides, where the hell is there any Quakers around here?"

"And if you was studyin for the ministry, you dont have to go."

"All right, I'll go see Father O'Toole in the mornin."

"Marvin, how can you make jokes like that?"

"Maybe if you got married, Marvin—"

"Me get married? Nixie. You're the only girl I ever loved, ma. I'll stick with you."

The summer went by. Service flags suddenly appeared on the street. The guy who thought that one up was a smart one. The factory even hung one out with seventy-four stars. The first draft was called.

Numbers 258, 2522, 9613, 4582, 10218—names in the papers, parades, music, flags, speeches—

A heat wave, mobs sleeping on the beaches. Save wheat, save sugar; the I.W.W., United States base hospital near Verdun bombed. A mistake! A dirty low-down Hun trick!

The drafted boys went to camps. Papers full of Yaphank, Dix, Camp This and Camp That. More uniforms in the streets, on the beaches. Girls with service flag pins. Slackers! Food will win the

war! Hello, soldier! Save gasoline, save W.S.S., save everything, save toilet paper. The Eleventh Engineers drop their picks and save the whole goddam British army from being wiped out. Another Liberty Loan. Marvin got off with a \$50 bond at \$5 a week. A hundred I.W.W. arrested in Chicago, and the dirty bastards ought to be shot. Bolsheviki.

The Irish-American plot to blow up Canadian railroads, the dirty stinking Cathlic bastards. Just like them, and by God maybe that will show America. Wilson's secretary is a Cathlic. If Wilson had any brains he'd get rid of that Tumulty. Feeding secrets to the Pope. "The Pope in the White House." U.S. troopship *Antilles* torpedoed and seventy American men lost. October 28 a day of prayer. The food administration will curtail retailers. Sugar a quarter a pound. A fat-ass Englishman named Herbert Hoover telling you not to eat sugar on your oatmeal. The wops getting licked. Girls easy to get. Twelve Americans captured, three killed, five wounded. A disgrace. Those birds who let themselves get captured ought to commit suicide. They'd never dare show their faces at home again, if they live that long. The war will last ten years. Alien enemies.

1918

YOU ARE directed to report at—

"For God's sakes, ma, quit hollerin. I'm safe. I get exemption. I'll tell those cockeyed bastards—"

"My only child, my only son. I'll go with you. Carl, how much money can you lay your hands on? If they wont listen to reason they'll listen to money. Oh, my child, my baby!"

Autobiography:

Name of Registrant—Marvin Luther Lang

Address—38 Schurz Avenue, Belle Bay, Richmond, New York
(Class I, Division A, Single man without dependent relatives)

Series I, General Questions:

Q. State (a) your full name and your present age, occupation and residence; and (b) the name, address and relationship of your nearest relative.

A. (a) Marvin Luther Lang, 22, ammunition worker, Belle Bay. (b) Carl S. Lang, father, 38 Schurz Ave., Belle Bay, 45.

Q. If you are employed give your employer's name and address.

A. Hartigan & Vogelzahn Machine Company, Belle Bay.

Q. Give below all the occupations at which you have worked during the last 10 years, including your occupation on May 18, 1917, and since that date, and the length of time you have served in each occupation.

A. Clerk in drug store	(months) 2	(years) 0
Delicatessen clerk	(months)	(years) 2
Butcher	(months)	(years) 3
Ammunition worker	(months) 6	(years) 1

Q. How many hours per week have you worked in the occupation or occupations above named during the period since May 18, 1917?

A. 50

Q. In what occupation do you consider yourself most proficient?

A. All

Q. Would you be willing to take free evening school instructions, fitting you for service in some occupation in the Army before you are called to camp?

A. Yes

Q. Mention any previous military experience you have had, giving organization, rank and length of service.

A. No

Q. Underline the branch of the Army in which you prefer to serve if selected: Artillery—Aviation—Engineer Corps—Infantry—Medical Department—Ordnance Department—Quartermaster.

Q. Schooling: Grade reached in school

A. 8th

Q. Underline the languages you speak well: English—French—German.

Q. In the columns below draw one line under those occupations at which you have worked; draw two lines under those at which you are expert. After each underlined occupation write also the number of years of experience you have had in that occupation.

A. (No. 4.) auto and motor truck driver, 2 years;

(No. 12.) butcher, 3 years;

(No. 26.) factory worker, 1½ years;

(No. 44.) machinist (drill press), 1½ years;

(No. 46.) merchant, 3 years;

(No. 77.) teamster, 2 years.

Physical Fitness

Q. State your height and weight, stripped.

A. 68 inches, 122 pounds.

Q. Are you in sound health mentally and physically?

A. Yes.

Dependency

Q. Have you (1) a wife or child, or (2) aged, infirm or invalid parents or grandparents, or (3) brother under 16 or sister

under 18 years of age, or (4) a helpless brother or sister of whatever age, mainly dependent on your physical or mental labor for support?

A. 2; yes.

Q. State whether you are married, single or divorced.

A. Single.

Q. Give the name, relationship, address and age of each person mainly dependent on your labor for support.

A. Carl S. Lang, father, 38 Schurz Ave. Belle Bay, 45.

Margaret Lang, mother, ditto, 45.

Q. Which of such dependents lives with you and how long has each lived with you?

A. Both, all my life.

Q. As to each dependent, state when you began to contribute to his or her support.

A. 1911.

Q. How much have you contributed to the support of each other dependent during said 12 months?

A. \$600.

Q. As to each dependent state whether such person is wholly dependent on your labor for support.

A. Not all.

Q. What was your total income from all sources during the last 12 months.

A. About \$2,800.

Q. Does any of your family or dependents own the house you live in?

A. Father.

Q. State earnings of each named dependent during preceding 12 months.

A. Father, about \$500.

Q. State amount per month you consider necessary for support of all your dependents.

A. About \$125.

Q. If you have stated that you contribute to the support of any person except your wife and children state whether you live with such person or persons, and how much you pay for your board or subsistence to them or others.

A. \$25 week.

(Supporting affidavits signed by) *Carl S. Lang*
Margaret Lang

Industrial Occupation

Q. Are you engaged in an industrial enterprise necessary (1) to the maintenance of the military establishment, or (2) to the effective operation of the military forces, or (3) to the maintenance of the National interests during the emergency?

A. Yes.

Q. Are you an employee or in business for yourself?

A. Employee.

Q. Do you claim deferred classification on the ground you are engaged in such enterprise?

A. Yes.

Q. State the nature of the enterprise.

A. Ammunition.

Q. What is produced by said enterprise?

A. Shell casings.

Q. Do you give all your working time to said enterprise?

A. Yes.

Q. If not what do you do?

A. Help in the store sometimes.

Q. What trade name is applied to your job (for instance, "laborer," "skilled laborer," "foreman," "manager," etc.).

A. Assistant foreman.

Q. State generally what duties you perform.

A. Operate drill press grinding base plugs.

Q. How long have you been engaged in the work you are now doing?

A. About 1½ years.

Q. State your education, training and experience for the work you are now doing.

A. Grammar school.

Q. State the reasons why you cannot be easily replaced by another person.

A. Shorthanded, women work there.

(No supporting affidavits.)

"All right, men, line up. Attention, now."

(O-ho sa-ay, can you see, by the dornsurly light—)

"Local Board 1172 is proud of you, prouder of you than we can say. Now, boys, Chaplain Hulsenbach will lead us in prayer."

It was chilly in the armory. Marvin straddled his suitcase. Over

in that mob of howling women was his mother. Maybe that was her yellin.

"God, our Father, Lord of battles, look we pray Thee upon these men who in the name of Thy son who said He came not to bring peace but to bring a sword now dedicate their lives to liberty so all men shall be free. Comfort the lov-ved ones they leave behind and steel their hearts to know that these their be-lov-ved sons and husbands go forth to battle the Antichrist, to do Thy will, so the desecrators of Thy holy temples shall perish, for those who live by the sword shall die by the sword!"

"My boy! My boy! Let me at him. Let me—let me!"

Jesus, if that was Ma making that stink!

"—an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth! Vengeance is mine, sayeth the Lord—"

"Say, aint he never gonna shut up, buddy?"

"Search me!" Of all the lousy luck!

Drafted!

Marvin threw his suitcase into the overhead rack of the day coach and then sat down on the stuffy green plush, awkwardly clutching his flag and the khaki packet the Red Cross woman had given him. The fellow next to him had thrust his flag into the breast pocket of his coat and his Red Cross gift in his coat pocket. Outside the band still played "Over There"—ta-d-daa-a! The crowds cheered. It was pretty swell, like belonging to the Giants going out to play the Cubs or something.

Marvin was on the wrong side of the car. A yellow boxcar was on the next track. But he didnt get up to look out the windows across the aisle because somebody would grab his seat and it was next to a window.

It was an hour before the train started. Other gangs arrived and there was more cheering; the band would start all over again, and the guys leaning from the windows waved their flags and yelled.

"Wish I'd brought something to read," said the fellow who shared Marvin's seat.

He was a short fellow and sort of skinny. His clothes were good, but they didnt have any style at all. He had on a light-gray suit, not pinchback or anything, and a white shirt with a plain blue tie. He was sort of brownish, like a wop. He had a derby hat on, and he had brought no suitcase or bundle.

Marvin guessed he was trying to be sociable, but what the hell

was the answer to "I wish I'd brought something to read"? What could you say?

"Have a cigarette?" Marvin asked.

"Hah, no! No, I just dont like em. Dont mind me, though. Light up."

Of all the nerve, Marvin thought. As if he'd let that mug stop him from smoking just because he didnt like it. Marvin lit a Camel.

"What's your line?"

"Bookkeeping, but I studied accountancy nights. And business English."

"English business?"

"Hah, no. Writing letters, and that sort of stuff. What did you do?"

"Butcher," Marvin said proudly.

The fellow whistled.

"That ought to make it easier for you down there."

"I guess it will. I'm not scared of blood. I stuck pigs so I guess I can stick a Hun."

"I didnt mean that, but I guess it's all right," the bookkeeper said, smiling. Well, what the hell did he mean?

"The name is Birnbaum," he said, after a while. "Dave."

Oho, so he was a kike! Funny he didnt look like one. Marvin thought with self-reproach he should have guessed it, what with the guy's brownish skin, brown eyes and his being a bookkeeper and studying nights. Just like a kike, always pushing ahead.

"Lang's my handle," Marvin said.

"German too, huh?"

"Whaddaya mean, German too?" demanded Marvin.

"No offense. Lang is a German name, that's all. Like mine. My name means pear tree in English. I thought of changing it. On account of the feeling against the Germans. Your name means long, you know."

"Hell, I'm no kraut," said Marvin. "My old man's father was a Civil War veteran and my old woman is English."

The nerve of that sheeny, calling himself German.

Birnbaum cleaned his fingernails with a matchstick. Suddenly the train shivered, lurched backward, started to move forward. The band played louder, and the crowd cheered louder, the fellows waved their flags and howled.

"Well, off to the war, buddy," said Birnbaum.

A soldier with stripes on his sleeve lurched through the car.

"Siddahn, evrybody. Siddahn! No roughhouse. You're in the army now, you basteds."

Everybody sat down. The soldier looked sharply at every man as he swayed through the aisle. He went out on the platform and lit a cigarette.

"Oh, boy, 'you're in the army now,' " somebody sang.

A few daring ones reached around, snatched off hats from the conscientious ones who were sitting upright, eyes front. Soon the car was filled with flying hats. Birnbaum took his off and hid it under the seat. Marvin pulled his cap tighter.

The sergeant opened the door.

"Pipe down, you goddam fools!"

Clickety-click through marshland. The train roared over an iron bridge, a second bridge, and landed right in a city where there were more bands, more crowds, more flags, and another line of dopes with bundles, suitcases, and flags, of course.

Some of the guys made a rush for the doors, but the sergeant barred the way at one end and somebody else in uniform stood in front of the other door.

"Oh, no, you dont," snarled the sergeant. "Back to ya seats, back to your seats."

The fellows went back to their seats, some nonchalantly and a few growling. The band played outside, the mob cheered. The train jumped, the locomotive whistled, and the station slid out of sight with the band still thumping away "Over There."

It grew very warm in the car. A few flasks appeared and were passed covertly around. Some fellows opened newspapers.

"I wish I'd brought something to read," Birnbaum said again.

He took the flag from his pocket and furled and unfurled it. Marvin took the khaki package the Red Cross woman had given him and opened it, so Birnbaum undid his too. In each was a cake of tar soap, a shaker-top can of foot powder, a khaki handkerchief, a blackish metal mirror, a shaving brush and a stick of Colgate's shaving soap, a Gem razor and one blade, a toothbrush.

"Not bad for nothing," Birnbaum said. "Must be a dollar an a half's worth of stuff there."

"I got my own," Marvin said. "Better stuff."

"Wanna give me yours?" Birnbaum asked, tapping the Red Cross roll on Marvin's lap.

"Like hell I do," Marvin said.

The train rolled on. There were flags at all the little stations they passed, and crowds that waved.

"Play chess?" Birnbaum asked once.

"What in hell's chess?"

"That answers it." Birnbaum sighed. "I guess there's no use asking you what you've read lately, either."

"Dont get snotty," Marvin said without heat. "I can read as good as you can and better."

"Ever read any of Gorki?"

"Sure, everything."

"What did you like best?"

"Dya think they'll draft the ball players?" Marvin countered.

The train rattled over another long bridge, came to a stop. The sergeant appeared at the door.

"Line up," he bawled. "Everybody stan up. No funny woik. Leave ya bunnles."

"Are we there?"

"Dont ask no questions. Compny, mark time—lef-ri-lef. Fur-rud—hurntch!"

Soberly the gang filed through the car, stumbled down the steps. Every other car likewise emptied. There were dozens of figures in khaki on the platform, mostly in shiny spurred boots.

"Fer Christ sake, show a little snap," bawled the sergeant. "Keep at line straight."

Slowly the lines merged, shuffled forward. Then a rumor spluttered back over the long file, spark of whisper along human fuse.

"Eats!"

There was a long oilcloth-covered counter, behind which women in white with blue-lined white veils toiled. Each man received a cardboard cup of warm coffee, condensed milk-sweetened; two ham sandwiches and an apple. Marvin watched Birnbaum with amusement. Ham!

Birnbaum ate the sandwiches in gulps. Jesus, maybe he wasnt a kike after all.

The line doubled back on itself, broke into car-length sections, while the band played and the crowd cheered. Marvin threw his cup under the train where scores already lay, covering the ties between the trucks of the cars.

Once more the train moved forward. Marvin looked at Birnbaum a little while.

"Ya know," he said, "for a while I thought you was Jewish."

"I am," said Birnbaum.

"But you ate ham."

"So did you."

"But I'm no sh—Jew."

"You believe in the Bible?"

"Ya dam tootin I do."

"All of it?"

"Sure I do. Whaddaya take me for, a lousy athiess?"

"Well, the Bible says you shouldn eat ham, or pork, that is."

"Ya cockeyed! The Jew Bible maybe."

"It's the same as the Christian Bible, except the last part, the New Testament. An it dont say anything in there about you can eat pork."

"Ya crazy!"

Well, the lousy liar. What was the use arguing? Marvin slouched down in his seat, pulled his cap over his eyes. Some fellows were starting a card game over the aisle. Marvin went to sleep.

Several times the train stopped to let more important traffic use the track. Darkness came and with it cold. Marvin woke up hungry. The train was still rolling along through flat, open country with occasional villages and farms, long stretches of black woods.

"When do we eat?"

The query became a clamor. The sergeant got up from the seat he had cleared out for himself in the front of the car.

"Quitther bellyachin," he howled. "Ya eat when ya get there."

Marvin sat up stiffly. Birnbaum was gone. So was the crease in Marvin's trousers. He took off coat and necktie and lay the full length of the seat, covering himself with jacket and coat.

Birnbaum came back.

"Dont move," he said, perching himself on an arm of the seat. "Say, a guy back there said he heard some of the officers say we werent going to camp. He says they says we may go to Philadelphia an get right on a boat an get our trainin in France."

Heads popped up all about.

"Aw, he's fulla crap."

"Whaddid he say again?"

Birnbaum repeated his information. It was argued hotly. A brakeman, coming in to turn on the lights, had to struggle through the group.

The train slowed down. Lights slid greasily past the windows. Another crowd, no band. Barely rolling, the train passed through a small village, came to a halt. Brakemen leaped to ground, swinging lanterns. Once more doors framed stern, uniformed figures.

Whistle from locomotive, and tolling of its bell. The clamor of progress was stilled, and then the train began moving backward.

Except for bell and rumble of trucks it retreated almost noiselessly.

"Jesus, are we gonna go alla way back?"

"Hey, cap, what's up?"

Birnbaum came back from another expedition into rumorland. "Somebody says smallpox broke out in a car up ahead an they are gonna back us up to the nearest city with a hospital an intern us all."

"Ya crazy sonuvabitch, who sez that?"

"A guy up there."

"I been vaccinated, anyhow."

The train slowed down and up jumped the sergeant.

"Grab ya junk, everybody. Line up in the aisles. Coats on, ya slobs."

The train stopped jerkily. Bobbing lanterns were seen through the windows and air that was fragrant, tangy, strange, came through opened doors. Voices rose against the windows, penetrating only as din.

Patiently, a little frightened, the men stood in the aisles, erect at first, leaning furtively against the seats after fifteen minutes. Some put bundles and satchels on the floor.

"Come on, you flatfeet. Step lively, now."

The men stumbled out of the coaches into air so thin, so cold, it was like another element.

"Line up there. Line up, goddammit. Line up, everybody. Inta line."

The train was on a siding, and the dim lights from the coaches eked out the puddles of illumination spilled by lanterns and flashlights. Blurry gray figures became khaki overcoats and polished boottops in the light. Officers stood in groups and looked at sheets and sheets of papers while the draft stood shivering in ignorance. Marvin clung to his suitcase, one bond to life as it had been.

("All right, now. No, they havent et. Ask Sherlock. Oh, captain. In the morning. Seven hundred and eighty-two.")

"Aharr-r-n-chun! Le-yafft fess! Furr-rd hunch!"

The twin lines fell apart. Startled, men faced every which way, stumbled against each other, tripped over suitcases.

"Fa Jesus' sakes—as ya were, as ya were! When I say attenshun everybody stannup straight. When I say lef face, toin so ya facin leff. When I say furrord march, for God's sake step out with ya lef foot an walk. It's as simple as that. Now!

"Aharr-r-nchun. Leyafffft fess! Furr-rd hunch!"

The line got under way, Marvin somewhere near the middle among strangers. A frozen dirt road underfoot, many trees all about, lights winking in the distance. Lights close by as the road turned and a gate, a sentry, bayonet fixed and gleaming. Marvin felt a thrill from coccyx to occiput. The men who had saved their little flags began pulling them out, and Marvin did too. The staff had broken.

"Fa God's sakes put them goddam flags away, ya look like a bunch a immigrunts!"

The sergeant's admonition was hastily obeyed. Marvin casually dropped his gift of the D.A.R. into the road.

The column passed low wooden buildings, all illuminated. A few soldiers were about. Mostly they watched the draft pass by silently. A few jeered:

"Caught cha, hah?"

"Got caught inna draft, an dont they look sick!"

"I want my mommer."

"You're in the army now ya not behind the plow ya sonuva-bitch ye'll never get rich ya inna army now."

Across a wide field. Another barbed-wire barrier and gate and overcoated sentry, bayonet agleam. Lights, like those around ammunition plants, and two-story buildings in a row a hundred yards away.

"Colyum halt. Raff-fess. Raffess, goddammit! Cantcher unnerstand English? Right—face. Toin right."

A longish wait again while officers and noncoms conferred.

"Count off!"

After two or three attempts sandwiched between explanations, the line was successfully enumerated by individuals. In sections of two hundred the men were marched through the lights and through the gates. Marvin was in the second lot, had to stand in the cold, feeling for once in his conscious life acutely insignificant and helplessly dependent, his every thought and emotion alien to surroundings. It was worse than any new job, worse than school even. He envied the soldiers striding past in heavy boots, envied them not only their freedom of motion but their ability to salute with snap, turn corners sharply.

Commands at last and the gang stepped forward, into glare, through a gate, to a vast, barnlike building smelling of camphor, pine, and wood smoke. In single file the men shuffled past a long counter, received each a canvas cot, folded and tied; two blankets, a crackling tablet of pillow; checked off by name and number

again; lined up in the darkness once more; at last, marched up to and into one of the big buildings.

"This colyum upstairs, this un right isside."

Marvin was on the ground floor. A vast room of raw lumber, naked wiring fruited at intervals with light bulbs. Warmer than outdoors, but not much.

"Line up in the middle, there. Now count off by fours—one, two, three, four. Ready? Count off . . . Okay. Odd men to the left, evens to the right. Now men, set up your cots. We seem short of mattresses and pillows but you wont be here long. Fold your blankets and put them at the end of the cot."

A baby-faced young officer talking, standing at the door.

"Dont lose your cards and papers. As soon as you're ready you eat."

One man raised his hand, schoolboy fashion, waving violently.

"Do you want to ask a question?"

"Please, mister, where's the terlet?"

Groans and laughter from the double line. The lieutenant conferred with the sergeant.

"Right to the end of the street. Ya cant miss it." The sergeant.

"Are you in a hurry? Very well, make it snappy. And, men, you will please learn to regulate the calls of nature so they will not interfere with duty," said the apple-cheeks, seriously. "Now get those cots up."

Marvin untied the bleached khaki cords of his cot, straightened out the contraption, legs up, pulled apart and adjusted the braces, turned the job right side up and folded his blankets at the foot, his suitcase on top of them. The lieutenant walked past, nodded, and smiled at Marvin.

"Good work, soldier."

Marvin gulped, tried to salute, was overcome by a sudden stage fright. Good work, soldier! Jesus, maybe he'd be a sergeant himself soon.

They lined up again, marched out, were led to another building mostly open shed, where fires glowed and the smell of food expanded every nostril, contracted every gut. Tin plate and aluminum mug; strong black coffee in the mug here; hash on the plate there, and mashed turnips and rice. Big wooden boxes filled with white bread cut in thick slices. Marvin took three. Trestle tables and benches. The men ate animally.

Two in blue overalls poured more coffee from big pots slung on a stick; from a bushel basket another tossed every man a doughnut.

"Boy, this is livin high."

"Please passa cream, sweetheart."

"White meat or dark?"

Back to the barracks. "Lights out in ten minutes."

Marvin took off his shoes, his overcoat, coat and pants. He spread his blankets, topped them with his overcoat, folded his pants to supplement the pillow. Shoes off, he climbed under the blankets. Across the way one man was on his knees, praying. One guy was putting on pajamas, for God's sakes.

Blip, and the lights went out.

It was goddam cold. The cold air came up through the canvas of the cot. Marvin got up and put a blanket beneath him. Snores were already beginning.

A soft thud.

"Jeezt, I fell outa bed."

"Lissen, youse guys! Pipe down an shut your goddam mouths. You're in the army now an by Jesus you cant cut up no jack while I'm ridin herd on youse, you lousy yellerbelly sons of bitches. Quiet now, or by God I'll make you sweat for it termorrer."

That was the sergeant. That guy had guts. That guy was-s-s. . .

"Now cough."

"Now lean over and pull your cheeks apart. Okay."

A long line of naked men, shuffling on tender feet over rough floor boarding, posturing and cutting obscene capers at the orders of half a dozen crisp, curt army surgeons, booted and spurred, reflectors on foreheads and stethoscopes looped around necks.

"Stand on your left foot. On your right foot. Say a-a-ah."

Tap-a-tap on chest, insult of cold metal on ribs.

"Open your mouth. Tsk-tsk. Ever go to a dentist?"

"Yes, sir, to get some rottin teeth—"

"You need fixing up. Get this now, sergeant . . ."

Shivering on a chalk mark. "How far down can you read? Now hold the card over the other eye. Can you hear this watch ticking . . . ?"

A long line of naked men on tender feet. Some with dead-white corns on cramped pink toes; some furred like the beast; some smooth and milky-white as girls. Some with tanned arms and shoulders; some tattooed and some circumcised. Some pimpled, some scarred.

"One hat, six an seven."

"Six an seven, ri!"

"One blouse, thurry-six."

"Thoidy-six, ri!"

But no gun, no bayonet. Marvin wasnt a soldier yet. He looked something like one, talked like one surely. He wore the itching trappings from heel to head, hide to overcoat. He walked stridingly, saluted elaborately, smoked Camels and called bread "punk"; Tuesday's stringy viand, "corn willy," and Friday's prandial gesture to the fast, "goldfish." He learned squads left and right; the about-face cunningly executed by a locking of instep with Achilles tendon; by the numbers; as you were. He arose in the dark and cold and went to bed earlier than he had ever the last half of his life.

After the evening meal he went to the Y hut, center for Christian good times and weak five-cent cocoa. HAVE YOU WRITTEN YOUR MOTHER TODAY?

Cigarette smoke, songs, almond bars, ruled writing paper with the red triangle. Magazines without covers.

Then Marvin was a soldier with a gun, gun, gun. He had a number too. His civilian clothes went home, cutting the navel cord that bound him to \$80 a week, pickups, midnight suppers and silk shirts. He wrote the first news-bearing letter of his life. He kept his gun clean as instructed, and learned to right shoulder, port, ground and stack arms.

He had new buddies, for the men had been graded according to size, and Birnbaum was rarely seen; then, when seen, he wore a corporal's stripes and was exercising a typewriter instead of a rifle, goddam office worker.

"Them guys shouldnt be let to wear uniforms as if they was soldiers. A buncha male stenogerfers an male cooks an all wearin uniforms like they was fightin men, for cripe's sake."

He wrote home that the army wasnt bad but the food was lousy and the underwear itched and there were no sheets and the hours were long and the work hard and did anybody buy the Saxon yet the war would last ten years but wait till the Americans got over there Over There and it wouldnt last a month and the pay was \$30 a month but he'd assigned half of it to Mom and he was paying \$5 on a Liberty bond so please send some cigarettes and stuff.

Mother wrote slantingly and pale blue that Marvin was terribly missed and that he should take care of himself, not get his feet wet, and the store was doing pretty good considering everything was regulated and she was sending a package.

The package came and Marvin was a swell guy, a prince, a pal if ever there was a pal. Boiled ham, a boiled tongue, brick cheese, strawberry jam, ten packs of Humps—Marvin and his squad consumed the lot after taps, all except the Camels.

Marvin's squad was Jake Haas, corporal (shipping clerk); Bill Fenstermeier (plumber); Nunzi Bacigalupo (cobbler); Marvin Lang (My Marvin, my boy, hello, son); Frank O'Neill (student); Irving Krump (salesman); Stanley Mackiewicz (pastry cook); William Smith (laborer).

Marvin gave the corporal two extra packs of cigarettes and half the brick cheese because he was a good guy; Haas was a regular fellow.

"Gee, ma, why didn't Pop come down too?"

"You know how it is, Marvin. My, how brown you got. I thought I'd never of got here. Is that one of your bosses?"

"He's a looie. One gold jigger on his shoulder, a looie, a shavetail; one silver jigger, a louie, a first lieutenant; two silver, a capn. Oh, never mind. If they got shiny boots on an mustaches, they're officers."

"Isn't it terribly damp here?"

"Sure it is but we got tough quick. That's the horspital there. Never been in it. Fella in my barracks is in there now with his fingers almost off from when his baynet slipped. Gee, send me some stuff from the store again."

"I will. Is this your house?"

"No, further down the street. They're alla same. Hi, corp! That's my corporal, Jake Haas. Sort of a foreman."

"Why aint you a foreman? You was in the shop."

"Gimme a chanst. Anyhow, what's the use of lookin for trouble? Ast anybody, the private he's got the cinch. Nothin to worry about. Absolutely everything a guy does is told to him, an all he's gotta do is do it when ya told, an somebody else does the thinkin an the worryin. Ya get up, wash, shave, eat, crap, work, rest play an sleep all in a gang when ya told to. Ish kabibble. Send me some limberger next time."

"But you never liked it. I bet them beds never gets aired."

"I wanna smear it in a guy's shoes I dont like. Sure they do, evry day."

"How a bunch of men can run a place like this without a woman's help, I dont see. Nobody to make up the beds the way they should be, or to dust—looka that dirt on that window sill."

"Sa-ay, woman's help! For Chr—Pete's sakes, a woman wouldn be safe with this bunch a hyenas."

"Oh, Marvin, dont get into no rough ways, will you? Promise you'll stay my own nice, clean boy, always a gentleman like I taught you. Pick out the nice boys to associate with."

"My God, this aint no Sunnay-school picnic, ma. Oh, this is the Y hut where we buy candy an cigarettes an cocoa an dont the dirty robbers soak you! That's the Kay of See hut run by the Cathlics. They give everything away, cigarettes even. Smart trick, huh? That's the perade ground. That's compny headquarters that's the this and that's the that an that's an over there's . . ."

"Oh, my train! Cant you come to the train with me?"

"Never a chanst. Slong, ma. Send me somethin soon."

"I'll give your love to your father. Kiss me, son."

"With all them guys lookin? Oh, well, here—slong, Mom."

"I'll give your love to your father."

"Yeah, do that. I wisht he'd of come down. I'll come up an see you."

"For Christ's sake, ya buncha lily-fingered pimps, is that a baynet ya got there or a French tickler? If you went up against a buncha Heinie boy scouts even—boy krauts ha ha ha—like you done juss then you'd all be in hell before—lissen, get mad. Git ma-ad. Them's Huns, Huns, an they just raped your old woman, your mother. They stretched her out on a table an the Huns marched up an took turns an then they cut the tits off her, see? They may look like bags a straw but them's Huns, Huns. One of these days they will really be Huns an ya gotta learn to stick em. They got your buddy. They nailed him to a choich door an cut his pecker off an stuck cigarettes in his eyes an put lighted matches under his tongue. An that's what'll happen to every goddam one of you that's took prisoner by the Huns, see? So now lemme see a little more pep when you go at em again. Sock the basteds by the nummers. Ready? Thrust—one-two—"

"Father in Heaven, Lord God of Hosts. Thou omnipotent one, look down upon these Thy sons we paray Thee with favor. Guide them and protect them and steel their arms-suh, make true their eyuzz, as they prepare for Armageddon where they shall come face to face with the Antichrist and smite them down even as blubblub. Joshua Samson Peter. So shall they wash off the

stain of Satan from Thy footstool in blood, blood, blood righteously spilled blood blood blub blah blur."

"Kaypee for us tomorrer."

"Kaypee the hell!"

"Snot so bad. No drill. An all ya wanner eat."

Kaypee it was. Peeling potatoes and turnips. Peeling them, Marvin quickly learned, by chopping each root and tuber into a cube, throwing two-thirds away.

"Hey, buddy, that aint no way to cut up a side a beef."

"Who the hell ast you for any lip?"

"Go crap in your messkit. Looka, dont be a dope. Lemme showya."

"Back to your pertaters, soljer. I din ast to let me show you how to peel them, did I?"

"Dont be a sap. Look, just lemme show ya. We can cut out a couple a nice little tenderloins for ourselves."

"Whaddayamean?"

"See, ya donno, do ya? You aint a meat cutter, are ya, now?"

"Haah uh. I woiked in a sausitch factry over to Kearny so I puts down butcher an they sticks me here."

"Who sticks ya here?"

"Poissonell ofcer. That's why they ast you all them questions about what woik are ya expoit in."

"Yeah? Does at get you anywheres? No; look, kin we sneak to a fire anywheres an broil em? Coupla beaunts, them lil steaks."

"Gimme em, I'll do it. Like em rare too?"

So all those damfool questions really meant something. Gee, suppose they put Marvin in the kitchen on account of being an expert butcher an delicatessen storekeeper. Or looka here. He was an expert automobile man; he'd put that down, too, together with a horse driver. Suppose they made him chauffeur to one of the big muckamucks in Cadillacs; better yet, a truck driver going to Trenton, Philadelphia, New York. No more gun totin or squads east. . . .

"Atten-shun! When I say attention it means pencils down and evry man looking at me. When I say go this time I want you to put a dot in the *circle* but *not* in the triangle *or* the square, and a *cross* will be *in* the square, the triangle and the circle. A dot only in the circle, and a cross that's in all three. GO!"

(Of all the goddam silly crap in the world this is the god-

damndest a dot in the circle but not in the other two figures and a cross that's in all three for the love of Jesus.)

"Atten-shun. When I say attention it means pencils down and all eyes on me. We now turn over the paper to test three. This is a test of common sense. There are sixteen questions. Three answers are given to each. Look them over and then put a square, no, I mean a cross, *cross*, in the square before the answer that in your judgment is best. You have ten minutes—GO!"

(If plants are dying for rain you should: water them, ask a florist's advice, put fertilizer on them. For the love of God are we gonna be soldiers or florists? Or farmerettes, maybe. *Water em*. Okay. A house is better than a tent they must think we are all boobs or nuts because it costs more *no* because it is made of wood *no* because it is more comfortable X! It is better to fight than to run because it is more honorable because cowards are shot because you may get shot in the back. Nuts. They're all right. Here goes X X X. We see no stars at noon because they are so much fainter than the sun because they have moved around to the other side of the earth because they are hidden behind the sky. Jesus Christ, what dummies they must think we are. Because they are on the other side of the earth. Anybody who ever looked into the front of a grammar-school geography knows that. Balls.)

"Atten-shun. When I say attention pencils down and all eyes on me. When I say go we'll dive into test eight. Note the sample sentence. People hear with the eyes ears mouth. Ears is underlined because it makes sense. Underline the word that makes sense. GO!"

(Boston is in Connecticut Rhode Island Maine Massachusetts. The Arabian is a kind of horse cow sheep goat. None, it's a kind of a nigger. Write it down. Turquoise is usually yellow brown green blue. Must mean tortoise. Green it is. Nuts. Dioxygen is . . . an eight-sided figure is . . . Darwin Falstaff Rodin nuts nuts nuts.)

Release at last.

"What's the idea of all that junk? There was words that I never heard of an I aint no half-wit neither. I guess I never had no trouble makin my way around."

"Aw, them was Heinie words. It was a catch to see if anybody knows Dutch an may be a spy, see?"

"Deep stuff, hey?"

"According to your questionnaire you've had quite a career. Let me see, an expert butcher, three years; auto and motor truck driver, two years; factory worker, hm-m-m-m Better than thirteen years all together. You are—twenty-two years old, and finished

the eighth grade. You must have been nine years old when you finished school. Why didnt you go on to high school and college?"

"I hadda work, captin."

"Too bad, too bad. Economic stress robs the world of another genius."

"Yes, sir."

"Oh, you admit it. How old were you when you finished school?"

"Sixteen, sir."

"So you crowded thirteen years of experience in six trades into five or six years of actual work?"

"Yes, sir. I worked at some of them jobs together."

"For instance?"

"Well, I drove a wagon the same time I was cuttin meat in a butcher's, deliverin, you see, an while I was a machinist foreman I drove my own car."

"Oh, now I understand. Well, you want to be transferred from the infantry to what, Lang?"

"Captin, you know—I—well, I'd like to cut meat again."

"Well, I should judge if you stayed in the infantry you'd have lots of opportunity to cut meat—Hun meat—with a bayonet."

"Yes, sir. I mean no, sir. When I was on kaypee an sees them cuttin up as good meat as they ever was like it was a steamfitter wipin a joint or choppin wood, honest, captin, it hurts a guy who knows his trade to see—"

"All right, Lang. That will do. We'll see what we can do for you."

"Yes, sir, and thanks, captin. An listen, if you get me back cuttin meat I'll trim you out some of the nicest little tenderloins you ever saw an hang em for you an slip em to you when—"

"Inat will do, Lang."

"Yes, sir!"

Marvin saluted, made his about-face, and marched from the room. Marvin guessed he'd get his transfer all right. That little mention of tenderloins—the captain looked like a man who liked his victuals. Showed that Marvin was appreciative . . .

Marvin didnt take much interest in his gun the next few days. In a little while he would say good-bye to all that, and be snug in a nice warm kitchen, a good cleaver in his hand again.

Marvin still packed his rifle at the end of a week. Glum, pessimistic, he put in for leave once more. Got it. Forty-eight hours' leave, with fare paid, an money in the pocket. Hot dog!

Admonition.

Inspection.

Shoes shined? Shoes shined. Blue cotton cord correctly on hat?

Yes.

"At ease. Back for retreat Saddaday."

"Yes, sarge."

The train crawled. Marvin felt that all eyes were on him. His belted overcoat fitted him well. It was Irving Krump's. Marvin eyed the girls. But mostly the girls eyed a young squirt whose white hatband proclaimed him a student aviator. Marvin wondered where the hatbands could be bought.

The terminal. Full of soldiers. Some just off trains, some getting on. This train for Yaphank. This train for Camp Dix. Over there over there tarara.

Marvin walked up Thirty-fourth Street to Sixth Avenue, to Fifth. All the flags in the world were out on Fifth Avenue. He saw some French soldiers in red pants. More goddam officers. Guys with easy jobs, you could bet, and spurs to keep their feet from slippin off roll-top desks, like the fellow said. Salute salute salute. Rich guys went to college and their old men got the pull to have em made officers.

"Hello, soldier! Had your dinner?" An oldish dame in a uniform, sort of.

"No, mam."

"There's a canteen right down the street two blocks and a block to your left. Waffles and chicken today. Go right in."

"Hello, soldier! Want a ride?"

Heck, another oldish dame. In another sort of uniform. Driving a Packard touring car. Two other doughboys in it. No room in front.

"Sure, I dont mind if I do."

"How'd you like to see the town? Stranger here?"

"Heck, no. Born in Br—Greater New York."

Marvin leaned back in the car. He eyed the soldier beside him, was covertly inspected himself.

"What's your outfit, buddy?"

Credentials exchanged. Then another soldier was hailed, accepted the ride.

"What's your outfit, bud?"

The car shot forward. "Of course you boys know this is Fifth Avenue. It has been renamed the Avenue of the Allies. That's Madison Square Garden and the famous Flatiron Building ahead. Isn't it a grand day? If there's anything you want to see especially, just let me know."

"A whorehouse," whispered the man on Marvin's left and he damn near choked, Marvin did.

"Otherwise I'll just show the sights as we see them. Even if you have seen them before they must be good again to see after all the hard times you've had in training camp. Expect you'll go over soon? I'd give anything to be Over There. I have a brother Over There. Captain Ray Cooper. In case you ever meet him tell him you were out riding with Cecil . . ."

It was dark when the canteen was reached. Music and dancing and a cafeteria with some pretty swell chickens waiting on the soldiers and the sailors, all free.

Free cigarettes too. Beds a dime a night, two sheets on every bed, the girl said, but—

"Do you go with it, blondie?"

"As you were, soldier. No rough stuff."

Marvin grinned and found a place to eat. Gee, this is the life. Satiated, he watched the dancing. Ten men to every woman, and most of the women scrawny old crows. He wandered out. A taxicab driver hailed him.

"Where to, bud? Out fra good time?"

"Take me down to the Battry. Whaddaya mean a good time?"

"Oh, whaddever ya think a good time is. This Nyawk is a big boig, bud. It can suit all tastes."

"How about a drink?"

"Well, it's agin the lore to give a soljer a drink, buddy, but I know a dump downtown, right on the way to the Battry."

The cab zigzagged southward and eastward, passed Tompkins Square, drew up to a door in a block of warehouses and tenements.

"Two bucks, buddy."

"Where's the joint?"

"Lessee the two bucks. I'll tell you wheres the drinks when I get my dough."

"Here, an a quarter."

"Mucha bliged, buddy. Go right to that door an ring the bell high onna left. Tell the guy Joe sent yer."

Marvin got out into the old New York smell of soot and garbage. He rang the bell and the door was opened on the instant.

"Joe sent me."

"Right upstairs."

Marvin climbed a gloomy flight toward a light that burned dimly. At a metal door with opaque wire-glass he knocked. A small pane lifted.

"Joe sent me."

Through the door and into a boxlike room. Another door, and smoke and smells came to meet Marvin. A big loft room, with tables all around and a bar all across one side. The place was full of soldiers and sailors and men in tuxedos and women in evening dress. A waiter steered Marvin to a table.

"Rye with a beer chaser."

A girl came up. Her face was blue-white with powder, her eyes rimmed with black. Blue eyes rimmed with black, and her lips were tomato red. Her pink dress, without sleeves, shimmered with spangles. She sat down, elbows on the table, leaning toward Marvin and compressing her breasts between her arms so the crease came up to her throat.

"Gee, you're a nice kid. Whatsya name, soljer?"

"Mike. What's yourn?"

"Gladys. Whaddaya drinkin? Make mine a same, Lew."

She smiled at Marvin. Marvin guessed she was a tart. Her drink arrived and she gulped the whisky, lingered over the beer.

"Two bucks, buddy."

"Pay the waiter, big boy, an make him stop bothrin us."

Two bucks again. Jesus. Marvin gave the waiter two bucks and a quarter. He peeled the money from the roll in his pocket without removing it. He had \$22, all in ones.

"Whaddabout nother lil drink?"

Marvin signaled the waiter. Two more of the same.

The girl put an elbow on his shoulder. He put an arm around her, closed the hand on her breast.

"Gee, you're a sweet kid. I love you, soljer."

"Not so bad yourself, kid. Here's the drinks. Cheerio."

"Down the hatch . . . say, this is a slow dump. Lets go dancin."

"Nuts. It's a slow dump awright but I been marchin too much. Gotta give the dogs a rest."

"Tired, sweet boy? Wanna go beddy-bed?"

"Gotta room?"

"Right around the corner."

Marvin put on his coat. The girl vanished for a moment, came back muffled in fur. She took his arm as they went out. On the street the girl tugged impatiently at Marvin's arm, heading him toward First Avenue.

"Lissen, darling," she said. "I'll show you a real good time. What's more, I aint sick. I take good care of myself. You aint sick, are you? Cause I'd kill the guy that give me anything."

"I'm all right," Marvin said.

"An ya got a little jack, aintcha?" She slowed her pace.

"I got enough. What's this gonna cost me?"

"I'm patriotic, I am," Gladys said. "Gee, I love you. I wisht I could stay with you for nothin but a goil's gotta make a livin. Gimme ten bucks an I'll show ya the time of yer life."

"Ten bucks, my eye. Ya think I'm a general?"

"Lissen, kiddo. A goil's *gotter* make a livin. Gimme ten bucks an I'll betcher ya never spent it for better. I know tricks. You'll remember it frever. I dont know where ya was gonner sleep to-night an I betcher ya din know yerself but—"

Where he was going to sleep tonight! In his own bed. In his own bed at the top of the stairs, with Mom and Pop in the room next door and the delicatessen smells hungering him.

"Lissen, kid, I cant sleep with you. I—I got another date."

"Lissen, feller, make it five bucks. I can get plenty hot for five bucks because you get me, kinder. But a goil's gotta make a livin—"

"Sure, I know all about that. Shut up that tune. I'm gonna go home. I almost forgot all about it but I'm gonna go home."

"Ya big mommer baby. Gotter git home! Wastin my time like this! Looker, buddy, there's my place, just two doors down."

"Lemme go. Take your hands offen there, you bitch."

"I'll bitch you, you fairy."

The two stood face to face now. The girl clutched her coat to her chin.

"Lissen," Marvin said. "I'm gonna go home an that's the God's honest truth. I bought you a coupla drinks, din I? An I'll give ya two bucks for ya time. Thats moren square, aint it?"

"You'll gimme two bucks for nothin an you wouldn gimme five bucks for a whole night of jazz?"

"Here it is. Take it."

Marvin stuffed the bills in the fist that clutched the furs. He turned and plunged across the deserted street. Was he a sap for this? A boob? Gladys—what were the tricks she'd have shown him? A cute kid, nice tits—

"Cab, buddy?"

"Staten Island ferry quick."

Marvin braced himself crosswise on the seat, as the cab picked up Christie Street, headed south. Gladys! Tricks! Mom . . . Pop . . .

The Bowery, Park Row, the Battery.

"Here yar, buddy. Ya kin just catch the last boat."

Marvin gave the driver a dollar and all the loose change he had, ran for the boat. It was cold, biting cold. The harbor was dark. Liberty's torch extinguished. He did not philosophize on that.

"Shshshshine?"

"Shine em up, boy!" said Marvin. He was *going home*.

It is a long ride to Staten Island and Marvin went out on deck to watch New York become a hazy panorama. The city was dark save for minute pinpricks of light here and there. Gladys! The pungent smell of horse and garbage made him think of Goldschmidt's stable.

St. George and the owl trolley. Schurz Avenue. Schurz Avenue was dark. The store was closed. Marvin pounded on the door. Pretty soon he saw a crack of light appear in the rear. Then an oblong of light, with Mother silhouetted against it. She came slowly through the store.

"Who is it? Who's there?"

"Open up for the United States Army!"

Fern leaves of frost on the panes and Mom peering through the icy foliage with widening eyes. "Marvin," and frenzied fumbling with the lock.

"Marvin!"

The old woolen wrapper. Marvin hugged his mother to him. Father came into the store, and Marvin kissed him.

"My, how big an grand you look . . . Marvin, my boy . . . Come in, it's cold here . . . What a surprise . . . How long kin you stay? Carl cut him some food in the store . . . You've been drinkin, Marvin, but I guess you're old enough to take care of yourself . . . I'll make you some coffee . . . It's cold in here coal is so hard to get. . . . My goodness what a thin overcoat no linin. . . . Look how brown he is . . . Put your feet on the chair. . . . Marvin, my boy!"

To hell with Gladys.

The automobile was sold and the money in the bank in his name. Things changed. People had to stand in line to get sugar and flour. Oleomargarine was higher than butter ever was before the war. Before the war. Coal was hard to get. Thank goodness, there were lots of wooden boxes and a quick heat could always be produced in a minute. But it didnt last. Prices were so high you wouldnt believe it. Even the people with big wages kicked. No profit in anything. No one would pay more than a dime for a ham sandwich and they expected margarine on it at that. Not

a penny profit. Taxes were away up and they deviled you all the time to buy Liberty bonds and War Savings stamps and to give to the Red Cross and the Y.M.C.A. . . .

(To hell with the Y, now. Dont give em a nickel. They're gettin rich collectin at both ends.)

Do you think you'll have to go to France? With all them millions of soldiers training why did they have to take a woman's only son and send him to the war? Look at Henry Ford's son—he got off from being drafted. Sure, Henry Ford got his son off and is he any better an American than I am just cause he has billions? Oh gord forgive us all but I would rather have my son sick in bed at home than in France getting shot at and maybe coming home blind or without arms. . . .

(For cripe's sake, Ma, you're spoiling my appetite.)

Sure, Margaret, let's be cheerful. Tell us about everything, son. I tried to get down to see you but I got to keep on the job. God knows what things are coming to. Can't call your soul your own. I guess we will wind up in the poorhouse. Well, I haven't much longer to live but, thank God . . .

Marvin went upstairs to bed and sat on the old rocker while his mother made up the bed for him, and took the blankets from her own so the smell of mothballs wouldn't annoy her boy. Marvin's old flannelette pajamas. It felt funny to put on pajamas. Loose floppy things on the legs, after tight puttees by day and tight drawers at night. Aah, the bed was grand. Goodnight, Mom, goodnight, Pop. Don't wake me. . . .

He dreamed thrashingly about Gladys and awakened to daylight—in *his own bed*. In bed at daylight. He rolled his pajamas into a ball, dressed quickly, quietly went downstairs. What a dream!

Coffee on the back of the stove, just like always. Oatmeal, and the top of the bottle on it for you, and white sugar too, my son.

Marvin got some paper from the store and while breakfast was being dished out for him—ten o'clock breakfast!—he wrapped his pajamas and shoved the parcel in his overcoat. (I'll chuck it off the ferry.)

Marvin sopped crumbcake in his coffee and then went into the store. My boy. Yes, quite a soldier, Marvin. Marvin, you don't know Mrs. Gulbransen. They came after you went to camp. That'll be all for you now, madam? See the service flag I hung up for you, son? Well, you'll want to look the old town over.

Marvin walked out of the shop and wandered down to the

cartracks. Strange faces everywhere. People eyed him as he stood erect as if on parade, in his long coat. He canted his hat over his left eye and lit a Camel. Some kids came up and stood worshipfully before him.

"Gee, you're a soljer, ainchu, mister? Didja kill any Huns? Gimme a penny?"

Marvin walked down to Goldschmidt's. New gold letters on the windows. "Goldsmith's Meat Market." A service flag in the window too.

"Ach, Marfin! Mommer, mommer, komm schnell runter. Marfin! Mine gootness sutch a soljer already. Louie is auch in. Didnt you see Louie? He said he voot look for you. He only writes pustich carts. Look, mommer. Unser Marfin. Go upstairs, Marfin, und Mommer giff you a bottle beer. Sutch beer aber. Like horse-piss already. To get rid of der Kaiser we must drink it slops. Und no meat efry Toosday. Prices, du lieber! Und no more hamburger, Marfin. Liberty steak it iss now. Sutch dummheit!"

Belle Bay looked funny. Such a little dump. The streets so narrow, the houses so small and shabby. The church needed paint. The shell plant looked about the same. Soldiers on guard. Marvin walked slowly past and made vulgar noises at the guards.

Back to the shop. My son, Marvin. Yes, he's at camp. I dont know—when do you expect to be sent Over There, son? Two cans of vegetable soup, yes, mam. . . . Marvin, my boy, sit down; here next to the stove. You look half froze. How about some hot soup? Lunch is about ready. Bean soup like you always used to love. Doesnt the bread look gray? Oh, you don't have to start back so soon, so soon. You dont have to. Why, you just came. Cant you say you got sick or something? Marvin, my boy . . .

"Hey, Lang, the top kick wantsta see ya."

"He knows where to find me."

"Have a good time, feller?"

"Peachy!"

"Any tail?"

"They're beggin ya ta take it. Sassiety dames. Take ya pick."

Marvin hurried to report his return. (Look up Louie Goldschmidt, dont forget, after). The top kick was in his quarters, shaving.

"Ya lookin fer me?"

"Na! The less I see of youse guys—whatcher name?"

"Lang."

"Oh, yeah. Lang. We gonna make a cook outa you, Lang."

"Holy Jeez. A cook?"

"Sure. You're a butcher, ainchu? Report here after retreat with all your junk an duffel."

"Thanks, sarge. An say, sarge . . ."

"Yeah?"

"Ya aint kiddin me, are ya?"

"Hell, no."

"Any time I can fix you up with a nice steak, lemme know."

A soldier—well, a soldier is a guy who don't take lip from not anybody. A soldier isnt ascares of anybody at all. He takes what he wants, a soldier does. Mostly he gets it given to him. Cigars, cigarettes, candy, clothes, soap and razors, all a guy wants and more. Grub too. Women. Auto rides and magazines. And pay besides.

Marvin checked over his duds in barracks bag and knapsack, and found that somebody had helped himself to underwear and water bottle; took, then, these articles from the belongings of another soldier just sent to the hospital an hour before. Marvin reported to company headquarters and leafed over the blurry pages of carbon-copy general orders to thrill at the sight of his name in type and the fact of his transfer. Pack on back, barracks bag over shoulder, rifle slung over arm, eyes-right passing officers.

"Sergeant Ventura? Private Lang reporting."

"Put your stuff down, Lang. Hey, Binder, show Lang where he bunks."

"This way, bud. Well, no more standin revelly for you, hanh?"

"What, dont we stand revelly?"

"Hell, no."

"Gee, that's swell. That's the nuts."

"Oh, yeah? You gotta get up a hour before first call to git the grub ready."

(Sharp knives and cleavers again and the clop of the meat ax striking the big maple block after shearing through a side of beef. White apron again, good old white apron, tied twice around the waist. Slabs of bacon piled up like paving stones. Slice, slice, slice; tweet tweet of knife on stone again, and slice, slice, slice. Translucent white of fat and mahogany brown of lean.

(And kaypees to do the dirty work. Kaypees to scour the block and wash up! This man's army, oh boy, oh boy!

(Good beef, prime beer, beef Goldschmidt wouldnt have been

ashamed to sell. Roasts as big as you never saw, six-rib roasts. Stews? Big galvanized cans, gee-eye cans, filled with cubes of beef and fat. Chop chop chop. You didn't like stew? Then cut yourself a Delmonico and fry it in butter.

(Afternoons at the Y hut, deserted and quiet, the *Popular Magazine* and *Munsey's* without no waiting line. Or go down to the gate and buy a paper. Gee, that's a hot one. It says here in the *Globe* that the factories are shutting down because they have no coal and thousands are out of work and right next to it says you got to work or fight and a guy who aint workin has to go to jail.)

"Suffragettes? Holy Jeezt, they're nuts, Binder. A lot of women who want to be men, that's all, aint that the truth, sarge? If they get the vote next thing they'll wanta hold office. Lissen, would you stop for a lady traffic cop? Lissen. Say, lissen, what about a woman President? Or wait, that's too crazy; what about a woman governor? Would you live in a state with a woman governor? She'd have the cops all wearin lace on their pants an squirtin perfume stead of bullets out their guns, hey, sarge?"

"Lissen a minnit, just lissen. If women were as good as men it stands to reason they wouldn need no laws to say they is. Did there have to be laws saying a man could vote or be a cõp or a foreman in a factry? Women are weakern men. It says so in the Bible, too. Men have always been on top. Oh, shuddup, you know what I mean. Aint I right, sarge?"

Or:

"If we do go over like Art says, it'll be moren a month before we get in the trenches an anyhow a cook or a butcher dont go up to the front line. I'd like to go to France ony to get a crack at them French hoors. And that's another argument about women votin, Binder. Suppose all them immoral women had the vote in France, can you eemagine what kind of laws they'd pass? An what about the hoors in this country? Wouldja give the hoors the vote same as yourself? But I bet we dont get over. I bet we stay right here in this göffersaken camp. Hell, the war'll be over in a coupla weeks. Ever since the Yanks got over there the Germans aint won a thing. They cant stand up against us. We can shoot bettern any nation. That's what fightin the Indians did for us. Them poor Heinies is made to go into the army if they like it or not. They aint got any spirit at all. But if—hey, Whitey, whaddaya know? Cmon over."

Then one night, there being no magician or vaudeville or musical comedy at the Y, it happened that Marvin, Jake Binder,

Whitey Spewak and Ernie Hopkins, greaseballs all, were playing black jack on Binder's cot when the yell "Tenshun!" sounded at the door. The men stood up rigidly and a sergeant came in with a new lieutenant, the Boss Captain, Smith, and Birnbaum who winked at Marvin.

"Lang!"

Marvin's heart jumped into his throat and wedged there. He stepped forward and snapped into attention again.

"Get your stuff, Lang."

Down went Marvin's heart, down to be dimpled against the hobnails in his bootsoles. What had he done, what had he done? He eyed the officers who were talking quietly together. Had they got wise to the sugar he had sneaked out to Mom when she came last Sunday? What else?

He saluted and walked to his cot. Mechanically he rolled up his belongings, took his trench mirror from the studding, put on overcoat and pack. The others still stood at attention, cursing the officers with their eyes. Marvin marched up to the group, but before he reached it the officers nodded to Ventura and went out, still talking.

"At ease," barked Ventura, and the greaseballs came on a lunge to find out what it was all about.

"I dunno," Marvin said, his throat fire, his heart ice. Ventura turned to the new sergeant and Birnbaum, who were rustling sheets of paper near the door. "Come along, Lang, step along," said the new sergeant, and all the others cried, "Jesus, sarge, what's up? Whatcha gonna do widdem?"

"Can't say, got me yorders," snapped the strange noncom, and Marvin obediently followed him out.

Strange things were happening in his chest and to his feet as he trailed along. He felt funnier still when he saw a long file of men in full marching order near GHQ, standing patiently. Soldiers going to the can or on some errand or another slowed down to eye the men, were shooed on their way by snarling noncoms.

"Wait here," the sergeant said.

Marvin turned to his nearest companion in the line-up.

"Whats up, soldier?"

"I think were bein shipped."

"Christ—Hoboken?"

"I dunno."

Another whisper out of the darkness.

"Here comes another detail. Boy, is this a picked crowd?"

Lights out bugled over the camp, and taps. Still the men stood, whispering. A hand-picked crowd, all right, Marvin thought. Evidently the best men out of every unit in camp. They were being rushed to France to fill out a regiment decimated at the front. They were being sent to Mexico. Revolution had broken out in Chicago. They were only going to parade in New York for the Liberty Loan drive to be held in April.

The strange sergeant hurried up, his pistol bobbing on his hip. "Lang? Come along."

Farther up the line a detail of two squads and another solitary figure stood apart. They were marched off, the ten men, through the camp to a quarter new to Marvin.

"Jesus, what are those things, cannon?"

"Goulash cannon."

The detail laid hands on the rolling kitchen, rocking it back and forth to free the wheels from the frozen mud. The sergeant led the way. Suddenly there were bulkier shadows, the smell of hot metal, low voices. Trucks. The goulash gun was rolled up on planks and stowed aboard. They went back for another.

"Lang, you and Kantner stick by these trucks. Detail; attention!"

The detail marched away into the black. Marvin turned to Kantner.

"What the hells up?"

"Soich me. You a cook?"

"Butcher. You?"

"Baker. We gettin shipped?"

"Les ast the driver."

They slipped around the truck, found the driver by his cigarette glow.

"Hey, buddy, whats up?"

"My dick."

"No kiddin, where we goin?"

"Dunno. Sealed orders. Haiti to relieve the Marines."

"Wheres that?"

"Down aroun Cuba someplace. Full of nigger cannibals."

Kantner shuffled through the shadow.

"I ast the driver of the truck behind, an he said we wuz goin to Rusher to fight the Bullshevitzky."

"Hell, buddy, nobody knows."

Now the tramp of feet on cindery ground, frozen. In column

of squads, all the selected men. Metal muffled by cloth clinked on leather, metal and bone. The men climbed into trucks.

Marvin fell asleep in his tarpaulin-covered field kitchen. Woke to the truck's lurch, and the roar of many motors.

Lurch and sway and sudden stop. Then smoothness under wheel, and less darkness, so Marvin, sitting on tailboard with trailing legs, could see behind him a wedge of road that grew longer. Kantner slept now. Marvin couldn't. Going places! Dawn came, and Marvin saw a truck forced off the road, and a farmer tugging at the reins of rolling-eyed horses, the man's eyes as bulging. Marvin waved to him but the farmer cursed earthily in terms of excrement, as behooves the farmer, who uses it and grows its raw materials.

Now the train poured through villages where shopkeepers stood at doors and looked after the trucks with wonder; some cheered and Marvin heard yells from far ahead of him as waking soldiers shouted ribaldry and stood balancing to relieve themselves over the sides of their conveyances. They passed women, and by the scandalized faces of some and the delighted outrage of others Marvin knew that the boys ahead were having their fun.

Once the long train stopped and Marvin hopped to earth, a thousand hot needles entering his body through his soles at contact with the macadam, and as far as he could see ahead of him were trucks with soldiers dropping off, and as far as he could hear were whistles peremptorily recalling them. It was rolling countryside they had stopped in, and now a courier came up on a motorcycle, noisy as a machine-gun nest, importantly cutting circles while his body leaned far out from his mount. A Cadillac, khaki with white numerals and flying a red flag with one star, came up upon the train.

"When do we eat when do we eat when do we eat eat eat?" followed the general's car, the salute of free men to authority. The sergeant climbed down and came around to talk to Marvin.

A lieutenant rounded the truck suddenly, and the two men snapped to attention. The officer looked terribly angry.

"Fire up and make coffee," he snapped. "Break out a couple of bags of bread. God damn this goddam army system. The old army game. Make it snappy."

"Yes, sir."

Salutes, and then blank looks, sergeant to Marvin.

"How the hell do we make coffee?" Marvin asked. "In what, with what?"

"Old army game is right! We cant make no coffee without water," the sergeant said, and strode off toward the head of the column at diminuendo pace. He returned heeling the lieutenant, who looked at the truckload of supplies and cursed and went away again, sergeant-trailed. Then the sergeant came back and climbed into the truck. He came out with two loaves of bread under his coat.

"We'll eat anyhow," he said. "Those bastards forgot an army eats. No breakfast for this outfit."

Motors roared and the train moved forward, avoiding towns, veering off sometimes along dirt roads where branches scraped trucktops, and allowed the soldiers hungrily to observe farmers coming from stables with buckets of milk, and scented smoke pouring from red-brick chimneys.

"I'll bet they're makin hot cakes an sausidges in there," Marvin said, pointing to a house. Kantner snorted, and dropped from the truck as it grated into second on a hill, to trot behind and stretch his legs. There was song ahead, now: "I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier"—"How ya gonna keep em down onna farm?"

At nearly noon the train halted again and whistles blew. There in a field was black smoke and figures in khaki, and already the men from the first trucks were in line and marching toward the smoke.

"By Jesus Christ, we eat," the sergeant swore. "Come on, you mugs."

The three men diagonaled across the humpety meadow, where a rolling kitchen belched interesting odors, and cooks doled out hot black coffee and oatmeal, sugarless and milkless, to be sure, into extended mess kits. The cooks were National Guardsmen, too young to be in the regular army, or too old, but very devoted to duty. The trucks were near the New York State line, that much was gathered.

So with the eating done the train rolled on, and after an hour stopped again and there were six ambulances by the roadside and a score of women in blue veils and white caps above overcoats of fur, who fluttered about fetching forth wicker hampers of doughnuts and sandwiches. A detail marched down the road and brought out caldrons of warm coffee as the women directed; great white-enameled, snug-lidded caldrons.

There were ham sandwiches and roast beef and corned beef, and most of the men, not hungry any more, threw away the bread and ate the meat, so the road was soon white with bread, white

bread; 200 feet of road paved with bread and butter. It was funny. The sergeant said that after the general had bawled out the commander of the train for not planning to feed his men the commander had telephoned ahead and probably they would have a meal served them now every five miles.

"Where are we going, did you find out?" Marvin asked, for he felt lonesome. Kantner was forever asleep, and Marvin needed talk. It is pretty bad to be all alone, and yet to know that there are hundreds of men close by. The sergeant said there was all sort of crazy talk but for himself he didnt care where they were going. It was jake with him, he said, to ride in a truck instead of pounding leather.

Pretty soon it was dark, and quite cold and raw. Marvin tried to sleep, his head on his barracks bag; next thing he knew the trucks were standing still, nose to taillight, and a lot of talking was going on. There were lights, from factory windows, Marvin saw. Then the command was given to pile out, and the men marched through a street. Most of the stores were closed, small inferior shops, selling fruit and bread and meat and delicatessen. The company marched right into a big armory, smelling of dust. It was dimly lighted, and rows and rows of cots were stretched across the back of the big drill hall. The soldiers stood in line for roll call, stew, doughnuts and coffee, and beds. Marvin slept until the bugle roused him. It didnt make any difference how badly anybody had to go to the toilet, he had to wait until he was marched there when the turn of his section came. Breakfast in the dark, and then back to the trucks which presently got under way, Marvin still sleepy, but nobody knew where the outfit was headed, although there was plenty of gossip, latrine gossip.

Back roads again and wild country, hill country with snow deep and blue in the hollows, and some of the trees with green tassels on their twigs. When Marvin's belly began to yammer for food the trucks stopped all up a long hill and over the crest, and not a house to be seen. Nobody was allowed out of the trucks, and after fifteen minutes or so they went over the hill one at a time at a signal waved from the top.

Marvin envied Kantner eating a doughnut he had put in his pocket, picking from his teeth the lint that had furred it. Marvin took his last pack of cigarettes from his bag and smoked as the truck went up the hill, and then he saw a great big lake, dirty with broken ice, and a broad white concrete dam. The trucks went down a rough, crooked little road that led off to one end of the

dam, and lined up in a wide meadow, with a rivulet running precisely through the center.

"What the hell is the idea?" Marvin asked Kantner, and Kantner said "Patience, my son, patience. You'll find out if you wait."

"Balls," said Marvin.

The soldiers were ordered to unload the trucks. Canvas and poles and boxes, crates, planks, two-by-fours, rolling kitchens. Officers and sergeants paced about, pointing at the ground, posting men who stood still and bewildered at arbitrarily chosen spots, where pretty soon tents started to go up; brown, circular tents.

"What the hell are we gonna do up here?" Marvin asked the sergeant, who was poking around the goulash guns.

"My guess is we got to guard this dam," the sergeant said. "I heard about the dams having to be guarded because the Heinies are throwing poison into them, just like they are putting ground glass in the sugar."

"What's the idea, to kill the fish?"

"No, sap, to kill the people. This is a reservoir."

A lieutenant came up and Marvin and Kantner and the sergeant snapped to attention. The lieutenant told the sergeant to get fires started in the stoves.

Marvin and Kantner got bags of charcoal from the stuff the supply trucks had unloaded; great heaps of bags and boxes and big, gallon-sized blued-tin cans. The sergeant studied the dampers, and pretty soon the men had fires going in the two rolling kitchens. It was good to be around a hot fire and Marvin and Kantner took off their overcoats. There were big caldrons that fitted into the body of the stoves, and Marvin and Kantner slowly filled them with water. They got the water from the river.

The sergeant was kicking at the piles of supplies, and then he ordered Marvin to open a dozen of the cans, which were filled with ready-mixed hash. Kantner was dumping bags of coffee into a cotton sack, putting the filled sack into one of the big kettles of boiling water. More charcoal had to be shoveled into the fire pits, and then Marvin had to empty most of the water out of four of the caldrons and dump in the hash. Gunny sacks were cut open and round loaves of bread taken out, and while the hash was cooking Marvin carved bread.

"Christ," he said to the sergeant, "I'm a butcher. I'm supposed to cut meat, not punk." The sergeant asked him if he'd rather be putting up tents, and Marvin saw that most of them were still

unwieldy bundles with which men were struggling with cold-cramped fingers, so he carved bread contentedly with the eighteen-inch knife. In one loaf he found a mouse, surrounded by a halo of green, and he threw it away—the mouse, not the whole loaf.

A couple of the officers, a captain and a major, came and stood by the warmth of the kitchens, and the men paid no attention to them. It was pretty soft for them, just waiting around and looking wise, until they had their grub ladled out to them and their beds made. It made a guy feel pretty nervous, walking past them, almost brushing the sleeves of their coats, those black-braided overcoat sleeves. The major wore spurs.

The sergeant spoke to the captain without saluting, and the captain yelled to a bugler, who sounded the mess call. The sergeant ladled out some hash for the officers, but they said they were going to a hotel to eat.

Marvin got a big spoon from the chest, and ladled out hash as the line of hungry soldiers filed by, thrusting out aluminum mess kits. They helped themselves to bread and Kantner helped them to coffee. The men squatted on the ground all higgledy-piggledy to eat, gobbling their food and then lighting cigarettes, although some came back for second helpings. Marvin, Kantner and the sergeant ate last, slowly, with relish, the sergeant producing a can of condensed milk for the coffee. Marvin felt proud not to be one of the mob.

When the men went back to work Marvin and Kantner had to scrub out the cooking utensils with hot water. The fires went out, and the sergeant said it was just like the goddam fools not to send coal.

The lieutenant came back, presently, the sergeant told him about the coal and the looie said somebody would have to see about it, and when the captain came up the lieutenant repeated about the lack of coal and the captain said it would have to be attended to.

"You'll have to put up a cook shack, too," the captain said. "I suppose they sent some carpenters along with this gang of yeggs."

"If they did they are listed as tailors," the lieutenant said. "I never saw a system like this."

Marvin saluted.

"I'm a butcher," he said.

"What the hell has that got to do with it?" the lieutenant asked while the captain lit a pipe.

"Well, they got me down as a cook," Marvin explained. "I was put in the kitchen to cut meat, and now look."

"Lucky bastard," the lieutenant said. "Who you got a pull with?"

"Well, I aint a cook," Marvin said. "Why did I get sent here for a cook? I dont know anything about it."

"That makes you a perfect army cook," the lieutenant answered. "What you dont know is what you are told to do."

The captain laughed, so Marvin saluted and did his about-face expecting the loogie to kick him in the behind.

Within the week a cook shack was built, after the latrines were finished. Electric wires were strung, and a bulb hung in every tent, including Marvin's which was divided down the middle by canvas. On one side Marvin and Kantner slept, and on the other the mess sergeant, whose name Marvin could not remember because he was "sarge" to most of the men, "greaseball" to most of the noncoms, "sergeant" to the officers and that left only his never-seen friends and family to call him by any part of Lloyd Christofel. He was from Pennsylvania and had run a lunch wagon with a helper in Bayonne before he was drafted. Nice guy, sarge, stocky and blond and no hell-raiser, although he couldnt see a joke.

The cook shack had a wooden roof, covered with tarpaper, with holes for the extended chimneys of the rolling kitchens to protrude. The roof covered a lot more than just the goulash guns—a long table, and an icebox made of planks, and a storeroom with padlocked doors.

Three times a week a truck came with fresh supplies for the kitchen. Fresh meat, beef and lamb and pork; lard and bacon and ham; once in a while chicken for Sundays. Flour and potatoes and carrots and turnips, rice and beets and stuff like that. Five-gallon cans of spinach and succotash and peas and blackberry jam and apple butter. Bread. There was a coal dump, soft coal, for the kitchen and the tent stoves.

There werent many men around at any time except mealtimes, of course. They were strung around the dam and in the woods on both sides of the reservoir and along the pipe line. Just perpetual guard duty, and the men were warned that if anybody took a leak or a crap above the dam he'd get a summary court. They were there to see that that water was kept pure.

Marvin was in camp two weeks when a bundle of letters was forwarded to him, all from his mother. The last one said as how

she had visited the training camp and was told he was gone, so she was sure he was in France, and the letter was pretty sloppy, something he hoped nobody would see, with "Marvin, my big baby" and "pray to God you will be returned safe to your loving mother" and that sort of stuff, so he burned it. After second thought he burned the rest, and then sat down to write her.

"Hey," he said, looking up from his letter, "where the hell are we, anyhow, sarge?"

"Ramapo Reservoi, I heard em call it. Why?"

"I thought I'd write home about it."

He wrote:

"Dear Mother and Father. Well, I am not in France. I guess I am pretty lucky, although I wish I could get a wallop at the Huns. I am on guard duty at Ramapo reservoi, which is very important work against spies who want to poison the water. Another fellow named Kantner and me and a sergeant run the kitchen for the company. It is all country. We live in tents. I dont know when we get leave. We have no Y hut. They said they might open a canteen. I would like for you to send me two cartons of Camels. Well, thats all I have to say for this time. So I will say good bye, olive oil and write to me soon. Your loving son Marv. Private Marvin Lang, No. 5676532, 451st Infantry, N.A."

This was the most important part of Marvin's life. It was to guide the rest of his existence like a lashed tiller. For this experience he was to owe, if it was a debt, evenings of pleasure and nights of worry, days of labor and of idleness that were sometimes joy and sometimes desperation. For this service to his country and the water company he was to become a member of the American Legion and forever to conduct and prepare the annual clambake of Kurzmeier Post No. 53; for this he was to become post commander one day, and for this he was to receive a premature cash bonus and a military funeral in his time's end, with a uniformed escort and a volley fired over his grave. This was the making of Marvin second only to the half hour spent in his making by Carl and Margaret (nee McAneny) Lang nine months and four days before his birth. They made Marvin the butcher boy. The United States National Army made Marvin Lang the man.

One day was much like another except there was a little more daylight. Up before first call to fire the stoves and prepare break-

fast; scrubbing caldrons and spoons to make ready for dinner. Rest for an hour, and the making of the midday meal; cleanup again and an empty afternoon before supper was prepared and disposed of. A few hours of idleness before sleep. On Saturday afternoons a truck called with a movie machine and a Y.M.C.A. guy gave a show if the weather was clear. He always brought a bundle of magazines, *Popular*, *Collier's*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Life*, *Judge*. Sometimes others, that had pictures of houses and gardens and junk like that but no stories except how some young dame raised enough stuff to can 189 jars of something in a 10 by 10 war garden and so won the heart of an aviator.

Nothing to do but chew the fat with Kantner, the sergeant, or the kaypees. No visitors were allowed, so nobody ever saw a woman although some of the fellows bragged about meeting girls up in the woods and laying them, then and there. But nobody believed them.

Spring came and the men played baseball, umpired by the officers, of course; nobody dared dispute lousy decisions. The pay was sometimes late, but there was no way to spend it, except in crap games, anyhow. Cigarettes, candy and extras like that had to be ordered from the truck driver, who made a profit on everything, the dirty bastard.

Once in a while a newspaper reached Marvin, but it was the same old stuff pretty much. Victories in France; a million and a half men in France; Mayor Mitchel of New York killed in an airplane accident; Marines in Haiti fight; raincoat scandal; heat wave. No Sunday auto rides. New draft law contemplated. All between 18 and 45 must register. Cubs win the pennant. Talk about Spanish flu. There was a long article in a New York *Sunday World* about the flu, and what people should do not to catch it. There were lots of medicines for flu advertised, and a lot of things you'd never think had anything to do with keeping flu away, like tooth paste and gloves and paper cups.

Mom wrote every week, and sometimes, say about every six weeks, Pop would send a postcard, saying prices were so high and the rules so strict he was going broke. Marvin had heard that all his life, so he didnt worry.

It was past the middle of October when Marvin was summoned by an orderly to the lieutenant's tent.

"Now what the hell is it?" Marvin asked. "Christ, they aint got a thing on me."

The orderly said he didnt know, and proved he didnt know

by hanging around the tent when Marvin reported to the looie. The looie stood up very straight and said, "Private Lang, you must prepare yourself for a shock. Take it like a man."

Marvin's knees knocked together. He could feel them hit and spring apart, and his throat went dry, as if all the spit ran into his hands, which got very wet. He swallowed, and then tried to say, "Yessir," but his voice squeaked. Had somebody seen him when he peed in the reservoir just for the hell of it, and was he going to be shot?

The lieutenant handed him a sheet of yellow paper with printing on the top of it. There was typewriting on it:

PRIVATE LANGS FATHER DEAD SUDDEN LEAVE POSSIBLE
MOTHER ASKS HERRMANN FUNERAL DIRECTOR.

"Pop?" Marvin said, and again "Pop?"

His throat closed up, and his mouth felt as if it had been starched.

"Have you any brothers or sisters?" the lieutenant asked.

"Ju-just my mum-mother—now," Marvin gulped. A tear lodged in the corner of his mouth, very salty.

"You may have leave at once, of course," the looie said. "I'll write your pass. Where do you live?"

"Staten Island."

"Any trucks going out this afternoon?"

"No truck today."

"Sir," reminded the officer. "I'll drive you to the Erie station myself. Beat it, Lang, and get yourself ready."

Marvin ran back to the cook shack. Kantner was asleep, and the sergeant was reading, his feet on the table.

"Got to beat it," Marvin said. "My old man kicked the bucket."

"Gee, that's tough," the sergeant said.

"The looie's drivin me to the train," Marvin added, putting a package of cigarettes in each pocket and feeling for his wallet. He put on his campaign hat, regretting a grease spot on the brim.

"That's certainly tough," the sergeant said. "How long you gonna be off?"

"I dunno. Well, so long. You can have them two packs of Camels left."

"Much obliged. Well, that's tough. Flu?"

"I dunno," Marvin said, and ran back to the lieutenant's tent. He wasn't there, but came back presently and gave Marvin his pass and railroad billet, looked him over, and said, "Come on."

They got into the major's Dodge, and the looie drove down the road away from the dam. The guard saluted as they passed, the looie waving a pass at him, and Marvin leaned back enjoying the ride.

"I got a car," Marvin said. "My old man sold it after I got into the army."

"Yes?" answered the lieutenant. "What does your father—I mean, what *did* he do?"

"Sold it and put the money in the bank for me," Marvin replied.

"I mean, what was his business?"

"He kept a store."

"Oh."

They came to a town and crossed the railroad tracks. The lieutenant said "Here's luck" as the automatic signal began to blink red and a bell rang. The station was just a block off the main street, and as they got there the train came in, smelling just like a goulash gun.

"Well, good luck." The looie stuck out his hand. Marvin shook it in vast surprise, saluted. "Thanks a lot for the ride," he said.

"The pass is for two weeks," the lieutenant said, as Marvin climbed into the coach.

He sat on the dusty green plush in an almost deserted car. The train stopped often, and it soon became dark. The conductor came to him and said there was a Red Cross canteen at the next station and if Marvin hurried he could get some grub which was free for soldiers. Marvin was on the platform at the next whistle, and jumped off before the train stopped. A woman in the white-veiled cap he had seen so often was looking up and down the train from the platform. She saw him and another soldier who got off from the last coach.

"This way, boys," she called.

Just inside the door was a stand. The two soldiers raced to it, and the woman gave each one a big paper cupful of coffee, two sandwiches wrapped in wax paper, an apple and a package of ten Piedmonts.

"Now run, and have a good time," she said.

"What's your outfit, buddy?"

Marvin told him. "My old man kicked off," he said. "I'm going home on leave. The old woman's all alone."

"Jesus, you can get a discharge for that," the other fellow said. "Sure thing. I wouldn't go back at all if I was you. Just wire

for an extension of leave an write in an application for discharge."

"No kiddin? An honorable discharge?"

"You're goddam tootin. Sole support widowed mother—its duck soup, buddy. Finee la gair."

The soldier was returning from leave. He was on guard duty along the Hoboken water front. He wore a sharpshooter's medal and was a first-class private.

They parted at the ferry. Marvin had expected to find New York in utter darkness, but the lights gleamed in the tall buildings. The ferry slowed down for a submarine chaser headed toward the bay, and there were army trucks on board, otherwise there was nothing warlike about the big town. In West Street Marvin hailed a taxicab and was whisked through the old familiar odors to the Battery, where he got the last Staten Island ferry.

Then he started to think of home and waxed a little fearsome. Death. Pop in a white apron, a little gray-greasy in the front, a low celluloid collar and a blue hook-on four-in-hand tie. Pop—Father—standing behind the counter against the Campbell Soup shelf, joking and gossiping with the customer, cutting off a hunk of baloney for some kid for a present. Pop the time the bank failed, knocking his head against the counter like he was crazy. Pop—Father. Never jolly, and usually worrying about going broke. Away back, in Brooklyn, Pop—Father—taking Marvin for a walk. Dead, now. White and waxy, and the house smelling of flowers. Where would he be laid out? Not in the store. It ought to be the store. Marvin saw him laid out on the counter, the glass cheese bell moved away to make room, and the scales. Stretched out on the counter, his arms crossed, in his Sunday clothes. He shivered, and started to remember away back when Grandpa died.

A girl sat down beside Marvin, chewing gum noisily. She dropped her purse. Stooped, when Marvin didnt move, to pick it up, jouncing him a little.

"I beg your pardon," she said. "Excuse it, please."

"Shut up, you bitch," Marvin said. "I'm not on the make."

"Well, of all the noive, of all the low-down stinkin noive," the girl said, getting up. "Believe me, I'm gonina tell the captin about you insultin me."

Pop—Father. Mother. Poor Ma.

The trolley swayed and pitched over the ill-kept tracks. Ever so often the pole jumped off the wire and the woman conductor, a faded lanky wench, climbed out wearily. The trolley wire pinged

and shot blue sparks, the lights inside the car flashing on and blinking out until contact was made, the motor hummed, and they went forward again. There were not many people in the car.

There were smiles for Marvin.

"Well, soldier, I guess you better hurry if you want to see any of this mans war. Yep, it's almost over now."

Marvin never answered. All smiles were alike to him. His belly felt full of cold, live snails. The outskirts of Belle Bay. Belle Bay. Schurz Avenue next. He pulled the bell, and climbed out, and his knees were wax.

Everything was dark in town. It was not only late, but there were the electricity conservation rules. A policeman's feet sounded frostily on the pavement, and as Marvin paused at the corner to get a grip on himself the cop passed, saluting carelessly. Soldiers were old stuff to him.

Marvin swallowed. The snails rioted. Twenty paces now. He hugged the buildings as if hiding. The store was dark. He stood with his hand on the doorknob, stopped by a strip of paper glued against the glass.

"Closed on account of death in family."

Marvin's stomach heaved, and he felt cold sweat run down his spine. He turned and walked up to the next corner, came back, stood in the doorway and then rattled the knob.

Forthwith light appeared in the back of the store and a womanly silhouette against it. Steps in the store, and then a face gray-green against the glass. The key grated.

"Why, it's Marvin. I wouldn't of known you, so big and in your soljer suit."

"Hello," said Marvin, and gulped. He took off his hat. "Pop's dead?"

The woman drew down the corners of her mouth and nodded dolefully.

"Is he—is he in there?"

"Your ma's in there. Dont you remember me? I'm Mrs. Loehr."

"Sure I remember you now. Well, I guess I better go in."

He walked through the store to the sitting-room door, up the worn little steps. The door closed behind him, and Mrs. Loehr hurried after him. "I'm sort of nervous in the dark store," she said, with a half giggle.

Marvin stood in the doorway. Mom—Mother—was sitting at the oak table. Two empty coffee cups, part of a coffee ring, the

coffeepot under its flannel, braid-bound jacket. Mom looked a hell of a lot older. Her hair was all white and there wasnt so much of it. She looked up at Marvin and didnt say anything. Then her chin wobbled.

"Marvin," she said, and started to get up, but slumped over the table. Marvin ran over to her, knelt on the floor beside her, and put his head down on the table too, because he was crying; crying with sobs that wrenched his belly, sucking it in until it scraped his backbone.

"Mom," Marvin said, salt tears running into his mouth and his nose leaking on the green tablecloth. "Mom."

Mom wept very loudly, drawing her breath in with a whoooosh, and shaking all over. Mrs. Loehr began to cry too, standing up against the doorjamb with her apron over her face.

Suddenly Marvin couldnt cry any more, and presently Mom looked up with composed face. She wiped her eyes on a corner of the tablecloth. Marvin wiped his on a khaki handkerchief and blew his nose on it.

"I'm so glad they let you come, Marvin," Mother said.

"They couldnt a kept me away," Marvin scowled.

"Poor Father."

"Yeah, poor Pop. What was it?"

"Flu. Three days. It was Saturday night he said he felt like he had a chill, so I give him hot lemonade and a mustard plaster and sweated him good. And a physic. Next day he couldnt no more than get his legs over the side of the bed. Stay in bed, I sez to him, but he insisted on getting up and that's what finished him, the doctor said. He got a chill again, and he all but burnt up with the fever. But he wouldnt give in. Margaret, he sez, you cant run the store by yourself an if people hears I'm sick they wont come near the place an me with the new fixtures to pay for. Did you notice the new fixtures, Marvin? All white porcelain and nickel and glass showcases with ice trays. They cost us twelve hunnerd dollars, but you wouldnt know the store. You must go out an see em. Afterwards, that is."

"Oh, they're just beautiful, Marv," Mrs. Loehr chimed in. "There aint a more modern store in Richmond."

"Yeah, I'll see em," said Marvin.

"Well, towards night he couldn stand it and he hadda give in. So I sent for Dr. Herbst an I couldn get him. So I sent for Dr. Morehouse, an he was out. Oh, it's been terrible. At last Old Man Schreck give me something to take the fever down, and he said

he'd try to get a doctor, an towards midnight a young Jew feller came, a nice feller, a Dr. Rabinowitz. I didn want to trust a young feller. I always say until a doctor has buried a couple dozen patients he dont know nothin. No experience. And worse yet, this young doctor, he couldn a been much older than you, Marv, he was lame so he couldn go into the war. Imagine a sick doctor. Well, he stayed with your father a long time. I'll give him credit, and he said he'd come back in the morning. He din get here until noon, an then he ordered the store shut but not a customer had been in all day because the news spread that your father had the flu."

"Aint people heartless?" Mrs. Loehr sniffed.

"Your father was out of his head, then, and he kept calling me momma. I hadda go down with the bed pan about seven o'clock, an I wasnt down a quarter of an hour, but when I come back he was dead."

Mrs. Loehr went tsk, tsk, tsk.

"I didn know he was dead right off. He laid there lookin at me with his mouth open, and I sez to him, Carl, I says, do you know me? But he didn move. So I went up to him an put my hand on his head. He was warm, still, but I seen he was dead. I just flopped down on the bed next to him, I dont know for how long. Then I run out to Schreck's, an I met Mrs. Loehr there, an I must say she has stuck by me ever since. Mr. Loehr got the undertaker, busy as he is."

"Gee, that was swell of you," Marvin said.

"It's no more than you'd do for us in a like case," Mrs. Loehr smiled. "God forbid."

"Wouldn you like to see your father?"

"Gee, mom."

"Well, I'll put the coffeepot on the back of the stove to heat up a bit, an we'll go up. He's laid out on the bed. The coffin wont come until tomorrow. I thought we'd have the funeral in here at first, but the undertaker said to me it would give the store a bad name."

Mom put both hands on the table and pushed herself erect. Marvin wondered if the gray, woolly looking wrapper she wore was the same one she had had since he was a little boy. Mother carried the coffeepot to the kitchen. Mrs. Loehr rocked herself, sucking her teeth.

"Come on, we'll go up now," Mom said.

Marvin went up behind his mother, more loath than he had

ever gone anywhere before. The steep, dark, carpeted stairs in their narrow well seemed twice as long. There was a dim light above.

"I been sleeping in your bed," Mom said. "I'll make up a cot for myself downstairs. Here he is."

Pop lay full-dressed on the bed, his bed, his and Mom's. He was skinny and very long, and his nose looked pointed. He had on a black suit, a stiff collar and a black four-in-hand tie. His hands were clasped over his top coat button, and loosely held in the white fingers, strangely manicured, was a carnation.

"Dont he look peaceful?" Mom asked.

Marvin felt that he should cry, but curiously he felt no emotion. This was a stranger on the bed, an unrelated, unhuman figure, harmless and dissociated from all life.

"It's a new suit," Mom said.

"Poor Pop," said Marvin, turning and heading for the stairs. Mom turned down the gaslight to a pinprick flame and followed.

She put her hand on Marvin's head as he stood two steps below her. "Now I only got you," she said. "Just you and me."

"Listen," said Marvin. "I'm used to roughing it. I dont want you to sleep on no cot. You keep my bed and I'll flop down here on the sofa."

"Oh, no, after all the hardship you been through you deserve a bed."

"I'm not gonna sleep upstairs," Marvin said vehemently, adding hastily, "Not with you sleeping down here all by yourself."

Not for a major's commission would Marvin have shared the second floor with the pallid, posy-clasping stranger. Not that Marvin believed in ghosts, not for a minute! But nothing doing on having that corpse nearer the stairs than he was. Or any other corpse.

Around the table again; Mom brought in the reheated coffee, and Mrs. Loehr said she would have one more cup and then maybe Marvin would see her to her door? Sure, Marvin would.

When he came back he looked around the transformed store, with its new white-enamel and nickeled fixtures. It sure looked swell. Marvin wondered what or who had prevailed upon the old man to spend all the money.

Marvin awoke to the smell of coffee and bacon. Mom was making a regular holiday breakfast. He went upstairs to the toilet, and shaved in the kitchen. At ten o'clock the undertaker came

with two men and the coffin. After some talk they decided the stairs were too narrow, so Marvin and Mom stayed in the kitchen behind closed doors while the body was brought down and put in the coffin. When it was all laid out the undertaker knocked on the door. Then Marvin and Mom came out. The coffin was of oak, very beautifully grained, and lined with lavender satin deeply tufted. The lid went up like a piano's and there was glass over the occupant.

"It would of been cheaper to take the body out in a basket and have it put in the casket at the parlors," the undertaker said to Marvin respectfully. "But the madam said she wanted the body to be taken out of here in style."

Mom was crying now, leaning over the coffin. Marvin looked solemn and shook his head understandingly.

"Shall we go now?" the undertaker asked. "It's a sort of busy season for us."

He was a round-faced man with large brown sorrowful eyes and a brown mustache that reminded Marvin of roaches somehow.

"Well, you dont expect us to go like this, do you?" Mom asked. "You wait, now. You're getting paid for your time."

Then Mrs. Loehr knocked at the store door and Marvin let her in. She was all in black, even to black kid gloves.

Mother was upstairs, dressing. Mrs. Loehr went up to help her. When Mom came down Marvin couldnt tell her from Mrs. Loehr, she was all swathed in black. She brought down a length of black satin, the edges puckered where thread had been run through them.

"This is for your arm," she said, fumbling for pins. "A mourning band. It's proper. You'd think these things of mine were new, wouldnt you? Only the veil and gloves. Marvin, you should of had black gloves. All the rest is old things dyed."

Marvin helped carry out the coffin. A dozen kids stood around the door and when they saw the coffin brought into the store they hollered for some who had strayed away to hurry up. All the windows in the block had faces in them. The coffin was very heavy and Marvin had a hard job straightening his fingers after it was stowed away in the hearse. There were two carriages.

The funeral parlor was full of palms and there were two rows of folding chairs, with carpet seats, arranged in front of two wooden trestles covered with purple plush, on which the coffin was placed.

Marvin and his mother sat down in the front row of chairs. Quite a few people had come into the parlor. Marvin recognized some of them as old customers. Most of them wore gauze flu masks.

The men were from Father's lodge, and they conducted a ceremony which Marvin didnt understand, reading from little books. Then a minister got up from where he had been sitting in the palms and read in German. Mom began to sob loudly, and that helped to make everything all fuzzy for Marvin so he never remembered as much about the funeral as he did about Grandpa's. After about an hour everybody got up and looked into the coffin, and Mother began to yell pretty loud, so the undertaker and the minister had to take her by the arms and lead her to the carriage. There was a bigger crowd outside the undertaker's door.

It was pleasant and slow to ride in a horse-drawn coach, with the hoofs going clop-clop on the asphalt. Mom wasnt crying any more. She started to talk about when she and Pop were young, and Marvin listened because it was all news to him. It was hard to think of Mom and Pop being very young and eager for life together.

"He was never a bold feller, never much for going out with the boys," Mom said. "And as long as we was married—twenty-four years—just think we'd of had our silver wedding if he'd a lived another six munce—we never spent a night apart. Poor Carl. He was kept pretty strict by his old folks, I guess. They had old-fashioned ways, old-country ways. Up to the time he married Carl was never away from his mother overnight. And scarcely ever a harsh word. Of course we had our little arguments. What married couple dont? But we always—"

Poor Pop, Marvin thought. What a life. Why the heck didnt I take the old boy out for a good time once or twice? He'd of appreciated it. Tied to his ma's apron strings until he was married, and then hitched to another woman every night, every day. He never seemed to complain. Maybe because he didnt know any better.

On the ferry Marvin got out of the coach and stood in the bow, on the men's side, with the lodge brothers. They told Marvin how proud his father had been of him and how often he had spoken about his son in the army, and how good a meat cutter he was and had money in the bank. The Statue of Liberty looked very green and it was grand to drag on a cigarette, but the smoke or the sun or something made his eyes water.

At the cemetery Mom got out of control again, especially after the ceremony of sprinkling dirt on the coffin in the open grave was being performed. She said she wanted to jump in and be buried with Carl, and the undertaker and Marvin and Mrs. Loehr, who was crying out loud herself, had to struggle with her pretty hard.

Then all hands climbed into the coaches again, and with the empty hearse following, this time, the procession clop-clopped along and Marvin's heart jumped when it stopped at the identical place it had stopped for everybody to have refreshments after Grandpa's and Grandma's funerals. The same old broad wooden porch and inside the same tables, the same smell. Only this time Marvin joined the men on the other side of the swinging doors. They ordered whisky, and the barkeep said he was sorry he couldn't serve soldiers in uniform, so somebody said, "Give him a celery tonic, then," and winked at Marvin, and took the tonic himself so Marvin could have the liquor. It sure tasted good.

Only one drink, and then the men went back to join the ladies. They had homemade boiled ham on rye, with lots of sharp English mustard. They all had beer, with a cup of coffee put near Marvin's plate just in case.

"It looks like it will be against the law soon for anybody to have a drink of beer," one of the lodge brothers said. "Not that even this slops is good beer. It's near beer, that's what."

"Near, but not near enough," somebody said, and everybody laughed, even Mom.

They had pie, then, and everybody had coffee, and then the procession went to the ferry and so home, which was reached after dark. Mother thanked Mrs. Loehr, and said she didnt know what she could do to repay her for her kindness, and Mrs. Loehr said anybody would have done what she did under the circumstances, and then Marvin and Mother unlocked the store door and went into the house, which was pretty chilly.

"You better make a furnace fire, Marvin," Mom said. "It's getting too cold for just the kitchen stove to heat the place."

So Marvin went down into the cellar, the same old cellar with the gray dust thick everywhere, the huge pile of cartons and boxes in all corners, the ash sifter rusty on the barrel, and the furnace full of last spring's ashes. He cleaned out the furnace, stuffed it full of excelsior and busted-up boxes and soon had a raging blaze going. There was not much coal, so he didnt use any. There were boxes enough to make the house warm for weeks. When he came

upstairs, in his undershirt and breeches, Mom was in her wrapper again, sitting in the kitchen.

"I dont guess the army is going to make you come back, now that you got a widow mother on your hands," she said. "You got to ask to be let off. The war aint going to last much longer, the papers say. So there wont be any sense in keeping you, a widow's only son, when they got a couple of million men on this side and more than enough on the other side. So you ask to be let off."

"Sure," said Marvin. "I dont know how it will be, though. It's different than if I was just a common soldier, but I dont know how they are gettin along without me up at the dam, because they dont have anybody to cut meat for them."

"They can get somebody, dont you worry," Mom said. "I'm real proud that they give you a responsible job like that, which it's hard for to fill, but you got a bigger responsibility now."

"Well, what if I can get off then?"

"Why, you'll come back here and run the store, of course. You didnt have any other idea, did you? The store is yours. I cant run it. I'll help with the salads an the chickens an the corn beef like always, to be sure. But a store needs a man to be in charge. An it's a grand modren place now. You looked it over, didnt you?"

Marvin had. The new icebox, the new counters and display cases, the repainted shelves and walls, the new window trim. No doubt it was swell.

"Your father decided to have it done over after them Jews opened the delicatessen around the corner. Below Goldschmidt's."

"When will we open again?"

"I thought we could open tomorrow morning. How long have you got off?"

"I dont know exactly," Marvin replied cautiously. "I guess I'm supposed to go back as quick as I can after the funeral. I dont know how they're gettin along."

"Well, I'll write a letter to your boss, an we'll wait for an answer. Maybe, he'll let you quit."

"Gosh, mom, that isnt the way it's done. Only the President or Secreterry Whoozis—Baker, now—can let a guy off from the war."

"Well, there's no harm in tryin. You can sleep in your own bed tonight. I'll go back to mine."

In bed Marvin began to think.

It would be fun to have a store of his own. To run things

the way he liked; to give orders to the salesmen, and to open cases snugful of new canned goods. To meet people and talk with them from behind his counter and all. He had ideas about the store, too. Like putting in a bigger lunch business, with short orders. He'd hire a waitress, a good-looking snappy girl, the kind that would bring the men in at noon.

But a store tied a guy down. It meant work from six in the morning to eight or nine at night. And later on Saturdays, *and* open part time Sundays, the best time Sundays. It meant sticking close to home. Look how it was with Pop.

And what about Mom? How much of a free hand would she give him? She always acted like he was a little kid, without much sense. She could never remember he was grown up, a man with his own life to lead. And look at Pop again; that's what Mom thought was a swell guy, a fellow who stayed home every night, who never went anyplace, just kept plugging away at his job and then going to bed, and the job and the bed right under the same roof.

Looking for a job, though—the store would always give—a nice snappy waitress—

Marvin slept.

Marvin tended store. It gave him a chance to think and to make up his mind, and anyhow his pass was for two weeks. He tended store in his uniform. His mother liked to see him in it and so did the customers. When he got spots on his uniform Mother cleaned them off with naphtha.

The people who came into the store talked quite a lot about Pop at first and how good he was. Marvin found the account book where charge purchases were entered and pretty soon he got to know a lot of the new customers by name and to recall the names of old ones he had forgotten.

Every night he cleaned out the cash drawer and gave the money to Mom, like she asked him to, because she said she knew where it had always been kept. She had to see a lawyer, though, because Pop hadn't left a will and it cost about a hundred dollars to fix things up.

"He talked about making a will but I made him shut up," Mother said. "And even if it means all this law business now I'm glad I did it because I'd hate to think of my Carl settin down and fixin up things for after his passing on. It would be like having had death in the house all the time."

Marvin was pretty sure he wasn't going to mind any old store. Mom always got the money; it wouldn't be any store of his. It would be like being married without the fun.

Mom sold all Pop's clothes one day and for some she got nearly as much as they cost new, everything was so high.

"If she's sold his clothes she's not feeling so bad any more," said Marvin to himself. So he brought out his pass to show her where he was due back at the camp day after tomorrow.

He felt like a son of a bitch, though, when she began to cry just as hard as at Pop's death.

"Listen, mom, it won't be for long. The war'll be over any day now, and I'll be back. As soon as Germany quits we'll have nothing to worry about."

So Marvin kissed his mother good-bye, took the \$20 she gave him, and trying to look as stern as possible walked out into November sunshine. It was sort of a lousy deal, leaving the old woman alone like that but, hell, war is war and anyhow pretty soon he'd be back in harness again. And he had a whole day to be on the loose in New York. What to do?

There was a canteen near the Battery for soldiers and sailors, although mostly sailors were there. He was steered to it by an old hen, and got a good meal for a dime. Everybody was talking about the war being nearly over, and all the janes were listening to a sailor who had taken some of the big naval guns up near the front. He wore his cap over one eye and had the tag of a Bull Durham bag dangling over his heart, although he smoked Fatimas. He was describing all sorts of things like busted villages and women pulling plows and the noise a gun makes and gas alarms and Hun planes. He made Marvin sick.

"Does that big false alarm give you a pain in the gut?" a soldier asked Marvin.

"I'm gonna puke in this pie," Marvin admitted.

"Lissen, les get the hell out of here and look for some excitement," the soldier said. "My name's Fagan. Got a pass or aye double you oh ell?"

"Pass. The name's Lang."

"Good. Me too. No need of being scared of the empees. Let's go, soldier."

Fagan was bigger than Marvin and had red hair. He wore the hat cord and insignia of the artillery, and was on leave from Sandy Hook.

Marvin and Fagan took a trolley to City Hall, and looked at

the posters and the guns there. Then they took another trolley, and got off to look at the imitation warship in Union Square. They walked around a bit, and took a Fifth Avenue bus, sitting on top in the cold breeze and hot sun, looking at all the flags. There were lots of foreign soldiers, officers mostly, French, English, Japs, Polacks, Italians. Girls waved at them and blew kisses from the sidewalks. Up on Riverside Drive, a couple of classy-looking dames got on near Grant's Tomb. Although there were lots of seats empty they sat down in front of Marvin and Fagan, who were in the last seats on the right side so they could smoke.

Marvin and Fagan knew the girls were looking for company, so for a couple of blocks they didnt say anything, not even to each other, just winking back and forth. Then Fagan started to talk about it being a swell view except for the people that got in the way of it.

Marvin agreed and suggested they hire the bus and make everybody else get off. The girls began to giggle and one turned around as if she was real mad and wanted to know if there was anything personal in those remarks, and would the gents prefer if she and her friend got off?

So Fagan said, hell, no, lady. Now that he'd seen her face, the scenery could go to hell, and it wasnt long before Fagan was sitting with one girl and Marvin with another. His girl said her name was Clarice Mae—she spelled it for him—and she said she was a private secretary. So was Fagan's friend, whose name was Genevieve. The girls talked back and forth a good deal, saying didnt Fagan remind Genevieve of you-know, and Genevieve didnt see it, so Clarice Mae said, "Oh, you know—E.F.," and then they both giggled and said, "Will ya ever forget that night?" and "Did you ever give him back his you-know?" and then they would laugh and laugh. Stuff like that. But beetween times they snuggled up close and the boys put their arms around them, and on the return trip it got dark, so they could do a little kissing.

Around Fiftieth Street Fagan said it was up to the girls to show them around, because he and his buddy were strangers in town, and they needed a drink worse than they needed anything. The girls talked together about "Barney's" and "The Wop's" and at Thirty-eighth Street they led the boys off the bus, and took them to a second-floor restaurant where they could get highballs. They ate a pretty swell meal of chicken and trimmings, and they all had four drinks apiece. It cost \$12, and \$2 to the waiter.

"Shall us go to a show or go somewheres and dance?" Fagan asked. The girls talked that over and voted for dancing, so Fagan got four pints from the waiter, and gave Marvin two, and they all went out to find a place to dance.

"None of your goddam Y huts or such Christlike places," Fagan warned, and the girls laughed out loud, hanging on to the boys' arms and putting their faces on their shoulders. The girls were good dancers and Clarice let Marvin dance close, with his leg between her knees, but Genevieve wouldn't, although he noticed she let Fagan do it. So that made him understand that the girls were on the square.

It was stuffy in the place, so Marvin began to feel his liquor pretty soon. Fagan was breathing pretty hard too, but the girls seemed to show no signs of being tight. Still, when Fagan said he'd had enough, he wanted some fresh air, they seemed glad to go. Marvin was glad to get to the toilet. A clock in the can said it was after midnight.

When they rejoined the girls Fagan said they would see them home. They said they lived up in the Bronx, near Crotona Park.

"My God," Fagan said. "We can't get there tonight. The Indians will get us."

The girls giggled at that, and when Fagan suggested they sleep out in the park they laughed some more. Then Fagan whispered to Genevieve for a long time, and she said "Excuse me a minute" to Marvin and took Clarice by the arm and talked to her while Marvin and Fagan walked together.

"I guess it's all fixed for the night, bud," Fagan said. "They got to pretend to talk it over but they was out for it from the beginning."

Marvin felt better in the fresh air, although the sidewalk seemed to come up to meet his feet every other step.

When they came to an all-night drugstore the girls said they wanted to telephone and they both crowded into a booth while the boys bought cigarettes and then waited on the sidewalk. A taxi came up and slid to the curb just as the girls came out, and Genevieve beckoned the driver. She told the man a number on Forty-sixth Street and while the cab was getting there Fagan opened a pint and they killed it between them. Oddly enough it made Marvin feel clearer and peppier, so he reached over from his folding seat and put his hand under Clarice's skirt, but she slapped it and said no rough stuff, please.

The cab stopped in front of a nice-looking private house and

when Genevieve rang the bell the door was opened by a swell-looking old dame about forty or so with very yellow hair.

"Hello, Muriel," said the girls, and Clarice said, "Meet Marvin and Jim."

The soldiers took off their hats and shook hands with the dame, who had a purple silk wrapper on, and she took them into a classy sitting room and broke out a bottle of rye and four little glasses.

"Well, I suppose you're all tired and dont want to sit around and gab all night," Muriel said with a wink. "I'll show you upstairs." So they all got up and followed her, and she opened doors off the hall on the second floor and asked that they be quiet because there were several guests in the place. The rooms were opposite each other at the end of the hall.

"The bathroom is right there between the rooms," Muriel said. The girls each went into a room and Muriel said to the fellows that that would be five bucks apiece. They paid in a hurry.

The room Marvin drew with Clarice Mae was about average size, on the areaway—matting on the floor and a double bed of iron painted to look like mahogany. Clarice stood in front of the dresser mirror fixing her hair.

"No rough stuff, now," she said. "I dont do this often or for everybody. You arent sick now. Swear to God you arent sick."

"Cross my heart, kid," Marvin said. "I aint been near a woman in six munces."

"Kiss me," Clarice said, and could she kiss! Marvin nearly exploded. She said he was a sweet kid, a big bad soldier boy. They sat on the edge of the bed and somehow Marvin didnt know how to begin because Clarice wasnt just a chippy, she had class and was sweet. They hugged and kissed and rolled on the bed with their feet on the floor and then Clarice said her clothes were being mussed.

"And yours. Lay there, soldier darling, and lemme take em off."

She undressed him right down to his underwear and didnt once get fresh or forward; it was just as if she were undressing a doll. Then Marvin sat up but she asked him to turn his back until she said ready, and before he knew it she snapped off the light and was in bed next to him.

About half an hour later, when they were resting and talking, there came a knock on the door and Marvin nearly died, thinking

it might be cops or MPs, but it was Fagan saying how about a little drink. So Marvin lit the light and in came Fagan with nothing on. Clarice pulled the sheet over her head and squealed and called Fagan a dirty thing.

"Rats," said Fagan. "Aint we all married folks together? Come on in, Genevivvy!"

Genevieve came in then, with a getup that made everybody laugh. She had the lace runner from the dresser tied around her like an apron and Fagan's blouse on, and her behind was bare.

They all sat on the bed, drinking the warm liquor out of tumblers, and Fagan made the lady tattooed on his forearm dance the hootchy-kootchy. When, after a couple of drinks, he tried to pull the sheet off Clarice Mae, Genevieve got mad and clouted him a good one, and Clarice called him a dirty bastard.

"No hard feelings," said Fagan slowly, rubbing his ear where Genevieve had hit him. "Lets kill the bottle." So they had a last drink and then Fagan said, "Come on, Jenny, we need exercise to keep this booze from gettin us," and the couple went out, Genevieve turning to remark, "You must come see us sometime, now."

Marvin was dizzy from the liquor and his stomach seemed too big for his belly. The bed swayed and bucked and when he shut his eyes Marvin felt as if he were dropping down a deep well in a sharp spiral. Clarice put an arm over his chest and he pushed it off.

"What's the matter, soljer? Sore about something?"

"I think that whisky's bad. I feel funny."

"Poor boy, let mommer fix you up a bit!"

She fluffed the pillow for him and straightened the sheets without disturbing him, and got up in the darkness to open the window. Then she curled up beside Marvin and stroked his head very softly, humming—humming. Marvin fell more slowly, in wider spirals. The lieutenant came in with no clothes on and told him his mother was dead, so Marvin began to cry. He was making a stew out of motorcycles, which were tough to chop up, but no wonder. He had a bouquet of flowers in his hand instead of a knife.

"Snap out of it or you'll be late for the funeral!" Kantner yelled in his ear, shaking him by the shoulder. Marvin opened his eyes and winced at the light. The pillow was snatched from under his head, so he sat up, blinking, the dream gone. Fagan was sitting on the bed, dressed.

"Gee, you were dead to the world, soldier. So your mommer doll beat it too, hey?"

Marvin sat up, battling daylight. Clarice was gone. Her clothes were gone too. Pretty soon he realized that the noises he heard were actually sounds, and not his head ringing; a confused jangling and tooting and yelling very far away.

"Wha-a-ajeez! My mouth tastes like a stable."

"There's a hell of a racket goin on somewheres. Woke me up. It's past two o'clock. Found my sweetie beat it and I see yourn did the same. Take a look at the love note."

Fagan handed Marvin a crumpled piece of paper. Marvin propped his eyes open and read the writhing script:

"So long sweetheart and thanks for a good time. See you in church ha ha. Fifty-fifty, hey?"

"What the hell," said Marvin. "It dont make sense."

"Yeah, well, fifty-fifty means just that, fella." Fagan pointed to the chair beside the bed and Marvin saw a little pile of bills and silver. "The girls went through our pockets and took haffa what we had."

"The dirty bitches," Marvin yelled, swinging out of bed. "Cripes, I feel sick."

"Dont talk about a lady like that, you poor bum. They was white. They could of took every nickel. No, them's a couple of high-class broads. Come on, snap out of it an we'll get the hell outa here."

The two went downstairs. No one was in the house, apparently. They ducked out the front door, which was standing open. The street was empty too, but now the far-off noise was plainer. Bells, whistles, sirens and voices in a hash of muffled sound.

"Where the hell are we? I guess we go this way."

Not very steadily, they walked upgrade. Past lofts and houses.

"Where in hell's all the people?"

At the corner of Ninth Avenue the pair stopped in amazement as four taxis pursued each other, filled with people who yelled louder than the klaxons blared. A little Jew with a skullcap leaped out of a store.

"Hooray," he said without fervor. "Mazeltoiv."

Suddenly there were scores of people on the avenue, mostly marching in an irregular column in the gutter. When the girls at the head of the line saw the two soldiers they gave shrill yips and dashed at Marvin and Fagan.

"Christ, the whole town's gone nuts," Fagan yelled and darted across the avenue, Marvin at his heels. Marvin thought maybe the Germans had dropped some kind of gas on the city that made

everybody crazy. Eighth Avenue was even more crowded. An army truck went by loaded with soldiers and sailors and girls. One girl stood on the hood, holding to the roof of the cab with one hand and waving a flag with the other. A window opened overhead and somebody dumped a wastebasket into the street. Other windows banged wide and suddenly the air was filled with a blizzard of torn letters, paper scraps, telephone books and streamers of toilet paper. Marvin and Fagan were in a throng of lunatics who screamed, clapped hands; a young woman, her hair streaming, her dress awry, kissed Marvin. She was pushed aside and another kissed him. A New York *Journal* truck ran up on the sidewalk and was overwhelmed by the throng. Papers were hurled out in bundles and tossed into the air in fragments. A major with three silver service chevrons on his sleeve was suddenly jammed against Marvin's chest. The officer was weeping and waving a bottle of White Horse.

"Here, soldier, have a drink."

The bottle was jammed against Marvin's teeth. The liquor ran all over his chin and neck. A major! The town was nuts. Maybe he was still in bed with Clarice and this was a whisky nightmare.

"What the hell's the matter with everybody?" Marvin demanded, thrusting the bottle aside. "What's up, anyhow?"

"Jesus, imagine that. Here's a guy wants ta know what's up! He dont know the war is over!"

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MARVIN WAS discharged with a gift of \$60 and his uniform; an honorable discharge without even the black mark of AWOL on the back of it for overstaying his leave two days. Two days? A day and a half of it were to be forever incoherent in memory, thirty-six hours represented by a confusion of swell hotels, champagne, garbage wagons, smashed lampposts, drifts of paper, thousands of kisses and a hundred drinks. All for a false alarm. When the war really did stop he was back at the camp dishing out spaghetti and meatloaf.

So Marvin went home in his uniform, and for a week Belle Bay was a festival town for him and the likes of him. The returned soldiers swaggered in uniform until everybody, themselves included, were a little sick of it. Besides, those whose sons had gone overseas began to make pointed remarks about saving some of the hoorahs until the real soldiers came back from Over There.

"And some wont come back," was gloomily reminded.

Some wont come back. Some. That included Father.

Yes, the house was empty without Pop.

Marvin tended store. He fell into the routine easily. Louie Goldschmidt came back after returning soldiers were old stuff, back from Camp Anniston down South somewhere, full of stories about corn likker and light browns. He stopped in to see Marvin. Marvin in a white apron again, slicing Swiss cheese and filling little paper boats with mustard chowchow.

"It's tough to be back to the ole grind, aint it?"

"I dunno. The grub's better and it's sure sweet not to have some goddam looie or top kick ridin you alla time."

"Guess there's somethin in that, buddy, I reckon."

Little by little the wartime restrictions were lifted. No more

lightless nights, no more meatless days. But, Goddlemitey, were things high! Oh, didnt the people holler when you totted up the bill. And no more beer, either, nor liquor even for civilians.

But good old chin music across the counter again. President Wilson was going to Europe, going to France to help make the peace. The war to end war. People said Wilson was going to start a sort of United States of the World, and that he wanted to be President of it too. He was crazy, everybody said. There were people who knew people who had seen him and talked with him, mind you, and they said he was nutty as hell. He giggled like a half-wit and strutted around trying to look like Napoleon.

Everybody was talking about the Reds too. There were riots—anti-Red riots. And anti-High Cost of Living riots too. People paraded with signs demanding coal, protesting the price of milk. The Reds were getting them to do it. They didnt know they were just saps working for the Reds, because they really did have a kick coming about prices, but the smart Reds, they egged the people on to parade and raise hell.

"What about this League of Nations, now?"

"Well, Mr. Schuster, I dont rightly know exactly. It seems like there might be somethin in it."

"Somethin, my eye. Say, Lang, we just got through sendin our boys to a furrin country to fight an die. Dont ya read the *Journal*? Do you want us to get mixed up in every furrin war? Ya oughta read what Brisbane says."

"But I thought this here League was so there'd be no more wars."

"Sa-ay, you aint *that* dumb. No more wars! They'll be wars as long as there's men. And this here League of Nations—League of Notions, I calls it, ha ha ha—is just a cooked-up scheme to get us to fight their wars for em, these smart limeys an frogs. Looka here, now, do you think a wop is as good as you are?"

"Hell, no, whaddaya take me for?"

"Well, if this League of Notions is set up, wouldn a wop have the same vote you got in it, just like in America a guy in Texas has the same vote you got? Think it over."

"Well, they wouldn let the wops run everything."

"Dont make me laugh. Here's us, a hunnerd million Americans, lessay. An about a billion wops an frogs an Slovaks an Japs, all with the same votes. Say, there's a war between the Greeks and the Spains. So we have a vote an all the other countries, these

billion wops an hunkies, they vote for us hunnerd million Americans to send a army over an stop the war, see?"

"Well, Christ, we wouldn *go*."

"Then they'd all pitch in an lick us."

"They couldn lick us."

"They could damn well try. An where would we be, here on the coast, hey? Bombarded. Sa-ay, that's a lousy cut of ham. Looka the gristle."

Marvin looked into the papers again during slack hours. Krazy Kat was still in the funny paper, for a wonder. Kid stuff. Tad, good old Tad, was still running with his little bugs in the cartoons saying funny things like: "Her father kept a barber shop in Weehawkin!" *Martha!* T. E. Powers with his Joy and Gloom figures, just like the old days. The ball teams were going South again, just like the old days. Matty had gone to war but he might make a comeback, with the Cincinnatis, a lousy team. But Brisbane and Hearst were writing serious stuff that made a guy think. Mostly about Wilson and his cockeyed idea about a world full of peace and taffy.

It was really Marvin's store. He thought of it as such. Each night he took the day's receipts into the kitchen and put them into the little steel box hidden in the washtub. Whenever he needed money for cigarettes he just took it out of the cash drawer. At the end of the first month the pork products man came with a bill for \$22.80, so Marvin got the money out of the box. Then a stranger came in with a bill for \$104 for canned goods and package foods, and said the bill had been running a couple of months now, and would Mr. Lang please clean it up. So Marvin went into the kitchen and got out the box, and Mom, who had been hanging up clothes in the back yard, came in and asked him with a great deal of excitement what he was doing.

"Paying this bill," he said.

"All at once? Over a hunnerd dollars? Are you crazy?"

She took the box from him and counted the money. There was \$197.87 altogether, so she gave Marvin a \$20 bill.

"Tell him to take this on account," she said snappily.

When Marvin went back to the store there was another customer, a new one, a yellow-haired girl with a lot of looks, so Marvin told the collector to wait a minute and sold the girl two salt herrings from the little barrel next to the icebox. Then he gave the man the twenty, and told him he would have to take it on account.

"Cant you do better than that?" asked the man, not putting the bill away but turning it over and over in his fingers. "I got orders to collect or shut down on you."

"Christ," said Marvin. "Have a heart. Business is lousy and my old man just died and I'm just outa the army, and we have to get along as best we can for a while. Go ahead an shut down."

"Sure business is lousy," the collector agreed. "Lousy with us. We got widows and ex-servicemen to pay wages to too. Pay half, cantcha?"

Marvin was ashamed to say he would have to ask his mother, so after a while the collector agreed to see what the company would do with the \$20 payment. The mailman came in with two more bills, one from the dairy company for milk, cream, cheese, eggs and butter for \$68 and one from the gas company for \$11.23 stamped Warning Second Notice. Marvin took them in to Mom.

"Aint there any money in the bank?" Marvin asked.

"There's your bonds and the money from your car and like that," Mom said. "About \$800, I think, besides the \$50 I'm savin against my own funeral that aint gonna be touched."

"Well, neither am I gonna sink my savings," Marvin declared. "Where does all the money go to? God, we gotta get down to a business basis or we'll be hangin out a red flag."

"Your poor father put every dime he could save into the morgitch an I think that's what killed the poor soul because he just paid it off a month before he passed away. An then there's the charges. We got a couple of hunnerd dollars on the books you might try for to collect. Some of the people moved away, though."

"Well, we gotta pay the gas bill, anyhow. I'll take the money around this afternoon in the slack period if you tend store. Then there's the iceman, and the baker. Say, what about the dough the old man used to hide away behind the cans?"

"That was the morgitch money and he never got over the time you didnt pay for that auto of yours and he had to take the morgitch money to keep you outa jail. He always said, after, you never did have any sort of business sense."

"God, he was one to talk, him!"

"Well, he give us this store and home, free an clear. A nice little business. You're better off than most young fellers, steppin right into a business practicky your own."

"An it looks like I'll have to pay for it, too. Holy Jesus, an all them fixtures to pay onto."

"Dont swear like that, Marvin. You learned such tough ways in the army. It's on account of the fixtures I didn want to pay

the can goods man all the money like you was goin to. So reckless with money, you are. The iceman an the baker we'll pay, because your poor father always said it was good business to keep your local credit good, then nobody could talk. We pay them cash. The big compnies we just pay them something on account an they treat you better because they know you're trying, see? That's what you got to learn, Marvin, runnin the business."

"It looks to me like all the money is accounted for onto debts. What if I need a new suit or somethin, or if I wanna go out?"

"Well, you'll have to struggle along till business gets better an then we can make some arrangement, so you get a reglar salary or a share of the profits. What's right is right, I guess. But as long as you have a roof over your head and three good meals a day, well, I guess there's no kick comin from you. I aint any better off myself, and all the labor and work I put into this store, makin salads an cookin and helpin out behind the counter besides doin the washin *and* the dishes an gettin the meals."

At any rate, when the bills had all been met or accommodated, there remained nothing in the steel box but four dimes and a handful of pennies so Marvin drew \$75 from his account and bought himself a new suit, two shirts, a pair of shoes and a green felt hat with a narrow brim and a red feather stuck in the band.

Nights, after closing hours, he went to the corner and hung around till one of the fellows showed up, or maybe some would drop in the store and wait for him to shut up shop. The crowd was an elastic affair but with a fairly definite nucleus. There were Marvin and Louie Goldsmith and Charley Seebold and the once despised Smarty Kress, now shipping clerk at the glycerin works which was making soap and fertilizers also. Charley and Smarty had both got to France and had been far enough up to hear German airplanes, but they got over talking about that. There was some talk among the four about starting a club to which only ex-servicemen could belong. Mostly the talk was about girls.

"Boys, these short skirts! The janes are gettin sense."

"Yeah, ya know what ya gettin these days."

Kress kept a pretty clean mouth. He was going steady with a girl named Viola Klops. He didn't show up on Wednesday and Sunday nights. One Friday he invited the gang to Viola's house. There was going to be a party, Saturday night.

"No rough stuff, fellas, an no likker. Her old man makes good beer and he may pour a couple of bottles, but dont get gay, will ya?"

That day, satisfactorily busy as Saturdays were usually, Marvin felt a new elation and a new timidity. He hadn't been to a "party" since God knows when, before the war, a way before the war even, when he was only a kid. He closed the store before eight o'clock, and took a bath in the kitchen tubs, shaved, put on clean underwear, clean socks, a new shirt and his new suit. He stood around the corner until Charley and Louie showed up, and the three went to Viola's house. Marvin knew Viola; she had been in the store three or four times.

The boys hung around the stoop a while, smoking, until Kress came to the door and told them for God's sakes to come upstairs, everybody else was there. So they filed up to the second floor of the two-family building, and the door was opened by Viola who had been waiting there for them to come up.

"Hello, everybody," Viola said brightly. "Come right on in and make yourselves at home."

She led them through a short, narrow hall with a bathroom obviously on one side, into the dining room. Marvin blinked in the glare of a two-burner gas chandelier turned on full, a great inverted flower of milky-green glass, leaded and with ruby insets at the angles of the petals. There was a shiny round table with a lace doily on it, and leather-bottomed chairs around it. A combination bookcase and desk, gay wallpaper, a flowered rug, white net curtains against the blind windows and a glimpse of kitchen with napkin-covered piles of something visible, as well as Viola's parents reading newspapers under the yellow gaslight.

"Put your coats and hats here."

The first bedroom. A classy bow-end bed with round pillows covered with net and ribbons, Kress's coat and hat and a stranger's laid out lengthwise. No light, except what came from the dining room. The boys straightened their ties in the mirror of the bird's-eye maple dresser, the top of which was covered with celluloid trays and jars and boxes in pink; they slicked back their hair, while Kress leaned against the bed and smoked, proprietorship in his pose.

"Come along, you nuts. You act like girls."

Bedroom number two, unseen because of the square of light from the front room where there was motion and color and music, and sudden laughter. Marvin, Charley and Louie stood in a huddle while Kress strode ahead, causing an immediate silence.

"Ladies and gents—I mean, gent—the delegation from Pumpkin Center's arrived and I wish leave to have you make their

acquaintance. Some of em speak English and are practicly human. This big bum is Charley Seebold—this is Marvin Lang, the pickled herring king, and this is Louie the Blood, alias Goldsmith, real name Goldschmidt. Seriously, now, fellas, may I make you acquainted with Miss Kramer, Miss Baum and Miss Armbruster. And Mister Pilcher. I guess you know Viola and Gloria.”

Gloria was Viola’s sister, maybe her twin. Pilcher was her friend, because he was sitting next to her with his arm over the back of her chair. The three strange girls, crackling in taffeta, smiled and bobbed and murmured. Which was which, Marvin didnt know. He sat down in the nearest chair, pulling up his trousers at the knee. He put his hands in his coat pockets, then looped his thumbs into the armholes of his vest, finally clasped his hands on his crossed knees. The others found seats and for a moment the silence continued.

“Pretty swell weather for this time of year,” Pilcher at last observed. “Good for business.”

Marvin cleared his throat.

“What line you in?”

“Haberdashery.”

“Yeah, it’s a good line.”

“What’s your line?”

“Table delicacies.”

“Well, that’s a pretty good line too.”

“Sure. People got to eat same’s they gotta wear does.”

Another interval, and Marvin examined the room. It was furnished pretty classy, and either old man Klops got good pay or else both the girls were working and chipping in good.

There was an oval rug, blue with a big bunch of roses in the middle. A center table, with a bookrack under it full of magazines. Two big overstuffed chairs, with tassels and fringes, and a big leather-covered sofa with hundreds of leather-covered buttons along the edge. A player piano and a cabinet phonograph, and then a few light chairs, sort of ordinary; just chairs, but shiny and nice. There were some pretty nice pictures on the walls, with lots of color but sort of girlish; lakes and sunsets and scenery like that, and a plaster plaque of three horses’ heads. The wallpaper was pretty tony, tan with a nice border of grapes and roses. A swell layout, any way you took it.

“Lets have some music,” Viola said, jumping up and winding the phonograph. Kress hastened over and took the crank out of her hands, after a little struggle in which they got pleasantly

tangled up with each other. The machine played "Cohen on the Telephone," which got everybody laughing, and then Pilcher told a Jewish joke, and it was a good take-off, all right, with his shoulders up around his ears and his palms spread out.

"I guess the ice is broken," Viola said. "This is Liberty Hall, everybody, so don't let's stand on ceremony but have a good time."

"Do you play the pianner, Mr. Lang?" one of the girls asked.

"I'm better than Padderooski," Marvin replied. "He can only play with his hands. I play with my feet."

He tramped the pedals of the player and everybody laughed. After two or three rolls had been played the girls started to sing to the music; they sang "Down By the Old Mill Stream" and "Just a Baby's Prayer at Twilight," "The Rosary" and "Mother Machree."

Then Viola suggested they play some cards but not everybody there knew the games suggested until at last it was discovered they all knew rummy. They made two tables, and Charley said Marvin could keep score because he was always a shark at figures.

After four or five hands Viola said, "Goodness, the room is blue with smoke. Let's get somethin to eat while the place is being aired."

So everybody got up and Kress and Pilcher opened the windows, letting in the marsh-scented breeze, and then Viola said, "Choose your partners for the grand march." Marvin found himself next to Miss Kramer, who was only shoulder high to him and had a sweet face although she was kind of skinny. She laughed up at him and tucked her hand in his arm, and the crowd paraded into the dining room, walking sideways past the beds where the passage was narrow.

The dining-room table had been loaded with trays of sandwiches, ham and cheese on rye and sardines on white. There was a cut-glass bowl of chopped herring-and-apple salad in the Plattdeutsch style, and a dish of stuffed olives and a big chocolate cake. About \$4 worth of food, Marvin figured.

"Will you boys have some beer?" Viola asked.

"What, in a prohibition country? I should say—yes!" Marvin shouted, so everybody laughed again and Miss Kramer told Marvin she thought he was one of the funniest men she had ever known, always making such ridic remarks. Marvin noticed then she had pretty blue eyes and just the faintest dusting of freckles on her sharp little nose. Her hair was lightish, but she didnt look to have much meat on her.

Viola brought in a big glass pitcher and five glasses on an aluminum tray and Gloria brought in a little cut-glass decanter and five wine glasses.

"Some of Mommer's elderberry for us girls," she said.

"Pop makes the beer. He always made it, ever since I remember."

"Oh, man, this sure is good. After this war beer, this hits a guy where he wants to be hit."

They ate and drank.

"Oh, my Gawd, I clean went and forgot about the napkins," Viola squealed suddenly, rising all red and flustered from her chair.

"Aw, ferget em, we aint compny," Marvin cried. "Save em for when you need em."

He leaned toward Miss Kramer and whispered, "For baby diapers after she and Kressy get hitched."

"Ooh, aint you the awful thing," Miss Kramer giggled shrilly. "Violer, if you could of heard what he said."

"What did he say?"

"Oh, I wouldn repeat it for worlds."

"What's the idear of dirty digs behind my back, young man?"

"I din make any dirty dig," Marvin protested. "I just said you could save em for after you was married, the napkins."

"Yes, but you didn tell for what to save em," Miss Kramer screamed. "Oh, I'll die."

"Come on, Lang, spit it out," Kress demanded.

"Heck, all I said was maybe they could be used for babies—on babies, I mean, you know."

The men laughed. The girls tittered, and looked at Viola knowingly. Viola turned pink, then laughed too.

"How about some more beer?"

She brought in another pitcherful, and Marvin showed her how to pour it so there would be froth or none, according to individual preference. "I din mean anything by that crack," he said.

"That's all right, Marvin. I expect to have a lot of babies. I guess you'll have a famly of your own too, someday. It's about time you picked yourself a nice girl and settled down. Oh, girls!" She raised her voice. "Girls, Marvin here is unattached. An he likes babies!"

"Yea, Marv. How about lettin Louise be your baby. What about it, Louise?"

Miss Kramer hid her face and giggled.

"Stannup, Louise, an show em what a nice couple you'd make." Kress and Pilcher dragged Miss Kramer to her feet and propped her against Marvin.

"Lets marry em now, lets have a wedding!"

"Charley, you be best man. Louie, you can be the minister."

"No, Ed, you be the minister, an Louie can be the rabbi later on, when his knowledge of the knife can come in handy."

The men bellowed and the girls bit their lips and made out they didnt know what Pilcher had been talking about. Marvin, suddenly the butt of the evening's fun, decided to play the game. It was sort of nice, at that. They must like him, all these folks.

Mr. and Mrs. Klops came to the kitchen door to watch the goings-on. Charley chanted the wedding march. A tablecloth was draped over Louise's head for a veil and she was given a bunch of soup greens to hold. Kress got up on a chair with a copy of *Private Peet* for a Bible, and a napkin ring was thrust in Marvin's hand for the marriage circlet.

"Well, ladies an gents," announced Kress. "We are gathered here to hitch this charming couple in the howling bonds of tom-catrimony. They will do it in spite of all the bad examples they seen. Now who gives this bride away?"

"Give her away nothin," Pilcher yelled. "Aint she worth two bits?"

"Two bits offered, two bits offered, who'll make it a halluf a dollar?"

"Make it a buck," Marvin yelled.

"A dollar bid, a dollar bid an there's a gent knows value," Kress chanted in a killing imitation of an auctioneer. "Do I hear a dime? No? Going, going once, twice and gone! Knocked down to the gent with the button off his pants."

Everybody laughed fit to kill when Marvin looked down in apprehension, and there never was such fun ever before, anywhere. Then Kress went on:

"Do you, Marvin Lang, promise to take this gal Louiser for your awful wedded wife, for richer or poorer?"

"He'll be a lot poorer when he starts buyin her rags!"

"No coachin from the side lines. Say yes, you big slob. Now then, Miss Kramer, do you take this bowlegged cockeyed beer barrel for your wedded husband, so help you Holy Moses?"

Louise hid her head on Marvin's shoulder and giggled.

"Hey," shouted Pilcher, suddenly straight-faced. "Hold on. Maybe this is legal, all this."

"Whaddaya mean, legal?"

"Sure, if a couple stands up in public an says they're married that's a common-law marriage, dont you know that?"

"Holy cats!" exclaimed Kress, hopping from the chair. "Maybe you're right at that. Game called on account a darkness."

There was a lot of laughing and surprised exclamations, and "What do you know!" and "Would it really?" and "I guess you wouldn mind, Marv (or Louise)," while Pop Klops laughed out loud until the tears came. He was a jolly, fat, red-faced little man with a white mustache and bald head. His collar was off and his suspenders looped over his hips, just as if there were no company.

"I guess it iss good beer, by Mike!" he chuckled.

They finished the food then, and the boys and visiting girls volunteered to help with the dishes, but Viola, Gloria and their mother would have none of it. "Mom will wash an we'll wipe," Viola said. "But you arent all goin home already? Why, the night's young."

"Oh, we must be going," the girls said, and the men nodded solemnly, anxious for a chance at the toilet on account of the beer. "We must be goin, really. It was a lovely party."

The girls all went into the front bedroom to put on hats and powder and the men hurried into their jackets and the bathroom.

"Could I have the pleasure of seein you home?" Marvin asked Louise.

"Oh, it's a way out of your way," she said. "I guess I can take care of myself, but thanks a lot."

"Cant let your wife go home alone, Marv," Charley advised, his arm linked in Miss Baum's.

"Well, if you dont mind, but it's an awful bother," Louise said.

"I'd be sore if you didnt let me," replied Marvin.

Hands were shaken ceremoniously all around by the fellow guests on the sidewalk.

"Well, we go this way," Louise said. "I live in the new development."

"Yeah? I havent been around much since gettin out of the army. My business takes so much time."

"Do you really own a store?"

"Sure, right down on Schurz Avenue, near the restaurant an movie an the trolley an everything. Come in some time."

"Sure thing. We take off the new delicatessen but I'll tell Ma she ought to buy off you."

"I wonder where Viola got the stuff tonight. Not from me."

"I guess she brought it from New York to save time."

"I thought it would have been nicer if she got it off me."

"It would of been nicer. She's a nice girl. So's her sister, but I dont see what Viola sees in that Kress boy."

"Oh, he's all right. We used to call him Smarty. He was the teacher's pet in school. Him and me graduated together, but I could always beat him in arithmetic."

"Gee, that's where I'm dumb."

"Never mind, kid, you got the looks."

"Oh, what a fibber. I think I'm awfly plain."

"I guess you havent any mirrors in your house, then. You suit me okay."

"You big kidder. I bet you tell every girl that right off."

"I havent any girl. Havent walked out with a girl for years."

"Must be a lot of dumb girls around then."

"Now you're kiddin'."

"Honest I'm not. I think you are so funny, always ready with a funny remark. I like good-humored men. Most of em are so dignified or else they get fresh right away."

"I dont blame em for gettin fresh with you, kiddo. I mean, a feller shouldnt forget ever he's a gentleman, but you sort of get a guy."

"What do you mean?"

"This. This is what I mean."

He kissed her.

That's how Marvin started to go steady with Louise Kramer. He didnt tell his mother, though.

After Selma Johnson had been in the store five or six times, however, Marvin's sense of objective wavered. The first time she came in for herrings Marvin's eyes opened wide, that time the bill collector was stalled off with twenty bucks. She was shy, and took her damp parcel without a word. She had a swell figure, deep-chested and erect. Marvin wondered what her legs looked like, cut off as they were from his view by the counter. He didnt know her name until the fourth visit, although he had called her "miss?" with a rising inflection, like an invitation for her to finish the phrase by supplying her name.

A couple of times she came in with a tow-haired boy of about twelve, white-skinned and blue-eyed (with invisibly white lashes) like herself. Marvin cut the kid a thick hunk of baloney, and the second time he gave the boy a whole frankfurter.

"What's your name, son?"

"Carl."

"That was my father's name. Did you deal here when he was alive? That's when I was a soldier."

"Nope. We yust moved here."

"Good. I hope your famly likes it. What's the rest of your name?"

"Yonson. Gimme another baloney?"

"Sure thing."

So he called her Miss Johnson the next time she came into the shop, and tried to get her to chat with him, but Miss Johnson was pretty close-mouthed. Not just businesslike, but sort of shy-like. She just ordered what she wanted, paid for it, said yes or no about the weather, and that was all. She sometimes pronounced her j like y, but that was sort of cute.

The time she came in to buy something for which Marvin had to come out from behind the counter was when he got to break the ice. She was the only customer in the store. Miss Johnson. Swedish girl, but a good-looker. Half a head shorter than Marvin himself, and her legs were swell.

"Your brother tells me you havent been in this burg long."

"No, we moved from Brooklyn."

"That's funny, so did we. We came here from Brooklyn. And your brother's name is Carl and that was my father's name."

"You aint Sv—Swedish?"

"Not on—no, my father an mother was both born here. He was German descent, my mother English. She makes the salads for me. Do you live close by? Father in business here, is he?"

"We live by my aunt, Mrs. Sundqvist, on Oak Street. My father, he is sick. He is a steelvorker, but he got hurted."

"I know Mrs. Sundqvist. Old customer. Been here as long as we have, I guess. Gee, I guess the first money I earned was taking a bottle of medicine to her house for Old Man Schreck, the drug-gist. Isnt that funny?"

That night, instead of gathering with the gang at the corner, Marvin walked in the opposite direction and by a roundabout route achieved the Sundquist block. It was a mild evening, and lots of people were sitting on their stoops or fussing around the little squares of grass and shrubs in front of their homes. Marvin greeted many of them by name, and nodded to all who looked at him as a matter of good business. The people who owed the store money seemed the least friendly, funny enough.

He wasn't sure he would know the Sundquist house, but he recognized it, sure enough. Three or four people were on the porch, but Selma wasn't among them. Neither was Carl. There was a stout middle-aged woman, and a man of fifty or thereabouts, tall, thin and mustached. He had a pair of crutches beside him. Selma's father. And two younger men, husky towheads. Selma's brothers, maybe?

Marvin said good evening, and they stared at him curiously and made no response. He wanted to ask if Selma was in, and didn't quite dare. He thought for a moment of easing his way in by asking if the herring had been satisfactory, but that seemed sort of dumb, so he nodded to the folks again and walked off rapidly.

It wasn't his night to visit Louise. A couple of days after he had taken her home from the party (a couple of days, just to show he wasn't anxious) he had walked past her house and sure enough she was outside. As she had been every evening, expecting him to turn up. She seemed very much surprised to see him, and asked Marvin if he was lost. She didn't ask him in, and after about twenty minutes of chitchat she excused herself and said she had an appointment.

"Who's the guy?" Marvin asked.

"Don't you wish you knew?"

He knew she stayed in the house, and stayed there the rest of the evening—just to show she wasn't too anxious.

Two or three nights later Marvin chanced that way again, and sure enough Louise was on the front steps. Her house was on a little terrace with four neat oblong concrete steps leading to the sidewalk, and two oblongs of ambitious grass on either side of the cement walk. The house was about fifteen feet back from the street, and was white colonial. That is, the two front windows had eight panes of glass in each.

Louise came to the top of the steps and she and Marvin talked until the feet of both pained from standing. Lights made the interior visible, and Marvin saw Mr. Kramer reading the evening paper and Mrs. Kramer's head now and then, and Louise's big brother Alvin, who was taking a correspondence course to become a railway mail clerk. The school was very encouraging to him, Louise said. She said he worked in a garage, but her herself worked with Viola in a Broad Street brokerage concern over in New York. She was a file clerk. It was interesting work. Marvin said it sounded as if she worked in a hardware store—file, catch

on? Louise said she thought Viola was awfully pretty and Marvin said yes, if you liked that type. What type did Marvin like, now? Well, he liked big redheaded girls with lots of figure. They had bad tempers, said Louise, and they didnt always have good complexions. Well, next to them, Marvin said, he liked—and he described Louise pretty carefully. That led to the analysis of motion-picture actresses, and Marvin found himself asking Louise to go to the movies with him Wednesday night.

When he called for her she wasnt waiting outside, but she was watching for him, because she waved from the window and Marvin sat on the steps and lit a cigarette. Louise came out in about five minutes and they went to the show, and had a soda at Schreck's afterward, and on the way home Marvin kissed Louise two or three times. She let herself be kissed, but she didnt kiss back, of course.

Then it was that Selma began to come to the store often. Marvin liked Louise. She was cute, and congenial, and no blood-sucker. But he was nuts over Selma. Not that he knew why. He didnt stop to think things over.

One night Marvin strolled up to the Greek's, and pretty soon Louie and Charley came along.

"How's Louise?" they asked, winking.

"How's old Love-at-first-sight?" they asked again.

"Balls," said Marvin. "Lets hop the rattler and go down to shoot some pool."

"Wait till Kress shows up."

They drank coffee and ate sinkers, and when Kress came the pool game was broached, and Kress was willing, so they jumped the next trolley and rode down a couple of miles to where there was a billiard hall. They got a table and four bottles of Bevo. They put salt in the drink and then played wordlessly for half an hour. After that they went through the kitchen into a sort of shed where the wop poured them rye for a quarter a shot and then they played more pool.

Back at the corner of Schurz Avenue, when the group broke up, Kress said he'd like to talk to Marvin. He asked Marvin if there was anything wrong between him and Louise.

"We ast her about you and she said she hadn seen much of you lately."

"Well, hell, I aint married to her, am I? I aint even engaged to her."

"Well, I just wanted to make sure there wasn't anything wrong between you two."

Selma came into the store the next morning. Marvin told her he had been past her house a couple of times.

"I guess I saw your father. The gent with the crutches?"

"Yes, that was him."

"Are those young fellers your brothers?"

"No, those be—is—boarders. Holger Svenson and Chris Imberg."

"Any one of em your sweetheart?" Marvin laughed loudly.

Selma giggled. She said no, she had no sweetheart. She would like a dozen eggs and a can of condensed milk.

"Do you ever go to the movies?"

"Sure."

"Would you mind if I ast you if I could take you sometime?"

Selma giggled again.

"How about tomorrow—no, say, Thursday?"

"Ach, I dont know. I shall ask my father."

Marvin gulped. He wrapped up the purchase, made change, and Selma left, stopping at the door to look back and giggle again. It was a jolly little giggle, and showed her lovely white teeth.

She didnt show up next day, and that night Marvin walked past her house again. Nobody was outside except the two boarders, so Marvin walked on to Louise's. She wasnt outside, either. He walked up and down past the house a couple of times, and the third time by she came out with her hat and coat on.

"Hello, goin anywheres?"

"Oh, me and Ma had a run-in."

"Wanna go to the show?"

"No. Oh, well. Lets."

She took his arm until they came to the lighted part of town, and in the movie she leaned against Marvin's shoulder, and when Bill Hart was galloping to rescue the girl from the Indians she let Marvin hold her hand when it slipped off the arm of the seat onto his knee.

Louise said she honestly didnt want a soda, so they walked home and this time they sat on the stoop and Marvin kissed her cheek a couple of times and then put his arm around her neck and kissed her on the mouth, although she pulled back hard. The second time she didnt pull back scarcely at all, and Marvin let his hand slide down to her waist so he could feel the curve of her breast against his thumb. It sort of got him, at that. He wondered what she would do if he put his hand on her, but then Louise was a nice girl, and he didnt want to get himself talked about.

Selma came in the next afternoon. She only bought a box of parlor matches for a nickel. Marvin asked her how about it.

She giggled—gosh, she was sweet.

"Sure," she said, and almost ran out of the shop.

Marvin put on his Sunday suit that night, and put vaseline on his hair. Selma wasn't waiting for him, so he walked up and down. Pretty soon one of the boarders came out and leaned against the doorpost, picking his teeth and contemplating the street.

Marvin stopped and cleared his throat.

"Is Miss Johnson in?" he asked slowly, so the squarehead would understand.

"Sure," said the Swede, removing the toothpick and staring at the point.

Marvin waited a moment, and then turned into the walk. The boarder, who had a chest on him like a barrel, stepped aside to let Marvin ring the bell. Mrs. Sundquist came to the door.

She led him into a front room, very gay with a flowered carpet and red wallpaper, pictures on the wall and a glass dome on the center table shielding a stuffed bird sitting on a branch bearing pink cotton flowers.

"Sit down, mister," she said.

Marvin sat down on a cane-bottomed chair, holding his hat between his knees. Pretty soon he heard the tap of crutches on the hall floor, and Mr. Johnson came in. His face was gray, and his hair was either white or very yellow. Behind him was Selma.

"Good avning, mister," said Mr. Johnson.

Marvin stood up. "Good evening," he said, sticking out his hand and then pulling it back when he saw that of course Mr. Johnson had to hold on to his crutches.

"Sit down," the man said. Selma stood in the doorway a moment. She looked pinker and whiter than ever, and she had a nice frilly dress on. She giggled a little—gee, she was sweet—and then disappeared.

"It looks like we might have warm weather," Marvin said. This was a funny way to take a girl to the movies.

"Yess," Mr. Johnson said, sitting down stiffly, keeping one leg straight before him. He propped his crutches against his chair, took out a pipe, filled it, with his eyes on Marvin. He offered Marvin the tobacco.

"Thanks," Marvin said. "I'll have a Hump."

Mr. Johnson looked startled, and then frowned a little when Marvin took out his Camels.

"They make for bad lungs. Val, so you have the store."

"Yes, sir. Me and my mother."

"Your father is dead?"

"Yeah, from the flu. Not so long ago."

"You make pretty good business?"

"Fair. High cost of living, you know. But we make out okay. Own the store free an clear. The house too. No morgitch."

"So? How big the house?"

What the hell did this have to do with taking Selma to the movies? Marvin described the house. He told of coming over from Brooklyn. That ought to interest the old geezer, his coming from Brooklyn too.

"It is better here, no? More air, more grass."

"Sure, an you're in New York City jussa same."

"Not so good. Maybe if it was not, it would be better yet. Too much Tammany. They stoled the election from Hillquit, even if he is Yewish. A Socialist government, we should try it."

Jesus, the guy was a Red!

"Never mind," Johnson said. "It nears nine o'clock. Selma! You be late"—a string of Swedish followed.

Selma appeared promptly at the hall door, little Carl behind her. Marvin rose.

"Well, good night, Mr. Johnson. I'll take good care of your daughter."

Johnson said good night. Marvin turned to Selma, smiled, put on his hat. She opened the front door. The two boarders—they looked like middleweight fighters—sat on the stoop, in silence. Marvin followed Selma out, pulling the door shut behind him and nearly knocking Carl over.

"Hey, what's the idea, wanna kill me?"

"Why, hello, Carl. Didn see you."

The boarders made room, wordlessly. Marvin and Selma went down the steps in single file. They turned toward the movies, Marvin studiously taking the outside. Carl was close behind.

"Going downtown?" Marvin asked the kid over his shoulder.

"You bet."

"Wanna nickel for candy?"

"Nope."

He tagged along. Marvin told Selma he liked her father. He told her he liked the Sundquist house. He said the boarders ought to take up the mitts, they looked like they'd make a classy pair of scrappers.

"They are good rasslers," Carl declared.

He was still there, and listening.

They reached the movies. Carl ranged up alongside of Selma. Marvin glowered at him, but bought three tickets. He bought three sodas after the show.

The boarders and Mr. Johnson were on the stoop when the trio filed up the walk at last. Selma said, "Thank you . . . I had a very nice time."

"Me too," said Carl, running on ahead and clattering up the stoop.

"Hope to have the pleasure again soon," Marvin choked. "Good night."

He turned and walked rapidly away. Of all the goddam evenings. First the old man cross-examining him like he was a crook or Jack the Ripper or something, and then that towheaded little pissant of a brother tagging along!

He didnt see Selma again until Saturday, when the store was crowded and Louie and Kress and Charley were there too, waiting for him. So he didnt get to talk with her at all.

Louie whistled when she went out.

"Some chicken," he said. "Swenska, betcha dollar."

Marvin said nothing.

They hung around Pop's, and then went down to the wop's and bowled and had a couple of ryes.

"See you tomorrow?" Kress asked. "We might take the girls over to the Aquarium."

"Yeah, an scare em to death with the excitement," Marvin jeered. "How about a nice walk in a cemetery?"

"Viola and me dont want to spend any money," Kress said. "We're savin it for—"

"Yeah, I know. Well, I'll meet you all at Viola's."

They went to the Aquarium, and it was nice riding the ferry. They looked at the Statue of Liberty boat and thought someday they might all go over on it and climb the statue. Louise was chummier than ever, and said how about a party at her house next Saturday night? Marvin said swell by him, but would she take him home afterward? So they had a real nice time, joking back and forth like that.

Selma came in the next morning, and this time she had her father with her. Marvin brought him a box to sit on. Selma bought herrings again, and a pound of butter and a pound of butterine.

Marvin thought, as he filled her order, that after all Louise had never come to the store.

"You should put in a line of Svedish delicatessen," Mr. Johnson observed. "Lots of Svedish people live here now, and more come."

"I got some nice Norwegian sardines."

Johnson laughed, inexplicably.

"You got a nice store," he said, and went out with his daughter.

Wednesday Marvin took Louise to the movies, and Thursday he dressed up and on a chance went to see if Selma could go. He didnt mind seeing the picture over twice. Louise had let him kiss her and squeeze her waist. He wondered if Selma would let him kiss her.

He walked past the immobile boarders, rang the bell, greeted Mrs. Sundquist. She seated him in the parlor again, and asked him to wait a minute. Marvin waited, then picked up a Swedish magazine. It looked a lot like English except some of the letters were cockeyed, with dots over the A's and lines through the O's. Then he heard Mr. Johnson's crutches. He stood up and passed the time of day with the old guy, who sat down and filled his pipe.

They talked about the Peace Conference. At least, Johnson did. Gosh, he knew as much about it as if he had been there. He said the peace treaty would make a lot of trouble. He didn't exactly side with the Germans but he stuck up for them in some ways, and for the French in other ways. Marvin just said yes and no and wondered where the hell Selma was. Then a chubby middle-aged lady came in, with red cheeks and her hair skinned back off her forehead.

"Meet Mrs. Yonson," said Johnson.

Marvin got up and said he was pleased to make her acquaintance. She smiled and sat down.

"Momma dont talk English much," Johnson said. "Now, Russia—"

He talked on and on, and pretty soon Selma came in. Marvin got up and shook hands with her. She sat down next to her mother on the sofa and Marvin wondered how he could ask her to go to the movies, even if it was almost too late for the last show.

He didnt get the chance. Johnson talked and talked like a schoolteacher. Then one of the boarders came in and said something in Swedish, and Johnson answered him in the same tongue. The boarder sat down. He had on a black shirt and a red tie, and

he looked as if he could lick anybody under 175 pounds. The boarder listened attentively to what Johnson said.

Marvin cleared his throat and smiled over at Selma.

"Nice weather we've had," he said, to bring some sense into the talk.

"Sure," said Selma. "Pretty soon summer is here. I like summer."

"Same here," Marvin said. "To h—I mean, I hate winter."

"I hate it here, because no snow stays. I remember home, it is fun in winter."

Mrs. Johnson spoke to her. Selma nodded, and tiptoed out of the room. Johnson dropped back into English, as the boarder, looking sullen, followed Selma out.

"Young people," Johnson snorted. "He says as how young people should run the world because old people made a mess out of it. If young people run it ve haf var evry year."

"Not for me," Marvin said. "No more war for me."

"Did you get shot?"

"No, I was lucky."

"Lucky! The craziness of it, war. Did you hate the Germans?"

Marvin shrugged. "I'm German descent. Not that I was a Progerman. I done my bit. I didn't believe all them atrocity yarns."

"Ay did. Ay believe, too, English *and* French *and* Germans *and* Americans—yes, Americans too—can be just as brutal in war. War makes a man do things he wouldn't believe it. Ay believe all atrocity stories from both sides."

Nice jolly time you had of it then, thought Marvin, as Selma came in with a huge tray. Mrs. Johnson put the glass-covered stuffed bird on the mantel, and Selma put down the tray which was covered with a red-and-white cloth. She went out again and came back with a tall copper coffeepot and five cups.

"Now," Johnson said, rubbing his hands, "Ay show you about Svedish delicatessen. Smörgåsbord!"

The checked cloth was whisked aside and Marvin saw an array of open-faced sandwiches. Selma gave him a plate and napkin, offered the tray. Marvin took a piece of dark bread smeared thickly with something pink.

"Eat, eat," Johnson urged. "Try everything. Selma, give him!"

Selma giggled and gave Marvin more sandwiches with her own hands. She brought him coffee, strong, black, highly sweetened and very hot. Then she sat down to eat. The family ate as if eating were serious business.

"How you like it?" Johnson asked.

"Swell," said Marvin. "Did Sel—Miss Johnson make these?"

"Her an her momma. It's good food, yes?"

Marvin said yes and wished he knew what he was eating. Everything tasted strongly, and usually of fish. There was pungent, crumbly cheese, little salty fishes, fish paste; Lord knows what else.

The tray was cleared, the coffeepot emptied. "I'll make some more," Selma said.

"Oh, no, not on my account," said Marvin. "I gotta go. Have to get up early, you know."

"It is good to get up early," Johnson declared. "Ay still do, but it is yust a habit. Since Ay got hurtit"—he smote his stiff leg—"a good steelman fit ony to peddle papers. Bah!"

He seemed ready to start a whole new conversation on that subject, so Marvin backed out of the room. Selma followed him to the door.

"Listen, Selma, I come to ast you to go to the movies," he whispered, putting a hand on her arm.

"Thank you," Selma said. "But I hope you liked the sandwiches?"

"They were swell. Anything you'd make would be swell. How about the movies some night?"

"I ask my father."

"Nuts! I mean, cant I see you alone ever?"

"I—I dont know. I—" She giggled.

Marvin wanted to kiss her but he choked back the impulse. He didnt know how she would take it, and somehow that seemed important, to know how she would act. He shook hands, and marched up the dark street.

"What a night, what a hell of a night," he said, dragging deeply on a Camel. "Gosh, what nuts some people are. Worry over the damndest things."

Friday Selma came in, cheerfully, alone.

"Well, did you ast your old man?"

"Who—what old man?"

"Excuse the kiddin. I mean, did you ast your father?"

Selma gripped the edge of the counter, put her weight on her hands, swung back and forth on her toes. Then she looked up at Marvin.

"Wouldnt it be nice if you asked them along for once?"

"You mean, your father and mother?"

"Sure."

Marvin stared at her in disbelief.

"And the boarders, maybe, and Carl, and Mrs. Sundquist?"

"Oh, no. Not the boarders anyhow. Mrs. Sundqvist maybe. She dont go, I bet you, but she would like if you invited her."

Marvin grinned. Of all the graft. Louise—why, he didn't even know the inside of Louise's house yet, let alone her old man or old woman. Tomorrow night at the party he would, of course; but there he'd been out with her, practically going steady with her, without her ever asking him for a thing, and Selma, after two visits, tried to horn in the whole family!

He wrapped her order without comment. As he watched Selma leave, her tight, oval haunches twitching under her skirt, he thought maybe she might be worth it, at that.

So much thinking about girls, and the provoking contacts with Louise made Marvin decide he'd take it on the lam that night. He went to St. George and picked up a girl near the ferryhouse.

Pop used to keep open until nearly midnight Saturdays, and Mom grumbled a little when Marvin told her Saturday morning he was going out at nine that night.

"Lots of people gets last-minute ideas and we took in as much as six an seven dollars some Saddaday nights, but I guess chasin girls is more important."

"I'm not chasin girls. I'm goin to a party."

"A girl's house or a fella's?"

"A girl's house."

"Hm, I thought so."

To Marvin's surprise, and gratification amounting to a thrill, Louise came into the store that midafternoon.

"I want to get everything for the party from here," she said. "You suggest everything."

"Gee, that's nice of you. It sure is nice of you. I'll make you a special price. Say, why not let my mother make up sandwiches? How about tongue an spiced beef an good ole ham-an-cheese? An potato salad on the side. We havent any cake."

"Oh, I made a cake."

"You made it all yourself?"

"Sure, I make good cake."

"I bet you do. Oh, Ma! Mom!"

Mother came into the store tying a fresh apron. She looked surprised to see only one customer.

"Mom, I want to make you acquainted with Miss Kramer.

She wants a load of sanwiches. An some extra good potato salad."

"Please to meetchu. What kinda sannitches?"

"Oh, I'll let you an Marvy decide. It's for a party."

"So you're givin the party. Isnt that nice?"

"I'll slice the meats, mom. Trim the crusts offn the bread."

Marvin cut the meat thickly. Twenty-four sandwiches? And three pounds of potato salad? Four? "Gob on the maynaise thick, Mom." It all made a huge parcel.

"You cant carry all this. Lemme go with you. Mom, you mind the store, an I'll be back in fifteen minutes."

It was gay to walk to Louise's house carrying the party fodder. The two chatted and laughed. Right in at the front door of the bungalow walked Marvin. Mrs. Kramer looked like Mom somewhat.

"Cant shake hands, mam. Please to meetchu, though. Where'll I put all this stuff?"

"Oh, just anywheres, Mr. Lang."

"No, I'll put it right into the kitchen."

"Oh, I cant show Louise's compny into the kitchen."

"Compny? I'm just the delivery boy, hey, Louise?"

It was fun, but he had to hurry back.

"Wait, I din pay you. How much for all this?"

"Oh, say a dollar even."

"A dollar? Why, that aint enough by moren half!"

Half? Not enough by twice as much more, but: "Not at reglar prices, even if we do have the best goods for the least in all the town. I'm makin you a special price because I expect to eat most of it myself."

"I guess you want to stuff yourself full of stuff you know so you wont have to eat any of my cake."

Mom was sitting behind the counter looking through the charge account book again, when Marvin returned.

"You ought to go out an collect some of this money. My lands! Well, so that's the girl, hey?"

"That's the girl givin the party, if that's what you mean."

"She's sweet on you all right."

"I guess she likes me."

"She looks bilious to me. Kind of sallow an scrawny."

"Rats, she's all right."

"Well, she aint healthy, anyhow. You dont want a wife who'll run you up doctor bills all the time."

"Who said anything about a wife? I aint marrying her!"
"She's figurin you will, count on it."

It was a nice party, more fun than at Viola's, even. Louise's brother wasnt a bad guy, very quiet, but he could see a joke. His girl was there, an Anna Pritwitz, a Slovak but lively. Just as American as anybody. And Viola and Kress, Gloria and Pilcher. Just the eight of them. Even if they had a whole house to themselves the Kramers didnt have the room the Klopses had in their flat. *This* time Marvin stayed after the others, and he really did help with the dishes, with an apron of Louise's tied around him. After the place was cleaned up he and Louise sat in the parlor on the "taupe mohair" couch (overstuffed) and he put his arm around her and she leaned her peanut-butter-colored marcel on his shoulder, and they kissed, listening to sounds from the other rooms apprehensively.

But the next morning Marvin was in trouble. Oh, never was he in trouble the next morning!

As soon as he could he went up to the corner, scared stiff. Charley was there alone, waiting for him or Louie to show up.

"Charley, come along a ways, willya? I got to talk to you confidential."

"Smatter? Ya look low. Knocked anybody up?"

"No! Dont talk about it. Hurry up. I wanna talk private."

Charley was his pal. Once he and Charley had made up a code in school. They used to go halfies on everything. Good old Charley.

In the sandy darkness toward the foot of the avenue Marvin told Charley and Charley whistled. "You're ess oh ell awright. Whyncher use a prophylaxis? What was you in the army for, anyhow?"

"Christ, I never thought of it. I din think the hag would burn me."

"Listen, steer clear of these clap doctors. There's a new saw-bones opened up on Libbidy Terrace, I heard say. A young guy, used to be in the AEF."

"That's over in the development. I dowanna meet anybody."

"Thinkin of Louise, hey? Well, we'll duck her. I'll steer the way."

"Gee, come in with a guy, willya?"

"Sure I will."

In silence the pair walked, Marvin painfully, to the new addi-

tion. The doctor's office was in a neat little white shingle house with an arched doorway, opalescent glass in the front room, to the right black-lettered MALCOM WALKER, M.D.

There was a light over the door. Charley marched up the stoop; Marvin lagged behind. "Lets not go in yet. Lets walk around a bit more."

"Nuts, he'll shut up in a minute. It's after hours now."

Charley pushed the bell. A young woman, the light on her hair yellow, opened. Yes, the doctor was in. She was eager. Please come in and sit down.

The room was very plain. Yellow walls, brown pictures like in schools. A shiny mahogany bookcase with a mahogany clock on it. An optimistic dozen straight-backed chairs and a very plain center table with new magazines on it: *Literary Digest*, *Life*, *Saturday Evening Post* . . .

"Who's first?" A short, straight young fellow with a white coat like a barber or druggist's stood in the arched doorway. He had a little, close-clipped mustache; sharp, dark-blue eyes.

"I'm with this bird," Charley said, thumbing toward Marvin.

"In this way, please."

"Can my friend come in too?"

"What's the matter, scared?"

Charley grinned. "Sure he's scared. He's got a dose."

The doctor frowned.

"Come on in. Your buddy can look at the magazines."

Marvin followed the doctor into the room with the clouded windows. There was a white cabinet full of shiny knives and funny scissors and pinchers. One of these high-legged, double-jointed beds on wheels. A weighing machine and a glass tank on a stand with a long rubber . . .

"Sit down, young fella, and tell me about it. So you put your foot in it, hey?"

Marvin grinned feebly. "I wish it hadda been my foot," he said.

The mustache twitched: "Service man?"

"Yep. Yes, sir."

"Overseas?"

"No, sir. Greaseball with a gang guardin the reservoi."

"Working?"

"Yes, sir. In my mother's store. Delicatessen. Schurz Avenue."

The doctor frowned. "Take off your clothes. Hop up on the table."

Marvin obeyed, his stomach cleaving to his spine. He looked

up at the white ceiling. "Hurt? . . . This hurt? . . . How old are you? . . . Now just a minute. . . . Hurt? . . . Here, I want to put something in your eyes."

Marvin sat up, wet with sweat, while the doctor went to his desk and began scratching with pen on prescription pad.

He gave Marvin the prescription and orders. Bed for him, and no beer, no whisky. Keep out of the store. And so and so. Do this. Mostly dont do that. I'll be around to see you.

"How did you get it, anyhow? Pick it up around here?"

Stock excuse: "I guess I—I got it in a dirty toilet."

Stock comeback: "That's a hell of a place to take a woman."

"Whaddaya mean?" Marvin bridled, then laughed. "To tell the truth, doc, I been goin with a coupla nice girls, clean ones, mind. And I got all steamed up from being good an gettin no more than a kiss, so I picked up a broad at the ferries."

"You're a damned fool, soldier. Get wise to yourself. Marry one of those nice clean girls—not for a while yet, or you'll pass it on to her. Keep away from the floozies."

"What'll I tell my mother?"

"Oh, tell her you got a touch of appendix. I'll back you up when I come."

Out, then, to the grinning Charley. "How was it?"

"Tough, but he's a good guy. Here, I cant have this filled at Schreck's. Get it for me some place outta town, willya, Charley? And you'll keep your trap shut about this, woncha?"

"Aint I your buddy?"

So Marvin told his mother he had been to a doctor and had a touch of appendix. Mother wrung her hands, asked why he had wasted that money. Why didnt he tell her? She would have put an icebag on him and given him a dose of salts. Here, she'd do that right now.

"Give the doc a chanst, willya? Lemme alone. An keep outa my room. I feel lousy an I dowanna have no fuss made over me."

"And I your own mother who brang you out of the double newmonia without a doctor, you talk to me like that!"

The doctor came daily, kidded Mom, scolded and cajoled Marvin; a fine guy if ever there was one. Two days Marvin spent in bed, sleeping late in the mornings, so late he had trouble sleeping at night. He ate lightly, from a tray, and got so hungry at night he sneaked down to the store and got himself graham crackers and a pint of milk.

Mom reported: "Eddie Kress was in to ast after you. An that Swedish girl, she ast after you, too."

"Nobody else?"

"Oh, Charley is in an out. An Louie was in."

"Who did you say?"

"Louie."

"Oh!" Not Louise.

The third day Mom came up in great excitement right after taking the lunch tray down.

"That Swede girl is here with her father," she said. "Can you come down? They want to see you right off if you can."

"For Jesus sake, what for?" Marvin yelped, alarmed.

"*He wants to buy the store!*"

"Tell him to go jump in the bay."

"I told him he'd have to talk to you."

"Tell him to go to hell."

"Well, I'll tell him you're too sick."

"Tell him nuts."

Sell the store! Sell the store? Why, what would they do without the store? Imagine! On the other hand, though, not being tied down to the store—Marvin had held down good jobs at good pay. Good pay! *There* was something to think about. What did he get now? Cigarette money. And the hours—from early morning to late at night. Tied to the old lady's apron strings. Maybe that was why Selma had been sweet on him. Maybe she and her old man had had an eye on the store all the time and were playing him for a price. Sell the store? Why, he could hardly remember the time there wasnt a store. . . .

(It was not that he gave much thought to such things, but childhood memories troubled Marvin. His mother's wedding, now; not his father's. It was Mother's wedding. The minister had stood on the square of bright carpet, unfaded. . . .

(The first time he had been allowed to cross the street alone; that was certainly a true memory. He remembered how very large it made him feel. . . .

(Grandpa. When Grandpa died Marvin began to live. . . .

(That first Sunday trip to Staten Island from Bay Ridge—the first look at the house in Schurz Avenue—selling Mom the first meal from the shelves. . . .)

It was a long time before Mother came back. She sat down on the edge of the bed sniffing at the heavy odor of disinfectant.

"Do you think the doctor is doin you any good? I never seen

crazier treatment for appendicitis. You better lemme make you a hot flaxseed pultice to draw the poison out. Do you think you swallowed a norange seed?"

"What about Johnson?"

"Johnson? What Johnson?"

"The Swede? What about him?"

"He said he'd drop in again tomorrow or the day after. What do you think of the idea?"

"I dunno. There's good reasons for sellin an good reasons for not."

"That's the way I feel. An your poor father, now, how he slaved an wore himself out to build up the trade. I remember when we bought it how proud he was. An how he spent Sundays for a month putting up shelves an plannin everything, the stock an all."

"Gee, ma, do you remember the time we opened the packin cases an put all the stuff on the shelves, an how I kep playin store an you bought crackers?"

"Like it was yesterday, son. Makin potato salad an roastin hams an chickins an washin windows all the time . . ."

"Our first customer. Who was our first customer?"

"Lemme see, now. Who could it of been?"

"Godammit, I remember! It was the little girl from next door. She come in for a dozen rolls and I ony gave her twelve so she come back for the other. Dont you remember? Beatrice Heine-miller. They moved. She must be married."

"I dont remember. I guess I wasnt in the store then. I musta been in the kitchen or somethin."

Mom began to cry a little, without making sounds.

"Gee, we dowanna sell the store, mom."

"No, I guess not. It's a sort a monument to your father."

Dr. Walker allowed Marvin up the next day. He had to keep out of the store, keep his hands off towels, silverware, anything anyone else touched. He had to wash his hands in this stuff and put that in his eyes. He had to burn this and boil that and by the way, did the man from the Health Department come?

"Christ, no! Why?"

"I had to report this, of course. He should have come. He may yet. Keep out of the shop, now, until I say you can go back."

Marvin explained to his mother that in addition to the appendicitis he had got the itch, somewhere; maybe in one of the ferry toilets. That made her anxious to mix some lard and bichloride,

but he showed her the evil-smelling medications the doctor had prescribed, and they looked potent enough even for her.

So Marvin dressed and sat on the bread box outside the door, drumming with his heels and smoking. It was swell, summerlike weather. Lousy of Louise never to send him word.

He dozed. An unfamiliar tapping aroused him, and he gulped when he saw Johnson ten feet distant. Selma wasnt with him.

"Better already, no? Good! No weather to be sick in. Ay guess you mother told you about my proposition."

"Yeah, but we dowanna sell."

"No? Vell, anyhow, you dont mind if Ay sit down?"

He sat down on the box beside Marvin, propping his crutches against the store window and lighting his pipe.

"The insurance people an the compny settled with me," Johnson said after a silence. "Ay got my money, but no leg, no yob. Ay got to find me a business."

"That's so," Marvin responded.

"Ay think to myself, maybe with all Scandinavian people coming here, a delicatessen with Scandinavian food, you know, maybe it goes good."

"I'm thinkin of puttin in a line myself," Marvin said. "I was talkin to a salesman."

"Yes? From vere he is, this salesman? Vat lines he vants you to put in?"

Caught, Marvin merely shrugged.

"Oh, everything. We didnt get down to details."

Johnson inspected Marvin carefully.

"You like it, keeping store?"

"Sure."

"Good money? Easy hours?" Johnson chuckled. "Easy hours for a faller without legs, but for a strong man like you, behind a counter an shovelin salads!" He chuckled again.

Silence. Then Johnson spoke again.

"How much stock you got? How you figger your overhead? You charge yourself a salary an rent?"

"Of course not. We own the house free an clear, an I'm my own boss."

"Vat taxes you pay?"

"Not much. About a hunnerd an twenny a year."

"Ten dollars a month. Hm."

"How's Selma an the missus?"

"Good! Fine! Selma is a nice hard-vorkin girl. She askit after you."

"She's a nice kid all right. Well, ya gotta excuse me. I gotta go in. Somethin you want?"

"No-o, not now. You think over my proposition."

"You dint make one yet. Just said you wanna buy us out. What offer ya wanna make?"

"You make me a price."

"No, it's up to you. We dowanna sell."

"Vell, vat's the use makin a price?"

Marvin went inside, a little resentful of the fact that Johnson had put new and uncomfortable ideas in his head. Rent—salary—overhead. Return on investment. Gee, he talked like a book. But even so—

"Mom, where's all the bills?"

"All the what? My land, Marvin, what do you want them for? It isnt near the end of the month."

"I wanna figger out just what we owe everybody."

"In the box in the tubs, of course, with the money."

Marvin, time heavy on his hands and a new curiosity to satisfy, took the steel box up to his room with a pencil and a couple of paper bags to figure on. He checked over the bills. The installments due on the new fixtures—down now to a little over \$200. The dairy products house, the canned goods jobber, the pork products company, the baker; he figured rapidly and accurately.

The Langs owed exactly \$1,019.41.

What did they own?

Marvin went downstairs.

"How much did you pay for the house and store?"

"What's got into you? Are you changin over your mind to sell anyhow?"

"Just tryin to find out where we stand, that's all."

"Your father paid \$5,800 for this place."

"As it stands?"

"No, of course he had it redecorated, and then there were store fixtures and all. And then after the panic he had to take out a morgitch but he paid that off."

"That makes more than \$7,000 he paid for it, then."

Marvin went upstairs with the account book. He was surprised to discover how little was really owed the store, once the bad debts were charged off. Not much over \$100.

Cash on hand was \$69.04.

He had of his own, in the bank, \$602. Gee, it had shrunk. Well, that didnt count. It was his money, not store money.

Sitting on the bread box later Marvin hailed Coleman, the veteran real estate and insurance broker of Belle Bay.

"Just for the sake of argument, Mr. Coleman, what's this dump worth now?"

"You want an appraisal?"

"How much would it cost?"

"Oh, nothin for an old friend. Not a cent, if you promise to let me handle it if you sell, ever."

"Sure."

Marvin took him through the house.

"Kind of old-fashioned. Hot-air furnace; gaslight an dirt floor in the cellar. But realty is high, now. Housin shortage. Who wants to buy, someone in town?"

"I'm not askin a figger for sellin. I just want to know what we can credit ourselves with."

Mr. Coleman hummed, looked around the living room, poked his head into the kitchen again.

"Oh, say seven-five. You'd have to shade that if you were sellin. But say, seven-five."

"You mean seventy-five hunnerd?"

"Yes, but you'd have to shade that to a customer. That's an askin price. How much cash has your customer got?"

"I havent any customer."

Small talk, and the old man went out. He stood in front of the shop contemplating its façade a moment, and then shuffled off homeward. Marvin hurried off to his figures.

Assets—real estate, say, \$7,500 at the top.

Stock on the shelves—oh, \$750.

Accounts receivable, say \$100.

Liabilities—\$1,020—say, they werent bad off at all. Better than \$7,000 to the good! They'd lived off the store for going on fourteen years, and had what they started with at least.

Charley came in that evening.

"Howsa kid?" with a wink. "Howsa old appendix?"

"All to the mustard," Marvin replied. "Howsa gang? Seems like they all forgot me."

"Not them! Why, I come in here every day askin your mother, and Kressy was in too, I know, an Louie sure. And so was your girl."

"Whaddaya mean, my girl?"

"Well, ole sultan, I dont know all your hairem, but I know Kress said Louise was worryin, an that she stopped in oncet anyhow."

So the old woman had kept that a secret, huh?

"Come on up to the corner?"

"Sure thing."

Kressy and Louie hailed him. It was good to sit down at Pop's again and chew the fat. Baseball and skirts, the Army of Occupation and wages.

"I'll tell Louise I seen ya. The poor femme was worried sick."

Charley had kept his word. Good old Charley hadnt told a soul what Marvin's ailment really had been.

Next day, casually enough, Johnson came scraping along on his crutches and Selma with him. Gee, the girl looked like a million.

"Hello," Marvin greeted them, jumping off the bread box.

"I am so glad you are better," Selma said, reddening.

Marvin thought, so maybe she has come around to help swing the deal, huh? If she's trying to vamp a bargain for the old man . . .

"Mom will wait on you for anything you want. I'm still off the job."

Selma hesitated, then entered the store. Johnson sat down on the box. Marvin waited for him to make the advances.

"Vell, Ay guess you been thinkin over my proposition?"

"Yes an no. Natcherly it makes a guy think."

"Vell, lets talk business. How much you think is the store vorth?"

"It's worth a good livin an a home for my mother an me."

Johnson made an impatient gesture.

"I'm no busnessman," he smiled. "I'm a friend for you, Lang, an I dont cheat an make belive I dont vant the store. Listen, you come around tonight. Selma, she vill make smörgåsbord and coffee, an ve vill talk like two men face to face. Eight oclock, yes?"

Selma came out, her arms full of bundles.

"Ay askit this young fella to come see us tonight," Johnson said. "You got enough to feed him?"

Selma turned red again. "I guess so," she said.

Sure, thought Marvin, this was a put-up job.

It became a warm evening. The boarders were not on the porch when Marvin arrived at the Sundquist house, but Mr. Johnson was. He started talking about trees: how he had watched the buds swell and unfold.

"Each leaf just like the other and each one a problem in mathematics," he said. "Look how they grow on a branch, so the under leafs get light and air yet from above. If there is a God he is a engineer."

He smoked awhile.

"God. Christianity. Nobody is a Christian. Christianity now and how Yaysus taught it is different. He taught socialism, almost communism. And pacifism. Vell, Ay dunt cheat nobody, dunt lie to nobody, an if Ay go to church Ay cant do better."

"I guess not," Marvin said, wondering where Selma was and if this was a Sunday-school meeting or Red propaganda.

Then Selma came out and sat on the top step, gathering her skirts around her calves. Nice legs. Johnson spoke to her briefly in Swedish, and she answered a monosyllable. Her father knocked out his pipe.

"Ay go inside a minnit," he said, and went indoors.

Marvin and Selma sat in silence.

"I was sorry to hear you was sick," Selma said. "I am happy you are better now."

Marvin flushed in the dark. Suppose she knew—she wouldnt know about such things. Selma wouldnt. He got up from the wicker chair and sat beside the girl. She leaned back against the porch pillar and smiled at him so he could see her bright teeth. The lamppost light made her white-and-goldness bright in the dusk.

"You got nice hands," Marvin said.

Selma laughed. "Nobody ever says that to me before," she answered. "Nice hair, they say. Not nice hands."

"Well, it is nice hair. I guess everybody notices that first of all but I look further than that. I look for the little things."

"My hands is not so little!" Selma laughed again, and spread her fingers on her knees. "They vor—work too much."

"Look how big mine are next to em."

Marvin spread his palm against hers, and they peered through the gloom at the comparison. Then Marvin closed his fingers over Selma's, and his heart beat faster. She let her hand lie in his clasp.

"How come your brother aint around?"

"He is studying for school examinations and then goes to bed."

Marvin edged closer, until thighs met. He pulled Selma's hand to his lap and then leaned suddenly and kissed her chin.

"Oh," Selma said in a small voice. "Oh."

"Never been kissed before?"

"No."

The little liar. She was twenty if a day. How could a girl grow up without being kissed? The bitterness lay on Marvin's lips, and he thought again that all this was just soft soap to grease her father's deal. So he kissed her again, harder, on the lips. He saw her chest heave and he breathed harder himself, for she sure was good-looking; in a way. That is, you'd turn around to look at her in a crowd where you'd pass up Louise.

Marvin released her hand and put his damp palm against Selma's breast. She trembled, and stood up hastily, all tautly poised.

"I look at the coffee!" she exclaimed, and ran into the house.

A nice act she put on, Marvin tried to make himself believe. He'd like to go to bed with her anyhow. Sell the old man the store and take a lay out of Selma as part of the price the old man wouldn't know he was paying.

Johnson came to the door.

"You kids have a qvarrel? No? Come in, now."

The living room was a little warm. Johnson sat down and Marvin did likewise. Mrs. Johnson came in and Marvin stood up to greet her, because he had been taught to be a gentleman. Then Selma brought in the food. The four munched and talked about the weather.

"Now," Johnson said, wiping his mustache upon a hand as hairy. "Now lets talk. The ladies, they got their yob."

Selma and her mother carried out the dishes, and Johnson lit his pipe. "Ay got my settlement from the compny," he said, coming to the point.

"Like Ay told you, Ay guess Ay open a little busness. Ay dunt bargain, or make out Ay dunt like what Ay do like. Ay like your store. It is good location, a house attachit, and not too much competition for me. For you, maybe yes. Ay put in another line of goods so the Svedes and Scandinavians here dunt got to go to Brooklyn for their stuff. So if you vant to sell, you say yes; or no is no."

"I never thought about it until you put it up to me," said Marvin. "I'll be as out-an-out about this as you are. The store is a living and a home. But it ties a young fella down. So my mind isnt made up yet but I took inventory.

"I took inventory. We got about a thousand dollars' worth of goods on hand. The house and store, fixtures included, is worth anyhow eighty-five hundred. I had an appraiser come in. We owe on stock and things like that nine or ten hunnerd dollars."

"Your figures include goodwill?"

Goodwill! That was an item he had forgotten. Just what it was Marvin did not know, except that it always figured in business transfers.

"No. You can figure what that's worth."

"How much business you do in a week?"

"It changes from week to week, you know that. The good season is just now startin in."

Johnson shook his head and puffed his pipe.

"Ay figgered about sixty-five hundert."

"Well, then, you see—" Marvin gestured negatively.

"Vell." Johnson drew noisily on his pipe. "Vell, Ay guess I open a liddle store of my own."

Marvin mused over that.

"With prices like they are now, and rents and all, you wont do it on no sixty-five hunnerd."

"Oh, Ay start small an build up," Johnson answered. "Ay ent scarin you with talk about competition. Tell you an idea. You sell me, an Ay hire you to run store for me for a month so you can get settled somevere an so ve keep your customers for me. You keep old ones, I bring new ones."

"I'll have to talk to my mother," Marvin answered. "It's her store anyhow an she said ony last night she wouldn wanna move out of it on account it's like her hus—my father's monument."

"You talk to her," Johnson agreed. "By and by Ay come see you both."

"Come some evening," Marvin said. And then there wasnt much else to say, so he said good night.

Selma was standing on the porch, surprisingly. Marvin came up to her and put his arm around her waist, his hand up high so he could feel her breast heavy on his thumb and wrist. He kissed her. •

"I guess that's worth \$500 on the price?" he said mockingly.

"I—what do you mean?" she murmured.

"Oh, nothing, nothing at all." Marvin laughed, as he marched homeward.

Next evening Marvin went to see Louise. It was like coming home, because this time he rang her doorbell and she cried out at the sight of him and dragged him indoors.

"Mom—Pop! Here's Marvin. Gee, I'm glad to see you well again. Sit down, Marvy. You mustn't strain yourself."

Mrs. Kramer came in, untying an apron; Kramer, looping up suspenders. They both shook hands, asked him how he felt, if he had his strength back. Alvin was out, they explained; calling on his sweetheart, they laughed. But Alvin would be glad to hear Marvin was up and around.

They sat down in the living room and Marvin was kept in a sweat answering their questions about his appendix, and listening to Mrs. Kramer tell how Alvin got it so acutely they had to operate on him right away.

"As big as your fist, it was, and all shiny and green. I seen it myself. They had it out before I could get to the horspital. In two weeks he was up and back on his job again. You shoul'da had yours out an not be bothered with it any more."

"I think he was right not to let em cut," Kramer said. "The way it seems to me, if you got an appendix it must be for something. You wouldn have it for nothin. Doctors is too quick to cut."

"I guess you're right," Marvin said, "but like Mrs. Kramer says, if its diseased bad, why, it ought to come out."

Louise clasped and unclasped her hands. When Marvin looked at her she shuddered. "I hate to talk about things like that," she said.

"Well, come on, pa," Mrs. Kramer said, getting to her feet. "I guess these young folks have enough to talk about together without a couple of old has-beens like you an me horning in."

The old folks left the room, shutting the door behind them. Louise came directly over to Marvin, and knelt on the sofa beside him, her arms on his shoulders.

"Gee, lover, I'm glad you're all better," she said, and kissed him on the mouth. "And here's one more to get well on."

She settled down beside him, his arms comfortably around her, his hands clasped on her lap. "Gee, I missed you," he said.

"I sent word by Eddie Kress, and I stopped in once to tell your mother," Louise said, looking up at him. "There wasnt a thing I could do."

"Gee, you're sweet." Marvin kissed her. "Whatcha been doin, kid?"

"Helpin Violer get ready."

"Get ready for what?"

"Her weddin, goosy. Dont you know they get married a week from Saddaday?"

"No. Kressy dint say a word."

"Isn't he the big pill! An you goin to stand up with him!"

"Nix on that! Let Pilcher do it."

"Violer thought that would be nice, her sister an her friend standin up for her an Kressy, an them standin up for the other two in a double weddin, but Glorier said she didn wanta make it a two-ring circus."

"I tell you, kid, lets you an me stand up for them, an they can all stand up for us an we'll make it a three-ring circus!"

"Ooh, Marvy, arent you bad? Why, we aint even engaged."

There was silence, then. This time it was a hopeful one on Louise's part, but Marvin's was one of panic. What in hell had he said that for? Louise tightened her grasp on his arm and hand. He'd like to show that Selma, though, she didn't have to think he was soft enough to fall for her line of sales talk.

"The girls at the office gave Violer a nice shower, a kitchen shower," Louise said. "She got the nicest things. Aluminum pots an pans, an towels an dishcloths an a meat chopper."

"That's a good graft," Marvin said. "How about a bedroom shower? I guess Kressy would appreciate that more."

"You're so bad, Marvy," Louise giggled, putting her face up to be kissed. "A girl brings all her own linens, sheets an things."

"Sheet aint no good without a bed, an a bed's no good without a mattress or a girl." Marvin guffawed. Louise hid her head on his chest, and pounded him tenderly with her fist. "You mustn't say such things, Marvy."

"You're old enough not to believe in no stork," Marvin replied. "Dont girls ever think about, well, after they get married?"

"Of course not," Louise cried, looking up with her hair over her eyes, her mouth wetly crimson. Marvin kissed her hard, closing one hand over her breast and gripping her thigh with the other. Louise clung to him, her hands on the back of his neck.

"Oh, let me go!" she cried, suddenly, and jumped up from the sofa. She crossed the room to the window, tidying her hair, her chest heaving. Marvin leaned back, watching her, breathing hard. He lit a cigarette. His hand shook.

Louise came and stood behind him. She put her hands in his hair.

"Dont be mad, Marvy. You aint mad?"

"What should I be mad about?"

"Lemme get you some cake, an I'll make lemonade."

The front door rattled, the latch clicked, and Alvin came in.

He blinked at Marvin. "Hello," he said vaguely. "Oh, it's you. Harya, Lang?"

"Okay," said Marvin. "Well, I better run along now. See you in church. Olive oil, Louise."

He walked home rapidly. Gee, it would be nice to have a little flat somewhere, and Louise in an apron cooking things when he came home, and when she kissed him like that he could pick her up and cart her off to bed with nobody to say aye, yes or no to them.

Kress came in next evening; Marvin was having supper in the kitchen.

"Wancher do me a favor," Kress said, almost under his breath.

"Sure thing," Marv replied, stabbing a frankfurter.

"Violer an me is stepping off together Saddaday week. Wancher stan up for me."

"Betcha, kid. Too bad, but I'll be there to close your eyes and read the burial services."

Kress looked up, squared off and punched Marvin joyously in the chest. "Gosh, Marv, I feel like a million. When are you and Louise gonna do it?"

"We aint even engaged yet," Marvin said. "I guess I wont get hitched for years." He hummed: "Gee whiz, I'm glad I'm free, no weddin bells for me."

"Nuts," scoffed Kress. "Settle down, nice little wife, nice little flat, nice little son sooner or later."

Mom called from the store. Marvin looked in. Mr. and Mrs. Johnson were there, with Selma.

"Aint that the Swenska you been hangin around, like some of the boys told me?" Kress asked in Marvin's ear.

"She's been hangin around me, that's all."

"Well, you're still free. I can count on you, then, hey?"

"For what? Oh, yes. Sure thing. Where's it gonna be?"

"At the house. You'll have to get a tuxedo."

Mother was flustered, and didnt respond to Kress's good night.

"This gentleman said you ast him—he said he come to talk and look things over. Why dint you tell me?"

"Hello, Mr. Johnson. Hello, missus. Hello, Selma," Marvin cried. "I guess Ma's excited because the house aint in apple pie order."

Mrs. Lang fled to the dwelling rooms, while Marvin entertained the callers in the store. He pointed out the stock, mentioning the good sellers. He demonstrated the new fixtures, while Johnson translated for his wife. Selma followed Marvin with her

brilliant blue eyes. He felt as if a spotlight were fixed upon him.

Mother peered into the store. "I guess you can come in, now. What with a man in the house an me in the store you'll have to excuse the looks of things."

Johnson laughed, and translated. They trooped up the steps behind the icebox into the living room, which was remarkably tidy.

"I just give things a lick an a promise," Mrs. Lang apologized. "Sit down, folks. My, isn't it warm?"

They sat down around the center table. Johnson remarked how cozy it was, to live right off the store. He translated what he said to his wife and she nodded and smiled at Mrs. Lang.

"Well, this isnt yust a social call," Johnson said. "Can Ay smoke?"

"Sure thing," Marvin assented. "I wish I had a drink to offer you, but I been off the stuff an it aint any too easy to get."

Johnson winked and tapped his pocket. "All in good time," he said. "Now, did you talk things over with your momma?"

"Talk what over?" Mother asked.

"Selling the business," Johnson replied, leaning back. "Like Ay told Marvin here, Ay am not a good—how you call it?—bargain maker. Ay like to open a business. Ay like your store an its place, handy and all. Ay think, well, maybe ve make it a bargain."

"I dont know," Mom said, twisting her fingers. "My husband started this an somehow I feel like I ought to ask him about it. Marvin's a good boy and a big help, but it was his father's business. I declare I dont know what to think."

"Vell, the insurance compny settled with me for my accident," Johnson explained. "Ay start a little busness, maybe, or else Ay buy it."

"Maybe you'd like to see the house?" Mom asked Mrs. Johnson. Mrs. Johnson turned toward her husband, and he translated. She spoke, and he told Mother it would be very nice of her to show the house.

"Ay stay here vith Marvin," he said. "Selma, she vill go vith you and talk for her momma."

The three women left the room, climbing the narrow, dark little stairs so that presently their footsteps sounded intermittently above. Johnson winked and took a bottle out of his pocket.

"A couple glasses, Marvin," he suggested. "This is akva vit."

Marvin got the glasses and Johnson poured out three fingers for each. "Skaal," said Johnson, clinking his glass to Marvin's,

and a moment later Marvin's eyes streamed tears from the tasteless pungency of the liquor.

"Good stuff," said Johnson, putting the bottle in his pocket again. "Now, it's all right to let the ladies talk and look into rooms, but us men, we do the business. Lets make figgers."

"Listen," Marvin said. "Sixty-five hunnerd is out. If you are figgerin on that there's no use wastin your time."

"Listen," Johnson replied. "You made a figger, Ay made a figger. So be it. Ve compromise. That's life, always compromise. Ve get in a lawyer, an appraiser, it costs us money. Ve see if we cant make a gentlemen's agreement."

Upstairs the toilet flushed noisily. The men grinned at each other.

"Does the price you wanna make include the debts and the accounts due us, or do we settle everything first?" Marvin asked.

"How much you owe, an how much is owin you?"

"I'll show you," Marvin said. He went into the kitchen and got the steel box. From it he took the bills and the paper bag with his figures on it. "Countin off bad debts, we stand to collect about a hunnerd. Countin in what we owe on the fixtures, we owe a thousan an nineteen. I check the stock at over a thousan. Saÿ stock an debts cancels each other. Then we settle on what the house an lot an store an goodwill is worth."

"Ay got a figger on it. A friend of mine from Stapleton, who owns houses, he figgered for me."

"Well, I got a figger too," Marvin said. "An old friend gave me a break. Coleman, the real estate dealer here in town, he came in an looked over the place and gave me an honest figger."

"Vich is how much?" Johnson shot at him.

Just then the women came down. Mrs. Lang led them to the kitchen. Selma and her mother exchanged opinions in Swedish.

"Marvin, cant you go out an make up some sanwitches?"

Marvin cut thick slices of roast pork, of smoked salmon, of headcheese. He buttered slices of pumpernickel and sour rye. By the time he was ready to carry them in the smell of coffee floated out into the store. The Johnsons were grouped together, talking earnestly. Mrs. Johnson was evidently displeased about some things. Selma was making little interruptions, drawing diagrams in the air with a pink finger.

"Excuse us," Johnson said. "You know Momma dont speak English yet."

"Sure, hop to it," Marvin said, setting down the food. He went into the kitchen, and Selma followed him.

"Maybe I can help your mother," she said. "I'm sorry I dont think about it quicker. I'm a squarehead, you know. We dont think quick."

Her eyes were blue as sparks from the trolley pole, and they burned into Marvin. Selma in his kitchen. Selma with that yellow hair down over her nakedness. Was her hair that yellow everywhere?

"Sure, honey, you can carry in the cups and saucers," Mom said. "Here, Marvin, you get real cream out of the store, an take the sugar bowl in as you go."

The two families gathered around the food and ate like connoisseurs. Johnson urged a drink of his brandy on Mother, who refused laughingly. "I used to like gin in tea," she said. "I'm English, you know. But I got over that. And I liked beer, before this war beer came in, and now it's worse."

"Now Ay tell you," Johnson said, pouring himself more coffee. "Ay tell you, Mrs. Lang. Like Ay told Marvin. My missus likes the house but it needs fixin. Old-fashioned, but solid. High ceilings, lots of room. A nice yard. Good. Marvin here says eighty-five hunnert, free an clear. Ay say sixty-five hunnert, an we take over all debts an liabilities. Now you got controlling vote. You say something now."

"I'm sure I dont know what to say," Mrs. Lang murmured. "Mr. Lang paid fifty-eight hunderd—"

She caught Marvin's frown, swallowed, and stopped.

"Vell, my price give you a nice profit an besides you got rent free for all the time you lived here."

Some of Mom's old acuteness came back to her. She straightened up in her chair, a glint of excitement in her washed-out eyes.

"But think how property has jumped here since then," she chimed in. "You couldnt buy a twenny foot by a hunderd lot anywhere around here for less than a couple of hunderd a front foot."

Johnson poured some brandy in his third cup of black coffee. He savored the mixture, and spoke thoughtfully.

"Ay know how much Ay can afford," he said. "Now here is my take it or leave it, an plenty of time to think it over. Sixty-eight hunnert, an Ay take over all liabilities. You let me know inside a veek. On top Ay give Marvin a yob for a month and pay him ten per cent gross salary."

"We'll let you know," Marvin said.

"Come on, Selma," Johnson said. "Ay hope we make an agreement, Marvin. Mrs. Lang, thank you for your good food. Good night."

Selma gave Marvin her eyes and hand. The visitors left and Marvin locked the door behind them.

"What do you think?" Mom asked.

"Lets sleep on it," said Marvin. "I shouldnt a drunk that likker."

But it had no bad effects. He was cured, all right, thank God, the next morning proved. And in the shop he and his mother talked.

"What'll we do if we sell?" Marvin asked.

"We can find a flat or a little house," Mother replied. "You can get a job without trouble. Maybe Johnson'd keep you on. Strange that woman didnt learn English yet. The girls nice, though, cept she looks so forrin. But healthy-lookin."

"That's got nothin to do with it."

"How much is six per cent on sixty-five hunderd?"

Marvin computed. "Three hunnerd an niney."

"That's how much a month?"

"About thiridy-two bucks."

"It would pay the rent onto a house."

Marvin pondered that. Evidently she had the idea of keeping the money all in a lump, investing it somehow, in a mortgage more than likely. That wasnt his idea. Invest it in a business. Six per cent was for rich people who had tens of thousands to stick away, and no work to worry em. Oh well, that was something to talk about later.

"Tell you what," he said. "If he'll pay seven thousand we sell."

"I sort of hate to, thinkin of your father."

"Yeah, but you wouldn be chained down in no store makin salads an sanwitches and tendin store when I'm out. I'd have a chanst to get ahead, too, without the store tyin me down."

"I guess so. I'm getting old. I dowanna stand in your way."

Marvin said, "Bushwa." Later he wrote a letter to Johnson stating the ultimatum. Johnson appeared the next afternoon with a lawyer. In an hour the deal was settled. Marvin and his mother signed papers and took a check for \$1,000 as a binder. Title was to pass July 1.

Marvin told the gang at the corner that night. Louie came to the store next morning and said his father proposed Marvin buy an interest in the Goldschmidt shop. The proposition was, the old man said that he loved Marvin almost like a son, and he would give

Louie a half interest, Marvin could have the other half for a thousand dollars, and they could rent the store from him for fifty dollars a month, lights included, the Goldschmidts to keep on living upstairs. Mom thought the idea wasnt so good. "What do you get for the thousand? Nothin you can put your hands on. No real estate. Just half the profits of a business you got to work full time for."

However, there was Kress's wedding to take business off Marvin's mind. Kress was downright scared about it. Marvin went with him to hire the tuxedos, which cost \$2 a night, but they had to buy a stiff shirt and a stand-up collar with a black tie.

Marvin drew \$20 from his bank account. He had to get a present for the bride and groom. What to get? He consulted Louise, who said she thought something they could use would be the best. He suggested an icebox. They bought a phonograph. The Kresses were going to set up housekeeping in a flat in one of the new six-family stucco apartments, steam heat furnished, over near the beach. The Friday before the wedding Kress and Viola took Louise and Marvin over to look at the flat. It was on the second floor. They had it all furnished already, and they paid cash for the furnishings.

Kress took the key out of his watch pocket, his face shining. Viola stood by, Louise's arms around her.

It was close in the apartment, and smelled strongly of varnish. The floors were hardwood, very yellow. The rugs were down, good American Orientals, with birds and bamboo sprays on them, mostly in the stylish new mulberry.

"The kitchen is a honey," Viola said. "It's all ready, even to a lot of canned goods I got at my shower."

The door led into the living room, where the couple had installed a three-piece suite of gold-hued mohair with carved mahogany feet. Marvin looked for the phonograph. It was there, ribbon and all. There was a long, narrow table of black enamel with touches of red and gold, and on it a brocade runner with camels and those pointed things—what do you call em, Ed?—pyramids, embroidered on in natural colors. A standing lamp, with a heavy wooden base and a silk shade in four panels, dark blue outside, rose inside, all ruffled and puckered most beautifully.

"Violer did it herself."

"Yes, and she hemmed all the towels and sheets. Looka the kitchen."

Stationary tubs of white enamel, a sink with a mixer faucet,

open plumbing. Tiled wall behind the sink. The white enamel icebox came with the flat. No pans to drain, it's attached to a pipe. And the kitchen cabinet, a genuine Hoover, with a flour mixer in it and look how the bin comes out, and look at the canisters in china-ware with windmills, all marked for sugar and salt and coffee and allspice.

"Whats allspice?"

The bathroom—Ed, show Marv the bathroom.

Genuine white tile floor and walls, and a one-piece tub. Built-in medicine chest and toothbrush holder. Shower bath, see? And did you ever see such a flossy crapper?

The bedroom had two windows on the fire escape. The bed was of walnut, with carved medallions at head and foot. And a blue-and-rose bed lamp. A cedar chest with lion's feet, and a Martha Washington sewing cabinet. A cunning little rocking chair in shiny flowered material. And the closet had a light in it that goes on when you open the door.

"Maybe the electric compny's foolin you, an it burns all the time."

"Shut him in the closet to show him, Ed. Help me, Lquise."

A pleasant tussel then, and Marvin was thrust into blackness.

"Lemme out or I'll smother. Help, I can't breath!" Marvin yelled. Louise snatched the door wide. "Marv! Oh, you big faker. You scared me sumpin awful."

Marvin hugged Louise and she pushed him away. "In front of people!"

"Well, it's a nice layout," Marvin said. "An I can see the bed aint been used yet. Good work, Ed."

Ed and Viola turned pink, and Louise put her hand over Marvin's mouth.

"Well, there's an apartment like this in the house nex door," Kress said. "I advise you to snap it up. Only forty a month, heat an water included. Why dont you make him sign up, Louise?"

"Why should I? I aint got any claim on him."

"When are you givin her the ring, Marv?" Viola demanded.

"Oh, dont talk nonsense," Louise protested, hanging her head.

"No nonsense about gettin hitched," Kress responded heartily.

Viola, bold as brass, came up to Marvin and put her arms around him. "Gee, that would be nice, Marv. Whaddaya say, lets be neighbors. Honeymoon row."

Marvin looked around. Kress was grinning like a sliced Swiss

cheese and Louise was looking out the window, her neck red. Viola, well, Viola's face was an inch from Marvin's.

"Yeah, it would be sorta fun," Marvin said.

"Oh, you sweetheart," chirped Viola, kissing him. Kress slapped him on the back. "Come on up here, Louise," Kress said, and kissed her. "Now we each got a kiss offen the others girl. Fifty-fifty, Marv."

Johnson spent the whole day in the store and even made himself sandwiches at noon, same as if the place belonged to him already. He was taking inventory, a detail on which his lawyer had insisted. Marvin helped him. Mrs. Lang brought out all the statements from the wholesalers, so the value of everything could be figured. The idea was that the day the store changed hands the wholesale cost of all the goods sold in the meantime would be deducted from the price paid for the business.

At 5:30 Marvin went upstairs and put on the rented tuxedo. The shirt bothered him most. The tie was a cinch; it was already knotted and fastened in the back with an elastic loop. At six he left the store. Mother and Johnson said he looked swell, like a waiter in the Astor. Marvin wore a straw hat dapperly on one side, and walked over to Viola's conscious of the looks he got. There was a crowd of kids around the Klops stoop and the flat was crowded with people—men shoved into corners by excited, sweated women who wore aprons over their finery. The parlor was shut off and no one could get in. In the hall bedroom the bride was being robed.

It was hot and it was close. Kress was in his tuxedo, very red in the face, serving Pa Klops's beer to all in the first bedroom, just beyond the dining room. Two tubs filled with ice and bottles replaced the bed. Empties were on the floor and dresser.

Every once in a while Viola's sister or her mother would stick in a head and yell for Aunt Meta or Annabelle or Liz, and some woman would squirm through the crowd and enter the mysterious precincts. The fellows crowded around Kress, making sly cracks.

"Lissen to this one. Lissen, Kress. A guy gets married, see, and he and his bride get onto a Pullman, see. So he goes out to the can and while he's away there's a guy with a trained bear in the upper berth an the bear gets loose an he crawls down with the bride, see. Well, the bear—"

"Aw, dry up. Jeez, you guys make me sick."

"Dont get stage fright, Kress. You gotta job—"

"Shuddup or I'll lam ya in the puss oncet."

"Ya will? You an who else?"

"Hey, pipe down, there. Calm yourself, you blokes. Open another brew, Kressy. You, buddy—upsy daisy. Gwan downstairs an cool off."

"Shshs, the preachers here."

A new tone, a new note, in the symphony of buzzing. The tempo of the hive rises as the nuptial flight draws nearer. A surge toward the door where the preacher stands.

"Wancher meet the best man, reverend. Mr. Lang."

"Harya, reverend."

"Well, you may call yourself the best man, son, but I think Mr. Kress has a better right to the title this evening. Come over here. I want to talk with you. You have the ring? Well, this is what you do . . ."

The room became fuller, hotter, stuffier, noisier. Then the piano sounded from the front room. The crowd milled, women giggling shrilly.

"Form a line there. Here, the bridegroom an the best man up front. Say, let a fella pass, will ya?"

"Spell that."

The front room had been cleared of everything except the piano. In the bay window, which was real roses from baseboard to picture molding, stood the minister. From a screw-eye in the ceiling hung a floral bell with a wax Cupid dangling from the clapper. Real society stuff.

"Everybody stop here. Where's that ribbon? Here, stretch it out. Now the bridegroom an the best man stand here. Everybody else behind the ribbon. For Gossakes, you're at a weddin not an accident. We dowanna marry the wrong people to each other. Okay, sis."

Gloria began the opening bars of the wedding march. Marvin felt fifty pairs of eyes boring into his back. He clasped his hands in front of him, saw sidelong that Kress plucked at the braid on his trousers. The hall bedroom door opened and Viola came in dressed in a veil, holding a shower bouquet, white satin gleaming under the net and tulle. Behind her came Louise in purple-pink organdy, a big floppy hat hiding her face. She had a bouquet too. The bride and bridesmaid passed behind groom and best man, and Viola edged in beside Kress just as if she had been married a dozen times. The minister motioned Marvin back, and he bumped into Louise behind him, but nobody laughed.

Kress surprised Marvin by talking up real loud when it came

time for him to say the fatal "I do" and then Louise nudged him and said "Ring." Marvin had the box in his hand, and it was all shriveled from perspiration. He slipped the ring to Kress who grabbed it tight and then pop-o! It was all over, just like that. Kress kissed Viola, Louise kissed Viola, Viola put up her puss for Marvin to kiss, the gang busted through the ribbon barrier, Marvin kissed Louise, everybody was kissing somebody and the women began to cry, and even some of the men did, whom beer and heat had affected more powerfully than the ceremony.

While all that was going on some of the women elbowed back to the dining room and kitchen, and laid out the sandwiches and salad, and Pa Klops uncorked more brew for the gas to work off. There was a wedding cake which didnt look like a cake at all but like that sand sculpture stuff you see on the beaches, all figures and flowers. A genuine caterer's job. Viola cut it. The mob was packed closer than in any subway crush, and everyone was sweating, laughing, talking. Marvin reached far and grabbed a couple of sandwiches—pah! some kind of slimy paste on warm lettuce between thin slices of limp bread. Somebody gave him a beer and several somebodies stamped on his feet. Then, after God knows how much of this, there was a surge in the crowd—the bride was being led back into seclusion.

"She's gonna change into travlin cloes."

"Hey, fellas! Marv, you an evrybody, come over here. Lissen—"

"Marv!"

That was Kress.

"Lissen, pal, I ordered a cab. I guess there aint any way to fool the crowd an make a getaway. Let em have their fun with rice an all that but you stick close an see there aint any funnywork, see? Sometimes they try to kidnap the bride or the husbind or some goddam trick like that, see. You stick by me. Let em chuck their goddam rice an their shoes an to hell with em. Louise is comin along to help Viola."

"Where we goin?"

"I ain't even tellin you. Viola an me fixed it up. You'll know."

"What about your suit?"

"At's okay. I'll change it somewheres an you take it back to the sheeny, see? I'll do the same for you someday."

"Gangway for the bride. Gangway!"

Viola, in a linen suit. Louise in something gray and pink. Hands reaching out to touch them, faces pursed pressing forward. The

girls came along sideways, erratically, through the dining room. Marvin forgot about his hat. He elbowed his way through the press to Viola, turned, linked arms with Kress, put head down and charged through the crowd. Into the hall, cool and dark. The electric shock of rice on bare neck. Cheers. Rice. Down to the front door. A cab, and a mob between it and the door. Two cops, even, grinning up at the wedding party.

Rice hissing, biting. A shoe hit Marvin on the temple. "I can lick the bastard who done that."

Oh boy! Marvin never felt tougher in his life. Kress and Viola ducked into the cab. Louise next. Then Marvin. The cab jolted forward amidst the most ear-splitting clangor of metal ever heard on that street.

"What the hell?"

Marvin stuck his head out the window. A lot of old cans and kettles, including a washboiler, tied to the back of the cab; some wise guy had topped that by roping the cab to the metal horse-guard around the buttonwood tree at the curb. The cab had pulled the contraption loose. People swarmed over the running board, boys hung on behind.

Cheers, yells, drummings, clanging and clatter, clamor and din. The driver zigzagged to throw the celebrants off the car. An arm came through the window, a hand snatched at Viola's hat. Marvin grabbed, twisted, pushed, and somebody sprawled in the street, rolled over on his belly. It was Charley! Well, it served even him right.

Heads popped from windows. Other cars, all pedestrians, stopped, as the marriage party sped along, ducking down one street, careening up another.

The cab slowed and stopped. "I guess we shook em all off, boss."

Marvin and Kress got out, ripped off the remaining cans and tinware, "Just Married" signs, other decorations.

"Now where to, boss?"

Kress named a street and number. "And take the back streets."

To Marvin: "We'll go back to the apartment, an I'll change my cloes there, Marv. You'll take care of these duds, hey? Then the missus an me are goin to New York, to a hotel."

Off rolled the cab. Viola turned to Kress and the two of them clinched, arms around each other's necks, lips close-glued, noses meshed.

Marvin put an arm around Louise and kissed her on the cheek,

whispered in her ear, "After they go, lets fix up the apartment for em. You know, mix it all up."

"That's mean."

The driver, intent on running up a fare as much as concerned with pursuit, made a tour of Richmond. It was pitch-dark night when he pulled up in front of the apartment and said, "Four dollas an thoidy cents."

"Here's five. Keep the change."

"Thanks, boss. Congratulations an best wishes."

"Thanks, fella."

Up the stairs. In front of the shining door Kress kissed Viola again, fished out the key, swung open the door.

What he started to say was not "Jesus!" but he said that.

A lot of the furniture and most of the rugs had been piled in the little hall, and when at last Marvin reached in and switched on the lights they saw a bedsheet had been tacked to the wall and "Welcome" printed on it in iodine.

Viola began to cry. Otherwise there was no sound from the four as they went into the apartment.

The living room had been all but cleaned out. A prodigious amount of labor had been accomplished in a short time to roll up rugs, shift all the furnishings, put the couch into the hall. Likewise the kitchen. All the crockery was gone, likewise the supplies.

The bedroom. Viola's going-away suitcase had been spilled on the floor. On the bed two effigies were entwined: Viola's nightgown, padded out with towels, and sprawled over it Kress's gray suit, stuffed with pillows and sheets. The contents of a can of tomatoes encarnadined the bed.

Viola sobbed louder, and Louise began to alternate giggles with cries. Marvin opened the bathroom door. "Good God," he said.

All the crockery and some of the linens were in the tub and the tub had been filled with water. The broth had been thickened with the contents of the flour bin and coffee canister.

In a rage Kress swept the bed clear of the dummies, plumped himself down. "Who the hell did this?" he choked.

No one answered; no one knew.

"How'd they get in?"

Kress glared at the three. "Where's your key, Vi?"

"I—I was afraid I'd loo-lose it so I give it to Glorier to keep safe."

"You goddam nitwit! That's the answer! That bitch of a Gloria

and her smart friends come up and done this. Jesus, what a sap I married!"

Viola shrieked and hid her face on Louise's shoulder. "Shame on you, Mr. Kress," Louise spat, and wept into Viola's hair.

"Sure, that's no way to talk," Marvin said, grinning nervously. "It will look funny to you after a while. It is kind of funny. Gee, they musta worked fast."

"Funny, my ass," shouted Kress. "A hell of a fine start on a married life this is. God damn the—"

"Lemme loose, Louise," Viola cried. "I'm going back home. I want to. Lemme loose."

"Hush, stop it," quavered Louise. "Listen, you two, dont let this spoil everything. You go on to New York like nothing happened, and Marvy and I'll clean up this mess so when you come back tomorrow it will be just like nothin happened, wont we, Marv?"

"Sure we will," Marvin agreed. "Come on, Kress, peel off them clothes and get into your other duds. Git outa here, you girls."

"No, I wont go with him, I wont!" Viola wailed. "We aint even married a couple of hours an he calls me names and curses me."

"Aw, nuts," Marvin soothed. "He's sorry. Tell her you're sorry, ole man, an get dressed."

"Jeez, but to spill everything to that dumb sister of hers. Gimme a kiss, kid. I'm sorry I bawled you out."

He put his arm around the sobbing bride, kissed the back of her neck. She turned up her face and gave her lips.

"Take her into the front room," Marvin told Louise. "Get a wiggle on, Kress. Here's your shirt. There's some tomato on the tail of it, but to hell with that."

Kress changed swiftly. Then he called Louise in to repack her bag. Marvin began moving back the furniture from the hall. He had the living-room rugs down when bride and groom said good-bye.

"Have a nice time," Marvin said, and then flushed at the unintentional double meaning. Louise and Viola kissed lingeringly. Viola was laughingly happy, Louise tearful now.

Marvin and Louise closed the door on the departing couple. Marvin turned to kiss Louise.

"No time for that, Marvy. Lets get going."

She hunted in the kitchen for an apron, and appeared with sleeves rolled up, dress covered with gay gingham.

"You get the furniture in and clean up the bedroom," she said. "I'll tackle the mess in the bathroom. You can start wiping when you're ready. I'll make the bed over again."

Marvin rearranged the living room as he remembered it. Then he repaired the ravages to the bedroom.

Soiled and crumpled towels and the mishandled bedding were used to wipe dry the dishes and to clean out the tub. After two hours of labor Marvin and Louise surveyed a tidy apartment, save for the pile of stuff bundled in a corner for the laundry. Marvin was in his undershirt, a sheet skirtlike about him to preserve the rented pants.

"Well, it looks pretty swell again," Louise said, brushing a damp strand of hair from her forehead with the back of a pink and water-wrinkled hand.

"And what a job," Marvin sighed. "Say, flop down on the couch there and I'll put on my shirt and run out for a couple of bottles of beer, hey? I guess we got a rest comin to us on the Kress furniture."

"Gee, I'm so tired I could drop," was all Louise said. Marvin put on his coat, leaving shirt and collar behind and letting Louise drop, as she had threatened, on the sofa, he sallied forth for refreshments.

He came back with two bottles of cold near beer and two sandwiches from the drugstore at the corner. Louise had kicked off her shoes and was lying on the sofa powdering her nose.

"Gee, this is homelike," Marvin observed. "Just us two, like we belonged here. We couldn't of worked harder if the dump did belong to us. Ha-a-a-up!" He yawned. "Just like old married folks."

Louise smiled dreamily, her eyes filmed.

"Whaddaya thinkin of, kid?"

"Oh, nothin. Of Viola—and—and nothin."

Marvin thought of Viola—and Kress. They were in New York, now. In the hotel, for their one-night honeymoon. They were—

"Gee, Louise."

He knelt beside the couch and put his arms under her shoulders, and Louise enfolded him and kissed him back. It was hard to breathe.

Marvin freed one hand and felt for Louise's heart. She sighed and shuddered a little as he increased his pressure. Marvin had to breathe through his mouth. His hand traveled down the curve of

Louise's waist and hip, to her knee, to the hem of her dress and under it. He trembled with the need of her as his hand passed the round, ornamental garter and felt the moist flesh above the stocking top.

Louise, lips apart, eyes closed, suddenly struggled erect, shoving at Marvin with both hands.

"Let me go, you—let loose of me," she cried wildly. "Oh, Marvy, what were you doing! Let me up."

Marvin sat back on his heels, panting, shaking his head.

"Marv, we've got to go, we must. It's late. My mother—"

The girl rose and ran to the bathroom, hands at her hair. Marvin stood up, his heart still hammering. So this was love—

Louise came forth, apron doffed, hair tidied, brisk and impersonal. "Come on, we must go."

Marvin picked up the black jacket with the silk lapels.

"Hell, I got to take Kressy's tux along."

He passed Louise, went into the bedroom, turned on the lights. "We got to make the bed too," he said. "No sheets on it."

Louise came in, looked through dresser drawers, pulled out two sheets. "Come on, lazy, grab these corners when I flip it over."

The sheet was smoothed, and Louise tucked the corners in on her side, crossed over to do the same office on the other. She leaned over, skirt tight across her bottom. Marvin reached out and caressed her.

Louise gasped and stood up. Marvin's arms were around her. The two strained against each other, and toppled over on the bed, unseeing, unthinking, just one fused motion. Louise said, "Oh, my dress," and lay limp as a rag doll while Marvin stripped it off over her head, and fell upon her, all senses merged into one thrusting demand. Once Louise cried out weakly. It wasn't the first time for her, but the first in a long time.

After a while Marvin arose and turned off the light. He rejoined on the bed a woman who twisted and twitched, who mingled tears of remorse with the involuntary chuckle of concupiscence, who turned her back upon him swiftly but pressed his hands against her breasts.

They awoke at dawn, awoke together, and stared into each other's amazed eyes. Louise sat up and saw that she was naked, that the man beside her was naked, and with a tiny scream she leaped up, holding a pillow against her, searched wildly for her garments, and fled—most amusingly naked in the rear.

Marvin stretched, examined his body, scratched, dressed. No coat. He put it with Kress's discarded finery.

Louise came out of the bathroom, which she had boldly put to obvious uses, dressed. "Marvy, oh, darling," she said, standing against the doorframe. "What—oh, we must get married."

"Yeah," Marvin said, dropping his eyes. "Yeah, I guess so."

"What'll I tell the folks at home?"

"Tell em you spent thê night with a friend, an that's no lie."

"Oh, Ma will see it on my face. Do I look different?"

"You look like a million."

"We shouldnt of."

Marvin laughed, and Louise flushed.

"That's all it means to you. You can laugh!"

"I wasnt laughin at that. I was laughin at Kressy and Violer—I was laughin at their bed. We—I guess we—Jeez, it's funny, dont you see? We—not them."

The next afternoon, a rainy Sunday, the whole Johnson family came around. They sat around the dining-room table and Mother went into the kitchen and made coffee. Mrs. Johnson followed her, her husband translating that she would like to make a baking-powder cinnamon coffee cake, a half-hour cake, it was called.

Selma and her brother sat on one side of the table. Marvin and Johnson sat opposite each other.

"Another veek, now," Johnson said. "Vare you folks moving?"

"I dunno, we aint looked yet," Marvin admitted.

"Did you consider what I said about you should stay here in the store?" asked Johnson. "Ay guess Ay need experienced help for the start."

"I guess I'll look around," Marvin said. "I dont have to hurry. I got some money of my own, a bond or two. Besides, I'm sorta thinkin I might get married."

Selma suddenly pushed back her chair. She giggled, her face pink, and then rushed into the kitchen. Johnson watched her with a knowing smile, Marvin with amazement. Johnson winked.

"All right, Ay guess," he said. "Ay guess we do business together so two families make yust a living."

Cripes, thought Marvin, they both think I'm going to marry *her*—marry Selma. Holy smokes! But—she had lots more stuff than Louise. Louise! What a mix-up.

"I might go pardners with Goldschmidt the butcher," he spoke. "I got to find a place for my mother, where she can take it easy."

"A boy what thinks first of his mother Ay shouldnt be afraid to trust with my money or my daughter," Johnson said. Marvin didn't know what to reply.

Next night, Monday, Marvin called for Louise. She acted as if nothing had happened between them. They walked to Kress's.

Viola opened the door. She had on a sleeveless dress with rick-rack braid around the armholes. Marvin saw she was shaved under the arms. Kress came out of the kitchen. He just had pants over his BVDs and slippers. He was smoking a pipe and wiping a glass.

"Yea, bo. Come on in. Make yourselves at home."

Marvin nudged Louise, and she gave a high, nervous titter, blushing very red. Viola had turned her back and was leading the way into the living room, so she didn't see. Kress stared, winked at Marvin. He was beginning to learn what funny things women were.

Louise and Viola sat with their arms linked.

"Gee, it was sweet of you two to clean up the mess."

"It wasnt anything, was it, Marv?"

"Nah, we had fun."

"What time did you get through?" Kress asked. "It must of took you all night long."

"I must a dropped my handkerchief," Louise cried in panic. "In the hall. Lemme look."

"I'll get you one of mine," Viola offered. "Come along an let the menfolks talk."

The girls disappeared into the bedroom. Marvin looked at Kress. He couldnt ask him what he wanted to ask. Kress suggested a beer. "She brung a dozen bottles from her old man's."

They pledged each other solemnly in the bitter, slightly clouded home brew. When the girls came out Kress demanded when them two was going to be sensible and get hitched.

Marvin cleared his throat in the silence that followed lengthily.

"We sell out this week," he said. "I got to look for a job, an I got to find a place for my old woman to live."

"Why not find a place for you an Louise to live?"

"Maybe she dowanna live with no mother-in-law."

Louise looked unhappy. "I just love your ma a lot, Marv," she said. "But it would be nice to start out alone together like Violer here."

"Maybe you could look for a little house somewhere an divide it?" Viola suggested. "Your mother could have her own rooms

upstairs an you two could live together downstairs, or the other way around."

"I dunno," Marvin said. "What about eating? Mom would eat with us. We couldn run two kitchens. Maybe she could house-keep an Louise could keep on with her job."

"Well, you just gotta make adjustments, that's all," Kress suggested.

"I dunno," Marvin mused. "But take it from me, no big weddin. I wouldn go through with what you two done for a million dollars. Just slip off somewhere an let a judge tie the knot, that's my dope."

"Oh, Marv, that aint like gettin married at all," Louise cried. "A girl wants a weddin, especially if afterward she—oh, that seems all wrong."

"Then we wont get married," Marvin said. "We'll just live together."

"Oh, shut up, you dirty thing," snapped Viola.

"I can stick up for Marvin on that," Kress said. "Next time I get married, bo, no shoes, no rice, no crowds."

"What do you mean, next time?" Viola flared. "You men! A weddin is the one big thing in a girl's life, and every girl is entitled to her own."

The talk went on, half-fooling, half-earnest, until it turned on what Marvin was going to do next, when the store was sold, and on that point Louise was so insistent that Marvin "better himself" he got sick of the talk and hauled her off home. Were all women so doggone bossy?

Tuesday morning.

"Looka here, mom, we gotta be out of here by the first. We gotta do sumpin about it."

"Dont I know it? Aint I counted the days? It makes me awfly sad. When I think how your poor father started this business an then passed away . . ."

"Sure, I know all that. I feel kinda—but looka, we gotta do sumpin. We sold the dump, didn we?"

"An you'll have to find yourself a job now, too."

"That's what I wanna talk to you about. Looka here, what are we gonna do with the money from the place?"

"I guess I'll invest it in a buildin an loan."

"That's all right. That's safe. But it dont get us nowheres."

"It gets us thirdy-two dollars a month steady."

"Yes, but what's thirty-two dollars? Cantcha see that—?"

"That's the rent of a nice house. It'd be like livin rent free, with no taxes, no morgidge, nothin."

"An what do we live off a?"

"You aint expectin to retire, are you?"

"No, of course not. An I dont expect to punch no time clock either. I aim to work for myself. Let's put the money into another busness."

"What kind of a one?"

"I been thinkin. A busness where *you* wouldn have to work. I been wonderin about a lunch wagon."

"Oh, no. No, no. You have to keep such late hours an all the time with toughs. No, I dont like that idea at all. Besides, if it dont make a go, the money's gone an where are we?"

"Looka here, that's no way to look at it. I'm a pretty good short order cook from the army, you gotta admit. I guess you could bake things, like puddin an pies. People gotta eat, dont they? An besides, toughs dont go to lunch wagons. I been talkin to a fella."

"Would it cost all the sixty-five hundred?"

"Well, lunch wagons cost more. They cost like a house. An there's the water connections an the ground rent an light an heat. I could get one for five thousand an a morgidge for the rest."

"Five thousand and go into debt besides? I think you're crazy."

"Well, whadda we gonna do then? You tell me. You know we gotta get a place to live an a job for me in a few days an all you do is criticize."

"Don't get so boisterous. I'm still your mother and entitled to some respect. Well, you just gave me an idea. Supposin we open a boardinhouse? Down near one of the factries. I bet we could find a good place, with four bedrooms, for thirty-two a month, an we could keep maybe five steady boarders, six if one didn mind sleepin with you, an feed maybe ten besides."

"For the love of gosh, *that's* a crazy idea. I—"

"Hear me out. You could do the cookin just like in a lunch wagon. An I'd help with the fancier substantial things. I'd do the bedmakin and maybe we could have a woman in once a week to wipe down the place an wash."

"Gee crimminy, what a life. Me in a kitchen, a Irish biddy."

"So you'd be in a lunch wagon."

"I would not. I'd be right up front talkin to folks an puttin the dough right into the cash dror."

"Well, I like the idea of a boardinhouse real well."

"An I think it's bughouse. Anyhow, it's haffa my money, aint it?"

"Haffa your money? I'd like to know how you figger that out. It's your father's money, that's whose."

"Sure, I know, I know. He aint comin around to collect it, though."

"Dont get disrespectful of your poor dead father, who died from overwork an worry about you bein in the army géttin shot an all."

"Okay on that. But I guess I worked for the business too. I guess I got up before light, an delivered orders. An when I was through school an other kids was playin I came back an worked in the store until they was in bed."

"I shoulda thought you'd be glad to, seein the nice home an the good care an education you got, an all. Dont be ungrateful."

"Oh, balls, there you go cryin," Marvin grouched. "You can't even discuss a business matter without bawlin. What's the use? It goes to prove women aint any rights to be in business."

"I dare you to say that to that pasty-faced little shrimp you figure on marryin. It seems to me she's in business an doin right by her parents too, I dare say."

"Who's gonna marry who? I'm not marryin anybody."

"That's what you say. I can tell."

"You can tell beans, maybe."

"You been goin around with that Louise pretty steady."

"Oh, we just been foolin around."

"Foolin around, hey? First thing you know, you'll get the girl in trouble and then what, Mr. High an Mighty?"

Marvin felt his face reddening, knew he had lost the whole argument on one blind shot; he jumped wordlessly from the kitchen table.

In the store, between customers, he brooded. His mother intended holding fast to the money. Well, suppose she did. He didnt want the money for his own fun. He wanted to invest it in a business, to support her, give her an easier life. Trouble was, she considered him a kid still.

That boardinghouse business. His days in a kitchen! On the other hand, a snug little lunch wagon, gleaming with nickel, a sizzling pan of hamburgers on the galley, and a bunch of young fellows waitin for their java and kidding back and forth. God Almighty, couldnt Mom see the difference?

Mrs. Lang came through, dressed for the street.

"Hey, where you goin?"

"Out. I wanna see about somethin."

"What about?"

"Good heavens, what a boy! My own particular business."

She passed through the door. Still sore, thought Marvin. Still—good night! Maybe she was going to cinch things by closing a deal for a boardinghouse! Marvin stamped on his cigarette, ran to the door. His mother was turning the corner. He thought of closing the store and following.

"Vell, hello, an how is our business today?"

Marvin turned to find Johnson at his shoulder. "Kinda quiet just now," he answered, and then was seized of an idea. "Say, dya wanna tend store by yourself a haffa hour, just for the experience? I wanta go see a guy."

"Sure, Ay like to."

Marvin stripped off his apron, then and there draped it on Johnson, strode up the street to follow his mother. She had already disappeared. Where? Not Goldschmidt's. Not the hardware store nor the rival delicatessen, surely. There was Swiger's real estate office! Kind of far off for an old lady to reach so quickly, a block and a half.

Marvin strode to the one-story, plate-glass fronted office of Emil Swiger; Swiger was a newcomer; realty, insurance, first mortgages arranged. He was gambling, it had been said, on the housing shortage driving people from Brooklyn and Manhattan to Richmond.

But Swiger was alone in his office. Marvin looked in and the man took his feet off the desk and waved a shirt-sleeved arm in general affability. Marvin waved back and, baffled, returned slowly to the store. Johnson was behind the counter, blissfully staring at the countless cans about him.

"Ach, back so soon? Nobody comes in the time you iss gone. Maybe Ay made a mistake to buy so slow a business like it is."

Marvin forced a grin. "Oh, there's enough to do when you get through the day an look back on it all."

"You got any plans yet, what you shall do?"

Marvin shrugged. "It's up to my old woman," he mumbled. "I dont know what she wants to do. I think she wants to buy out a boardinhouse."

Johnson let several minutes pass in silence before he spoke.

"It is good to have regards for your mother. But also a man must know he is a human indiividual; am Ay right? Ay admire

how much you think always on your mother but you must not be tied to her apron. Ay tell you this because Ay like you very much, as my family does, whole, too."

"You aint telling me anything," Marvin replied. "What the hell, I earned my living long before I could vote. I've traveled too. But she says all the money is hers and she's likely to waste it on somethin crazy."

A customer ended the discussion, and presently the pre-lunch-hour rush was on. Johnson worked as hard as Marvin, both in filling orders and in agreeing that it was terribly hot but the humidity was what made a body feel it so. When trade slackened Johnson said he had to go home to his own meal.

Marvin cut himself a half pound of summer baloney, ate it in a chunk, drank a pint of milk. And then in walked Mother.

"For the love a Mike, where you *been*?"

"I been out to get me a hair rinse an a permanint, that's what," Mother replied defiantly, removing her hat gingerly and giving her alarmingly rigid hair a toss which disturbed not one wondrous ringleet.

"You got a what?"

"Oh, dont be so dumb. For the first time in my life I got a few cents I dont have to account for to nobody, an I guess I'm as entitled as the next one to spend a penny on myself."

"What money? You didn draw none?"

"I got it out the box, that's where. Outta the cash box in the kitchen. An I got a good mind to take all of it an buy me some of them nice fluffy dresses."

"Holy—hey, did the heat getcha?"

Mrs. Lang stalked into the house. That, thought Marvin, settled it. Why, the old lady must be past fifty, and getting herself all beautified like a flapper. She just wasnt to be trusted with money, that's what.

He followed her into the living quarters. Mother was looking at herself in the old oak-framed mirror over the sideboard, fanning herself with a folded egg carton.

"I thought I'd die under them electric curlers," she said, with disconcerting animation. "I musta sat there for two hours gettin my head baked. How do you like it?"

"It looks like a shingle roof," Marvin retorted. "You must be bats."

"No, I aint. I'm just wakin up."

"I wish somebody would wake me up," Marvin cried.

"I been thinkin more about that boardinhouse idea an it seems better every time I turn it in my head. Look, we never thought of all the people that come here to the beach. Why, the beach is crowded this very minute an here it's only a Tuesday and scarcely past noon. Summer boarders, that's what. A nice, simple home place, with lots of plain food. So I sat down an figgered no frumpy old woman is gonna get any customers, so I fixed to get myself shined up a little."

Marvin leaned against the doorframe while this lengthy explanation was presented. "I aint gonna do it," he said.

"Then I'll get along without."

"Besides, I got a say in investin the money."

"A son to argue with his widowed mother about the few dollars his father scraped and saved, killin himself to do it."

"Aw, he got it from his old man. He didnt put it away in any bughouse boardinhouse scheme. He showed sense."

"Marvin Lang, standin there tellin me I have no sense."

"I din say anything of the kind."

"You said as much as. You're stubborn. It's the Dutch in you. You want your own way. You got your heart set on that lunch wagon. You want to get in debt, and into a business where you meet only truck drivers an Lord knows what bums. Well, my heart's set on something more refined. I aim to better myself, not go downgrade."

She talked just like Louise had. All women were alike. "Refined," jeered Marvin. "Feedin an cleanin up after a bunch of dead beats."

"You just talk. If everybody was like that, there'd be no boardinhouses. Look at it reasonable. You can just help me in the kitchen till we get a start. Then get yourself a good job an pay me no more than any boarder. Meanwhile the intrest on the money goes a long ways toward payin our rent. From the store connections we can buy our stuff wholesale, and the first month on credit. If we dont make a go, we still got our money."

Marvin could think of no ready argument. He was saved by the store bell. His mother, sensing her advantage, continued to speak from the door after the customer had gone.

"If you do get married, which I dont say you shouldnt, you dont have housekeepin expenses right away. You bring your bride under my roof. Then we wont be divided. Besides, the girl will like it without housekeepin. Maybe she can help me. I think that's

a real nice idea. She can help me, an there's her board taken care of. Or if she works someplace, she can keep on, an that's an income for you right off."

Marvin walked out of the store and stood on the sidewalk, sullen and bruised. That night at closing time he merely stripped off his apron and walked out to meet the bunch at the corner. What a razzing they'd give him if they knew he was a prospective kitchen canary in a boardinghouse! But if he had a lunch wagon it would be like this all the time, talk and laughs, and the nickels dropping into his till for pie and coffee and cokes.

Wednesday morning and Mother marched through the shop again on a mysterious errand. "Dont forget the high-heel shoes an lipstick," Marvin called after her. But the bang of the screen door was his only reply.

Again she returned after lunchtime had passed. She looked the same, however. After a moment's disappearance she spoke from the living-room door.

"I was talkin to that new real estate man. There's nothin much doin around here in the boardinhouse line, he says."

Marvin's heart leaped.

"I think I'll try up around South Beach. He has a real nice car, that Mr. Swiger. He's an up-an-comin young man. Knows his business. An he agrees with me about lunch wagons."

"I guess he does know his business if he agrees with you," Marvin said morosely. "That's his business, aint it?"

"He says he can get me a house this fall bettern now. He says he thinks he can rent me a place just outside South Beach for forty-five dollars a month with six bedrooms an a room off the kitchen. He wants me to look at it. It's rented now, but the woman's husband died an she wants to give it up."

"Sure, *her* husband dies an she wants to give up, but your husband dies so you'll take up her business. Huh, that's sense, maybe."

"Oh, she's lots oldern me, and has no grown son."

"Besides, I thought the intrest was gonna pay the rent an here the rents forty-five."

"Oh, but Mr. Swiger showed me a way. He says I should put my money in seven anna haf per cent bonds. Besides, we been figgerin on ony sixty-five hunderd and we got seven thousand, really. Mr. Swiger says he can get me gold-edge bonds at seven anna haf, an that's forty-four dollars a month."

"Yeah? An if the bonds go sour, if the compny busts, then

what? Whaddaya got? Old paper, thas what. Even a intrest in a lunch wagon wouldn disappear."

"Look, Marvin, maybe these figgers will change your mind. I got it all down in black an white. If we have seven sleepin rooms, that means we cn take in ten boarders, anyhow. Say eight, just to be sure, not countin kids on cots in their mothers' rooms.

"Say, we charge ten dollars a week for a person with room an three meals, or eight dollars for with two meals. Just to be reasonable I figgered on four payin each way. That's sevenny-two dollars a week comin in, not countin children and not countin on havin the place filled up at all. Say, it costs a dollar a week to feed em, an a quarter a week for sheets an pillowcases. That's fourteen dollars a week clear, just like found money, because I figger we get our own board an cleanin an laundry free outta that."

"Well, I guess that settles that. Fourteen dollars a week! Out of that you gotta pay for heat an light an clothes for us an—Gosh, I never thought! Where you gonna get the money for beds an sheets an furniture to begin on?"

"You're not tryin to help me. All you do is criticize an find fault. Always throwin cold water. Here I'm tryin to do my best for you an keep our money together for a rainy day an what encouragement do I get?"

"Now listen to my prop. I invest the money in a lunch wagon. We rent a little house or a flat somewheres, an you dont work at all, just maybe help with pies. Not even that. Nobody's beds to make, nor kickin about food to listen to. I lived in a boardinhouse. You just take it easy, see?"

"You still got that foolish lunch wagon idea."

And so all day. Marvin went to his date with Louise at her house, with a heavy and perplexed heart. A damp and muggy evening did not make him feel better. It was hot in the bungalow, so Louise took Marvin to sit on the porch, even if everybody could see them.

"Whatsa matter, Marvy? Whadda ya so grouchy about?"

"I'm not grouchy."

"You act blue."

"Gosh, cant a guy think?"

"I shud think you can think other times, not when you're callin on a girl."

"Maybe that's what I'm thinkin about . . ."

"Come on, Marv. A penny for your thoughts."

"Worth moren that."

"Listen, Marvin Lang, I din stay home just to sit next to a graven image watchin you sulk all night. What's bitin you?"

"Aw, lets talk about sumpin else."

"All righty, you begin. . . . Well, say sumpin."

"Christ, what makes you so gabby all of a suddent? It's my old woman all over again. Talk, talk, talk."

"I'm goin in the house if you cant be civil."

"Well, I'm worried. That fool mother of mine wants to open a boardinhouse, an she's goinna throw away the money we'll get from the store."

"Oh, yes! What are you gonna do when the stores sold? What plans have you got? Got a job?"

"No, I aint got a job. Listen here. I wanna take the money and invest it in somethin safe. I wanna buy a share in a lunch wagon, see? An she wants to open a boardinhouse an sink the money in Wall Street."

"I dont think a lunch wagon's a nice business."

"Oh, you don't think a lunch wagon's such a nice busness, dont you? What the hell dya want me to be? A—a—man stenographer?"

"Dont be so crabby! I'd like for you to get a nice job where you would have some dignity. I dont think even the store is good enough for you. Looka Ed Kress, now—"

"Oh, yes; looka Ed Kress. What's so swell about him?"

"Oh, Marvin! You dont want to be a counter jumper all your life. And bein a cook an waiter—"

"I guess what was good enough for my old man—you neednt be so goddam highbrow. What's your old man do for a living? Is he mayor or sumpin?"

"You just leave my father out of this. But I'd love for you to have some ambition, to get a job where you wear nice clothes."

"I'd rather be my own boss an go nakit, instead of wearin a pansy an a stiff collar an be bossed around by some son of a bitch."

"You cant start at the top."

"There's money in gasoline stations. Looka all the cars, an more gettin built every minute. Looka Henry Ford."

"That's a sort of rough work too."

"Christ, a guy cant get any sympathy nowheres."

"I got all the sympathy in the world. I just want you to better yourself."

"Looka here, kid, whaddaya say we get married? Right off. Tomorrow mornin."

"Marvin Lang, how you talk. No, I want to get married right."

"With a veil an flowers an rice?"

"Yes, like every decent girl should."

"Well, none of that for me. Now listen, kid. Tomorrow you get off and we'll go over an get a license an nobody knows about it till we come home an give em all the ha-ha."

"What put such an idea into your head?"

"Well, we were gonna get married, werent we?"

"Were we? I never said I would. Besides, I dont like any rushin off to get married. People ud think we had to get married in a hurry."

"What the hell! We aint so pure. And they'd find out if no baby came in six or seven munce. They'd change their minds."

"My father'd kill me."

"Oh, no, he wouldnt. He wouldnt have a thing to say oncet you're married. Come on, kid. Whaddaya say?"

"You never even told me you loved me. You take an awful lot for granted."

"Why not, after a dame sleeps with a guy."

"Marvin Lang, I—I never want to speak to you again!"

"Nuts, sit down. No, I wont let go. Sit down. You holler so loud the whole block's listenin."

"I suppose you think you're doin me a big favor now, astin me to marry you after—after— Well, I wont do it. What are we gonna live on? My job?"

"Well, what's wrong with that? You gonna quit work soon's you got a husband an just loaf?"

"An you? So long as you got a wife with a job you dont worry about workin yourself, I suppose? I guess you'd even wanna live here?"

"Look, lets talk sense. No use of gettin mushy or spoony about it. You got a good job—no, wait a minnit—I have a few bucks in the bank. I got an offer from Goldschmidt to go into partners with him if nothing else turns up, but I'll start in gettin me a real job right off. When I tell my mother I got a wife that'll stop her cuckoo notion of openin a boardinhouse—"

"I get it. You wanna make me marry you so your mother wont spend the money the way she wants. Well, I want to tell you, Mr. Lang—"

"Lissen, Louise, for the love of Mike. It isnt as if we hadnt—"

"If you bring that up again I'll slap your face."

"Yay, an who's got the big grouch now?"

"I'm not grouchy. Here you keep steady compny with me for I dont know how long and never a word, never a plan; all you want is to paw me and mush around. Then all of a sudden you get sore at your mother and you're gonna be out of a job an so you come around a mighty changed man. No, no spoonin or mushin. Oh, no! It's different now. Lets get married the cheapest way we can so I can support you while you find a job an show your mother where she gets off at. Good night, Mr. Lang."

"For the love of Mike, Louise! You'll make me sore, talkin like that."

"Let go of my skirt. I intend to make you sore. It's about time somebody took you off your high horse."

"Yeah, well, I'm glad I found out about it in time, the kind of fair-weather friend you are. The delicatessen busness wasnt any too bad a couple of weeks ago. Who's the new guy?"

"There aint any new guy."

"Oh, the hell there aint. Well, wait till I see him. I aint sore. I'll give you a good recommendation. I'll tell him you can kiss plenty good. No, he knows that already. I'll tell him how hot you are in bed—"

"You wouldnt! You wouldnt! You wouldnt dare. My brother—"

"Oh, so there is another guy. Well, see how much I care. I suppose he's got a tony job as a floorwalker someplace in a perfume department and smells just like a hoor house. An a shavetail mustache, and goozlum on his hair an—"

The door slammed. Marvin cut short his tirade, spat, lit a cigarette, leisurely descended the steps to the street and walked off aimlessly, rage and frustration in his throat like a chestnut bur. His mother gone nuts, his girl loony. Suppose he went west. Just disappeared. He could leave his coat down at the beach. Hell, he never wore a coat these days. Leave his shoes and a note. They—

Marvin found he had circled the block and was in front of Louise's again. He paused a moment, then marched on.

"A girl who would sleep with a guy before he even ast her to marry him. Phooey!"

The store door was open, and the door to the living room. From behind the icebox came voices. It was Swiger, the real estate man.

"Ah, good evening, Mr. Lang. Good evening. I got a new business prop I thought I'd lay before you. Sorry you werent in

but I went ahead to outline it to your mother here. Wouldnt take her for the mother of such a big man, no, sir."

"What's the new idear? The boardinhouse is out. I cant see it. What's—"

"Why dont you let the gentleman explain, Marvin?"

"I dont fancy the boardinhouse idea a hunderd per cent myself, to tell the truth. A lot of work, and you cant always be sure of your trade. No, sir. I see that we agree on that. See it on your face. Mr. Lang. No. Here's the prop. A little farm."

"Wait. Wait. I know what you think. But get this. You're in New York City. Biggest market in the world. They're gonna build bridges and tunnels over to the Island from Jersey and New York; short cut, you see. That means what? It means a boom in real estate for one thing. It means every penny you put into God's green soil is going to grow like wheat. It—"

Marvin laughed out loud. When he had finished laughing he forced it further. His mother looked chagrined, the realty man hurt and amazed.

"Me a farmer, a hick farmer with a straw in my mouth! That's the richest yet."

"Nothing of the kind, Mr. Lang. You do me an injustice and yourself an injustice and also farmers. Why, they are the most contented and prosperous people on earth. Never a worry about food and shelter, and a whole hungry world waiting for what they raise. Now, here's my proposition:

"This is the city of New York, and yet it is rich, untouched soil for the most part of it. You have at your doorstep a population of seven or eight millions, counting Jersey. You cant lose.

"I agree with what you said about opening a boardinghouse. Of course it is my duty, my professional duty, to supply my clients with what they want. Your dear mother here, she came to me about a boardinghouse property and I said I'd please her or bust in the attempt. Ha ha ha. But I got to thinking it over. It's a hard life with no future. It wasnt ideal. I'm not in business just to make money, believe it or not. If I dint think I was making people happy, getting them homes, seeing them nicely settled, and also seeing them making the best possible investment so they'll get their money back any time and a little more, I'd quit. I mean it. I'd quit."

"Yeah," said Marvin, trying to conceal how impressed he was. "I tell people the same thing about when I want em to buy some slow-moving stuff."

"I see you are a businessman, Mr. Lang. I cant fool you. Well, I'm not trying to. This is no guff. Were you in the service?"

"You bet your—you bet I was."

"So was I, buddy. Naval Reserve."

"I was in the army myself."

"Yeah, I always regretted not enlisting in the army. You boys saw the real service. You were the fighting men. But just the same, as the fellow said, the Navy took em over and the Navy brought em back."

The two men solemnly shook hands.

"Well, lets get back to our muttons, as the Frogs say. Here's my proposition. It's nothing to me personally, although I wont say I wont get my little profit out of it. As one businessman to another, all the cards on the table, as the fellow said. Straight dice, huh?"

"Everything on the up-and-up," Marvin agreed. "Go ahead. Shoot the works. I dont think much of it so far, but spill the dirt."

"Well, about ten miles back of here, on a good macadam road, and not two hunderd feet from the main east and west highway, I got the sweetest little proposition a man—or a woman, mind you—could want. Cozy, lots of space, and the soundest investment in Greater New York.

"It's a farm, like I said. Five acres, with about ten peach trees an a couple of apple trees, a grape arbor twen-ty feet long. Two big hen houses, with runs and all, but maybe the wires need repairing. I tell you, honest and true, and you go see it for yourself.

"There's a house on it, good solid construction, none of your modern flimsy junk. And I'll admit it needs a coat of paint. But otherwise it's sound as a dollar. Six rooms and a big porch with vines growing over it. The asking price—mind you, the asking price—is only ten thousand dollars to settle an estate. I bet I can get it for you for eight-five."

"And then what?" Marvin asked.

"Man alive, cant you see? You get yourself a couple of hundred chickens. Say, some Leghorns for eggs, and some Rocks or Rhode Islands for both eggs an meat. You sell eggs. People will come to you for em. Beg to buy em. Fresh eggs are scarce. You know that, being in the provisions line. Scarce and high. So is chicken. Friers, broilers, roasters, stewers. All the fresh eggs you want yourself, all the good chicken you want, and makin money besides.

"Now wait a minute. Aside from that, you plant a little garden.

Corn an stringbeans, maybe squash an cucumbers, early peas, limas, radishes, lettuce. Say, five bucks for seed, and you eat all summer your own fresh vegetables with the dew on em. The rest you sell. Put up a little stand by the roadside and watch how people flock in. Fancy prices, and no packin, no cratin, no merchandisin.

"Now wait. I'm not through. You're your own boss. You can see the lights on the Woolworth Building from your farm, and instead of trolleys you hear the birds singin an the crickets chirpin. You work no harder than you have a mind to. Nature is workin for you. Mother here makes homemade grape jell, puts up corn and chili sauce for the winter. You put a couple barrels of your own home-grown potatoes in the cellar, and some popcorn to pop over the fire. Did I tell you there was a big fireplace in the house?"

"Man, it's the chance of a lifetime to be independent. And in a few years with all the improvements, all the people lookin for homes, that land will be a gold mine. Cut it up into city lots. Or if you still like the idea of boarders, take a family or two for the summer. People pay high for country board. Bettern they do at the shore.

"There you are. I cant describe the opportunity. Come and look the ground over. It wont last long. If I didnt think you'd think I was pushin you, I'd advise you to give me a deposit right now."

"Heck, if you think so much of it, why dont you buy it yourself?" Marvin asked.

Swiger laughed.

"Lissen, I own two hundred acres. That's why my faith in Staten Island is. I dont own it outright. Got options on some, a little equity in some more. I cant manage another square foot. I wouldnt let go of what I got. Like the fellow says who had the twins. He wouldnt take a million dollars for em but he wouldnt give a nickel for two more. I just havent the nickel. Well, what do you say?"

"I think it's wonderful," Mrs. Lang said. "It sounds grand."

"It does sound good, but I think we ought to investigate. It takes capital to start a farm."

"Sure it does. Say, we get this place for eighty-five. You got sixty-five, isnt it?"

Mrs. Lang started to say seven thousand, but a black look from Marvin made the first syllable turn into a sneeze.

"Sixty-five, right. You give a first morgidge of three thousand,

with option to renew. I'll fix all that up. That takes fifty-five of your capital, leaves you a clear thousand. Lets say it's too late this year to do any farming for profit. You can grow some corn, some beans, garden stuff for your own use and for the winter. Say, you invest a hundred in plowin and seeds and tools. Say, you put another twenty-five dollars in some hens, pullets that'll start layin this fall. You got still nearly a thousand to see you over the winter and to get a start on in spring. By the time the money starts comin in, man, you still will have half your margin snug in the bank."

"An what about taxes?"

"Ha ha ha. I knew you'd ask that. You got a level business head. Get the bad news over with, hey? A good motto. Well, the taxes—guess! Whaddaya pay here?"

"Oh, a hunnerd an a quarter."

"The taxes on this place is seventy-two dollars an fourteen cents a year! Tie that, or beat it. I dare you."

"What is it, a lot of junk?"

"All I can say is, look at it yourself."

"Okay, take us out. Take us out—Sunday mornin."

Marvin locked the door thoughtfully behind Swiger.

"What do you think, Marvin?"

"He's got the gift of gab all right."

"He said to look at it. He couldnt be fairer."

"No, he couldnt be fairer. Yeah, it might be fun. An you always got your land. That's what I was tellin you. Bonds—phooey! Paper, an when the Wall Streeters feel like it, you're broke."

"I knew I shoullda listened to you."

"You think always I'm a kid still."

"Always, my little Marvin."

The old lady certainly was nice to him the next day. Marvin was happy with the glow of self-satisfaction. He sure got that crazy notion about a boardinghouse, with him cooking—God, that was funny—out of her head in a hurry.

He would make peace with Louise now. She was probably darned near crying her eyes out. Well, he had been grouchy. But gee, he had been worried too. Women never seemed to realize a man had to worry. They had it soft. If they never found a job it was no disgrace—if they did, it was only till they got married and got a man to support them. But all the time they thought a

man had ought to jump the way they told him to jump, do what they wanted him to do when they wanted it.

Well, he couldnt go around to see Louise. Best go see Kress. That was the way to do it. See Kress. Louise would hear about it from Viola. Then he'd see Louise at Kress's. Say, Sunday evening.

Marvin went to Kress's. He went early, so the couple wouldnt be out at the movies. The Kresses acted sort of funny. They were terribly surprised to see him, and cordial and all that, but they acted funny. Kress talked politics.

"I'm too busy to give politics much of a thought," Marvin said. "I got my own worries. What the hell, the country will be here for a long time no matter who's elected. It always has been and always will."

Kress didnt seem to care what had been worrying Marvin. He got up and wandered around the flat. Viola was sewing.

"You got the jimmies or somethin, Kressy?" Marvin asked, stretching his legs to show them he was going to stay.

"No, why?"

"You act sort of funny. So does Viola. Been fightin? Did I bust up a family argument?"

"We never fight," said Viola.

"Ha, that's a laugh. You nearly killed each other before you was married an hour. I seen it."

"Oh, that."

"Yeah. Me and Louise had a sort of fight."

No rise. What the hell was the matter with them?

"She couldnt see that a guy has worries, especially busness worries. Sellin the store an all."

"Yeah? What are you gonna do after?" Kress asked, stopping his fiddling with the latch of the door.

"I got an idea I might buy a farm and raise chickens."

Kress and Viola both burst out laughing. They laughed almost hysterically.

"What the hell is so funny about that?"

"You—a hayseed. Jesus God! Marvin Lang with manure on his shoes, sayin 'I swan, it looks like rain an the hay aint in.' Oh, what a yarn. Stop, you're killin me."

"What the hell is so funny about that? No sweatin in a shop, no hoppin around takin orders from no boss. Not even gettin up at some lousy hour to bring in the bread and the milk for the store."

"You're not serious."

"Yes, I am too, serious. Gwan an laugh. I—"

A ring at the doorbell interrupted. Kress and Viola exchanged startled glances. Viola hurriedly put her sewing away, straightened a rug. Kress stood with his hand on the doorknob.

"Say, you been expectin compny? Whyncher tell a guy? I'da put on a tie."

"Oh, it isnt compny. I mean, you know em. Or you know her. It's—well, we dont even know who one is. We—"

There was a rap at the door which Kress swung open quickly.

It was Louise, in a flurry of peach organdy.

Marvin stood up, his heart suddenly boisterous.

"Wantcher meet Mr. Ulrich, Mr. Kress."

A dapper, dark guy with ice cream pants, a gray coat, Panama in his hand, was standing on the threshold shaking Kress's hand. Louise turned, saw Marvin, turned pale so that the rouge stood out like a rash on her cheeks.

"Oh," she said.

"Dont mind me," said Marvin.

"Violer darling!"

The girls embraced.

"This is my best friend, Mrs. Kress, Kippy. This is Mr. Ulrich. And that's—Mr. Lang, Mr. Ulrich."

"Pleased to meetcha."

"Howya, fella."

The five sat down, Ulrich balancing his hat on his knee. Viola rose suddenly, apologetically, took the hat.

"Oh, we aint stayin," Louise said. "We just dropped in a minute. Mr. Ulrich is takin me to Coney Island."

"I get passes," Ulrich said modestly, showing white teeth. "I'm in the advertising game with the *Globe*. You know, newspaperman."

The goddam dressed-up sissy. So that was why Louise started to criticize his job and clothes, hey?

"It's a good line," Kress said. "You meet lots of intresting people, I hear."

"Well, yes and no. People are all pretty much alike, I guess. What's your line, Mr. Kress?"

"Manufacturin. Mr. Lang here is a farmer."

"Really?"

"A what?" shrieked Louise, laughing shrilly.

"Yeah, no kiddin. He used to be in the delicatessen line but

he sold out," Kress said, straight-faced. "Now he's gonna go in for the butter an eggs business in a big way."

"Oh, butter an eggs."

"No, farmin'," Marvin said, clearing his throat. "I'm gonna buy me a good big farm right here in Richmond. I'm gonna stock it with a thousand chickens to begin with."

"Why, Marvin Lang, you gonna do no such thing, really?"

"What the hell is funny about it? A nice home in the country, all the fresh eggs an vegetables with the dew still on em, a big open fireplace—a guy's nuts to live in a flat an work in the city."

"Well, I guess here's where we say goobye, Mr. Marvin Lang. We wont see you. You'll be up when we're just goin to bed, an in bed when we start gettin lively."

Marvin rose. The ridicule was getting under his skin, getting his Dutch up.

"Yeah, maybe that's so. An maybe one of these days you'll choke on a egg or a potato or somethin from off my farm. I'll send you some flowers, maybe."

"From off your farm?"

"From off my ass."

"Marvin!"

"Hey, cut it out, Marvy."

"Marvin Lang!"

"Aw, balls. You all make me sick. You're dumb, that's what. Cant see any further than—than Coney Island. Well, pleased to metcha, Mr. Ulrich. I used to go with Louise. We sort of thought we'd get hitched once but she likes pretty boys that wear swell clothes, like her old man. You heard of old Millionbucks Kramer?"

Ulrich was puzzled. Kress and his wife stood close together, alarmed and uncertain. But Louise was white with fury.

"Dont believe a word he says. Dont you. We never were steadies."

"Naw, we just hung around together," Marvin grinned. "Just good old pals, hey, Louise? Buddies, that's all we were. Honest to God, Mr. Ulrich."

He moved toward the door, stood irresolute with his hand on the knob, turned to confront the tableau again.

"We never slept together, never even kissed, cross my heart," he shouted, his eyes suddenly smarting. "That—that—maybe you still want him not to believe a word I say?"

He slammed the door behind him, darted down the stairs three steps at a time, deaf, all but blind.

So he wasnt good enough for the little bitch, hey? White pants. Free passes. Nuts! Balls! Hell!

He strode home, stood in front of the store a moment, then marched on toward the Johnsons'.

Pipes glowed in the darkness there. Marvin opened the gate and strode in.

"Hello—ach! Marvin. Sit down. You know the boys."

"Sure. Hello."

"Good evening."

"What brings you so pleasantly around?"

"Oh, just out for a walk."

"Ay call Selma, she's upstairs."

"Dont bother."

"No bother, Marvin."

"Ay tal her," one of the stolid young men said. He went into the house. Pretty soon the other chap went in wordlessly.

"So, Marvin."

"Yes, sir."

"You goin to miss the store?"

"I dunno. I think I'll like a change."

"You got plans?"

"Swell ones. I'll tell you later."

"Good."

Selma came down, very quietly. She edged around the scarcely opened door, spoke a quiet good evening, and sat down in a rocker beside her father.

"Vell, vot—ha ha, Selma she kicks me ven—when Ay forget my double-yoos. Ay forgot what Ay was going to say."

"It's been pretty warm after the rain," Marvin observed.

"What you can expect in summer? Ay always wonder why people get married in hot weather."

He chuckled comfortably to himself.

There was a silence, save for the sucking sound of Johnson's pipe.

"Ay guess Ay go in an read some more," Johnson observed. "Good night for a while. Selma, maybe Marvin like some home brew."

"After a while," Marvin said.

Selma said nothing. For minutes on end the two sat there, Marvin on the top step, Selma in the rocking chair.

Marvin lit a cigarette, coughed.

"I been thinkin," he said. "I been thinkin about buyin a little farm an goin in the chicken business an fresh vegetables."

"Oh, that's nice," Selma said. "Papa could maybe sell them in the store."

"Gee whiz, I never thought of that," Marvin exclaimed. There was a swell idea! The girl had a head on her. Selma! Louise—phooey!

Selma, with the yellow hair. Was it yellow all over on her? Selma with the blue eyes like sparks from a trolley pole when ice was on the wire. Big blonde, swell chested Selma, quiet and helpful Selma. She had never slept with a man, you could bet.

"I'd like to ast you sumpin'," Marvin said gruffly. "Whaddaya say we get married tomorrow?"

"Ach, Marvin, so quick?"

"Well," said Marvin. "The way I look at it . . .

1944

EPILOGUE

THE LOOIE stood up very straight and said: "Private Lang, you must prepare yourself for a shock. Take it like a man."

Carl's knees knocked together. He could feel them hit and spring apart, and his throat went dry, as if all the spit ran out into his hands which got very wet. He swallowed and tried to say "Yes, sir," but his voice squeaked. Had somebody traced those ten pairs of socks and the six shirts he had swiped out of stores and taken home for the old man and the kids?

The lieutenant handed him a sheet of yellow paper with printing on the top of it. There was typewriting on it:

MARVIN LANG FATHER PRIVATE CARL LANG DIED
SUDDENLY LEAVE POSSIBLE MOTHER ASKS KUGEL
FUNERAL DIRECTOR.

"Pop?" Carl said, and again, "Pop?"

"I'm damn sorry, you know, Lang," the lieutenant said. "You may have emergency leave at once of course. I'll write your pass. Where do you live?"

"Staten Island," Carl gulped. A tear lodged in the corner of his mouth, very salty.

At Harmon a woman from the USO came through the car and talked to the soldiers and sailors who were awake. "The train will be here about ten minutes," she said to Carl. "There's coffee and cake and sandwiches, if you like."

The food was on a baggage truck, the coffee in a great big white-enamel pot and the sandwiches wrapped in waxed paper and labeled, "Salmon salad" and "Chicken salad" and "Liverwurst."

Carl took one of each and a paper cup of coffee; he went close to the train steps to eat. A big pfc with the white-striped red ribbon of the good conduct medal on his blouse walked up, taking alternate bites from the wedge of chocolate cake he had in each hand. He asked Carl what his outfit was and Carl told him.

"My old man kicked off," he said. "I'm goin home on leave. The old woman's all alone with the kids."

"Jesus, you can get a discharge for that," the other fellow said. "Dam tootin. I wouldn't go back at all if I was you. Just wire for an extension of leave and put in to your draft board for bein the sole support of a widow mother."

"No stuff!"

"You can piss in my mess kit, no stuff."

The conductor hollered, "Boo-oord!"

"Good luck, Mac," said the pfc. "I'm makin a little tomatater in the seat back of me else I'd tell you how a feller I know done it but you go ahead and see if I aint right."

Wouldn't that be something? No more reveille, no more inspection, no more shoving socks and underwear and crap at the never-ending lines of scared-looking draftees. A discharge button in your lapel. Running the store, your own boss and all, and the girls running after you, after you for a change. Wouldn't that be something, now?

The bus was empty at Schurz Avenue, where Grandma Johnson lived and where Pop's old man had a store once too, only Mom's old man bought it. Carl moved up to a seat behind the driver. "Bay View Terrace," he said. The driver was a stranger, an old guy with the pinkie finger off his right hand. He grunted.

"That's where I live," Carl volunteered. "My old man just died. Know anybody in Richmond Gardens?"

"Hunh huh," responded the driver. "Only been on this line two days."

He pulled the bus to the curb. "Aint the reglar stop," he said, "but I guess it's alright." He shifted the gear lever and eased up on the clutch. "Sorry about—" The hiss of the air valve on the closing door cut off the rest.

Carl stood on the corner. A block down he could see the shiny white façade of the Liberty Theater gleaming in the street light. Next to it was, he knew, the Sugar Bowl and next to that Goerke's Acme Liquor Store and then Lang's Independent Market.

He crossed the street and walked down dark Bay View Terrace, the wind from the bay salty and pungent on his lips. It was a good street, nothing but one-family houses, each one with a lawn although some of the people planted cannas instead of grass on the strip of earth. There was a giggle and a swift "sh-sh-sh" from one stoop as Carl plodded along, his GI shoes loud on the concrete. In one second-story window a light came on suddenly. Somebody going to the can.

Across Pershing Avenue. Now it's the 200 block. Seventh house on the right. It stood out from all the rest because there were lights upstairs and downstairs. Thus, night gave the Lang home an individuality. For a day or two the black-and-purple crape on the doorframe would set it apart from its clapboard-and-shingle homologues too.

Carl's stomach heaved, and he felt cold sweat run down his spine. He turned and walked back to the corner, came back and noiselessly mounted the stoop, stood irresolutely before the door until something brushed against his hand. He gasped, saw that the wind had fluttered the crape against him, and in crawling terror wrenched at the knob. The door was locked and Carl could not find the bell, so he pounded on the scrim-screened glass, standing as far from the fluttering black ribbon as he could.

Forthwith there was light in the hall as a door opened somewhere, and a womanly silhouette appeared against the curtained glass. The bolt grated.

"Why, it's Carl. I wouldn't have known you, so big and in your soljer suit."

"Hello," said Carl, and gulped. He took off his cap. "Pop's dead?"

The woman drew down the corners of her mouth and nodded dolefully.

"Is he—is he in there?"

"Your ma's in there. Don't you remember me? I'm Mrs. Helmquist."

"Sure I remember you now from Belle Bay. Well, I guess I better go in."

He walked down the narrow hall to the kitchen door from which the light came. He stood in the doorway. Mom was sitting at the oilcloth-covered table. Two empty coffee cups, part of a coffee ring, the coffeepot with the chip off its side that made a picture of a rabbit. Mom looking a hell of a lot older, and her hands wrapped up in gauze that was stained yellow.

"Mom!"

"My Carl!"

There was a thump on the ceiling, and a scramble and voices. Those were the kids. He heard Rose Marie's shrill "wait for me," and he hoped they would hurry down because Mom was crying out loud, and so, for Christ's sake, was he!

The kids were sitting on the floor: Calvin and Junior and little Rose Marie. Mrs. Helmquist had gone into the front room to lie down on the davenport, now that Carl could sit up with his mother, and Carl had had coffee from her rinsed-out cup. So now they could talk.

"He was a good man, your father."

"Yes, mom. Yes, he was."

"All he ever thought about was you kids. To give you evry advantage. And a young man, still."

"How did it happen, mom?"

"Oh, my God, I can see him there vith his shirt burning and him not moving at all, lying there so tvisted up and not moving vith the flames."

"Hush, mom. Lemme pour some more of this gunk on your hands."

"I dont know how we shall get along now. Maybe the army vill leaf you out to run the store."

"They will, mom. I met a guy who told me how to do it."

"If ony he vouldnt have bought that gas. I told him and I told him ve didn need it. Ve can get along on the ration, I told him. But you know how he vas. Independent. All them joyriders going to the beaches and Jersey every Sunday, he says. If they can get the gas so can he, he says. If the ration board vont listen, then they wouldnt make a monkey from him, by gollies. The government killed your poor father just the same like shooting him."

Rose Marie and Junior began to bawl. Funny how mom's Swedish accent came out when she got excited, just as it used to when she got terribly mad at the kids and lammed them.

"So he brought it home from I dont know who, in them cider jugs, and he gets out the big old iron coffeepot to pour it out of and he says to me mom, he says, Sunday ve go for a ride too. Oh, God, in a hearse ve are going. Marvin, Marvin!"

"Hush, mom. Forget it."

"He shut himself up in the garage and God knows what hap-

pened. I'm sitting here listening to the radio and suddenly—boom! Not loud. Just boom. I run out—”

“Mom!”

“I beat out the flames with my own hands. But he is dead. Dead. They saved the garage. The Civilian Defense done it before the fire engines got here. The car got some paint off and one tire melted, and now they say the insurance people wont pay nothing on account it was illegal.”

“Dont worry, mom.”

“Well, maybe it is better, if it had to happen, that he didn live to be a cripple. If he would of lived he would of been blind and all scarred up. But his blood is on the government's head. First it is points, points, points they drive him crazy with, and then—”

“Mom, shut up, please. For Christ's sake, ma.”

“Carl, my big boy, you're the man of the family now. Dont let the government take you back in the army, promise me.”

The funeral wasnt as bad as might have been expected. They never opened the coffin at all.

At the cemetery mom carried on some, but she was so swathed in black she didnt look like herself at all. She looked like a big black umbrella upside down. It was pleasant and slow, the ride to the cemetery and out to the Scandia Hall beer garden, and the men from pop's American Legion Post had been out in uniforms all covered with medals, and fired a volley from rifles over the grave. There was more beer and sandwiches and coffee at the house, and the men in uniform having taken Carl into the fraternity of those who have borne arms, the returned soldier was solemnly taken out back to look at the blistered car and scorched garage.

“Jesus, what tough luck, Lou. I still cant figure it out.”

“He had better sense than to of been smoking, Carl. He must of knocked a spark that set the gas fumes off, don't you think, Ed?”

“Yeah, but you cant tell what's in that bootleg gas. Well, he never knew what hit him.”

“Yeah, that was a break, Charley.”

“Cripes, I can remember when he got his first job with my old man, Carl. Drivin a horse, it was. That sounds like a million years ago. He got to be a pretty good meat cutter too.”

"Yeah, an the way he fixed up our apartment the night me and Violer got married an you basteds loused up the joint. Old Marv, he an Louise worked like sons of bitches to straighten it up."

"I always wonnered why him an Louise din hit it off. It looked for sure like they was goin to step out together. Excuse me, Carl. This all happened before you was born. I guess Selma made him a good wife, okay."

"I guess he left your ma pretty well-fixed, dint he, Carl?"

"I dont know, sir. I guess we'll get along okay."

"You gonna run the store?"

"Sure, if I can get me a discharge. I heard a feller say I could on account of being a widow mother's support."

"Sure you can. Us fellers in the post will get you all the help you need. We got a regular service for servicemen. An you ought to join up too when you get out."

"You bet. Well, will you find out for me about getting my discharge? The old wom—mom, she cant run the store, and Cal's too young. He ought to finish high school anyhow. Then I can break him in. The war'll be over an he'll never be drafted. Then maybe when he catches on we can open a branch in Belle Bay."

"Sure thing. Count on us, bud. Lang Brothers Markets, hey?"

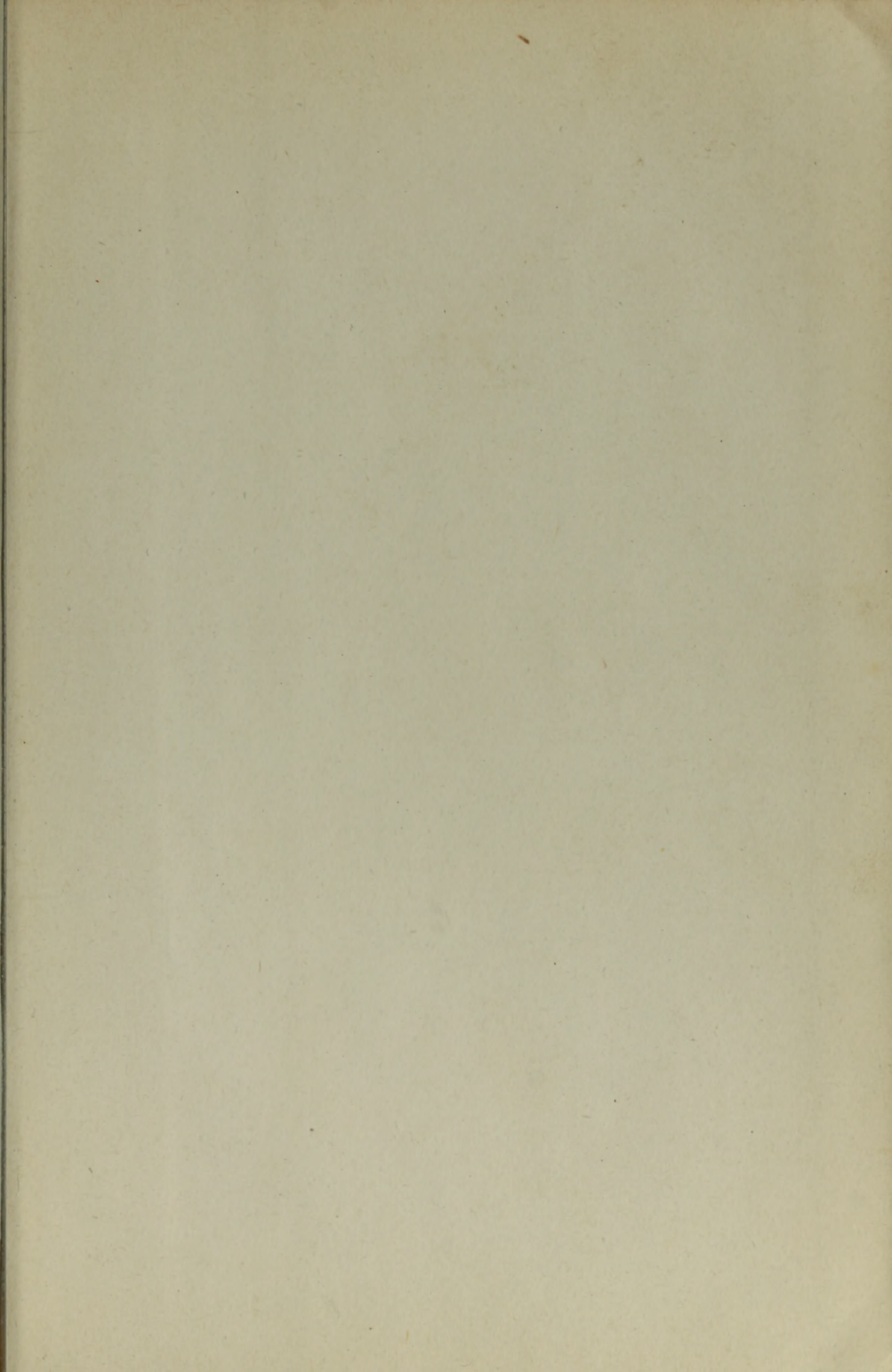
"Sure, an there's Junior comin along. Excuse me, my mom's callin."

"Well, count on us, Carl."

"He's a nice kid."

"Old Marv sure was proud of him. The kid's got ambition."

"Yeah, the kid's got ambition. Just like his old man."



(Continued from front flap)

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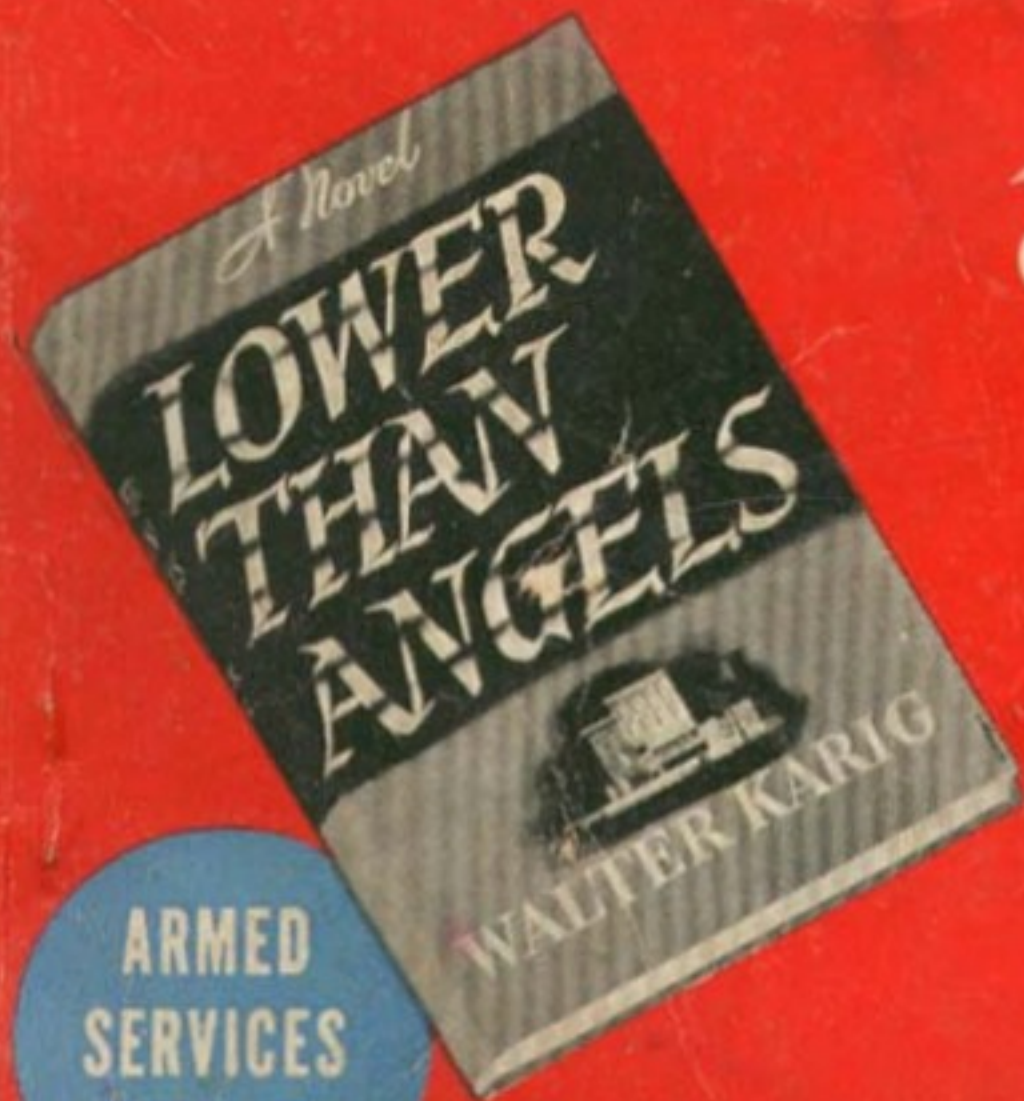
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