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# Worlds Beginning

Every now and again a manuscript comes into a publishing house which disrupts its never very predictable routine. *Worlds Beginning* is certainly one of the most readable books that DS&P has published. More than that, it is as deeply provocative as it is readable—a book with the excitement of vast horizons.

The time of *Worlds Beginning* is twenty years following the end of the present war. The problems of peace are no longer vague and theoretical problems: here, as real as if it were taking place before our eyes, is what might happen within another score of years. Gigantic technical advances in a shrinking world bring the American economy to a virtual standstill. Yet in the crisis lies the seed of its magnificent solution.

*Worlds Beginning* is a story about the future, but it is in no sense a prophecy. It concerns a dream of a better world, but it isn't a blueprint for that better world. Its theme is that American democracy, resourceful, individual and strong, need only face its problems in order to solve them.

Robert Ardrey is a young man. His major work so far has been in the theatre. He is the author of *Thunder Rock*, a play regarded as one of the most powerful of recent years. The disciplines he has learned make this first novel a work of extraordinary drive and craftsmanship.



# *Worlds Beginning*

BY ROBERT ARDREY

NEW YORK

DUELL, SLOAN AND PEARCE

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*To Helen and Ross*



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This is a work of imagination, and the persons, events,  
and institutions described are entirely imaginary.



## FOREWORD

WHY DO I WRITE THIS BOOK?

It is a story about the future, but it is in no sense a prophecy. It concerns that dream we all of us so cherish, a better world. But it is in no sense a blueprint for that better world.

Why, then do I write this book?

I write it, first, because I am a man of considerable life expectancy. The future concerns me. I shall have to live in it. And I have a son.

I write it, second, because I am a citizen of a democratic state. I believe in democracy and I have faith in it. But I also believe that our American democracy is coming to the end of its years of grace. From now on, it will have a future just so long as its citizens are interested. I am interested.

I write this book for one more reason. Because, as an American, I have in my bones a sense of adventure. And I believe that the future, for all its certain peril and probable horror, offers to a people who were born for the wilderness a new adventure beyond rhyme or reckoning.

The very writing of this book has stimulated in me the excitement of vast horizons. I hope it may do the same for others.

R. A.



*Worlds*  
*Beginning*



## OF HINDSIGHT

I FIND THAT GROWING OLD, IN THE NEW DAY, IS AN EXCEEDINGLY comfortable occupation. There is so much to remember.

The hibiscus needs water. The lantana needs cutting. The petunias need weeding. You putter about, and you remember and ponder and poke about among the budding roses and the forgotten alleys of your mind. Was it this way? Was it that? How close did we come?

You laugh at yourself a little and go back to watering the hibiscus. You're getting old. You're hunting religion. Remember the humid, oppressive September days in the Ohio valley mill towns. No bright fatality determined the Youngstown swing. It was sweat and privation and blood on the sidewalk. Don't minimize the achievement of men with your comfortable drooling. If we were lucky, then we were lucky. But whatever we've got, we've earned.

The sun, climbing out of the eucalyptus trees, turns yellow and catches fire. The shade goes away from the garden. A fly insists that the back of your neck is its rightful home. You tell yourself that this is the wrong time of day to work in the garden, and you retire to the shade and the orange juice and the fly swatter.

So it is that I give myself over to the voluptuous game of hindsight. What times. What a time to have lived through. Twenty years since the Second World War. Ten since the

days of Youngstown, and Wheeling, and Indian Pass. What times we've seen. I envy my children the world that's theirs. But I saw the tide come in.

I remember a New York lawyer, in the time of the crisis, who told me: "Whichever way this thing comes out, we're through. The kind of division this country's got into we'll never recover from. Personally I'm for the men. They've got an objective. We know the alternative. But my God, this is a democracy. Whichever side wins, the other side'll never accept it. We'll have revolution and counter-revolution—"

He was frightened. He was grey. Who wasn't frightened? Who wasn't grey?

Was it part of our weakness that we never quite understood ourselves? Our own strength, our own common sense, our own adaptability? Ten years, and already we've forgotten our conflicts. Already we take for granted in today's fulfillment yesterday's struggle and dreading and grief.

At Youngstown and Hartford and Wheeling and Gary, of course, men fought for something as tangible as a lake breeze on a summer's night. The winners won all, and curiously enough, the losers lost little. Such struggles are easily digested.

But remember the outbreaks and the violence before the commonwealth idea got around. Remember the fighting when winner took nothing. Remember the years that closed the post-war decade, the years of race hatred, and Jew baiting, and scapegoats, and labor chaos, and driving, hurtling, relentless confusion. How can such hatreds be gone so soon?

I think of the time in Chicago when an attendant at one of the pumping stations was discharged for drunkenness, and the station workers said he wasn't drunk, and it became an issue, and there were shouts of precedent, and

the pumping stations went out on strike and four million people went without water for thirty-six hours.

I think of the time when a Negro boy, delivering packages for a St. Louis department store, knocked by mistake at the wrong house. The lady of the house, expecting a visit from a certain gentleman friend, answered the door in delicious undress. Nothing would have come of the fascinating exhibition but embarrassment for the Negro boy, had the husband not run up the stairs at the moment and in humiliation and senseless rage knocked the Negro clear off the porch. The riots that followed lasted five days.

Those were the years when winner took nothing. Recall such events today, they smack of wet-chin idiocy. In half a generation we've removed the frustrations of an era, buried them, forgotten even their graves.

What's happened? Are men suddenly rational, inexplicably virtuous? Not at all. We've traded old sins for new, old idiocies for bright, clean, shining ones. But something deep and festering in our hearts has been cured, and with it has gone much of the darkest nonsense of our times.

I'm reminded of a friend I had in the old days. He was a little bit scrambled inside, and he tried very hard to cure himself. I met him one time and asked how was he? Did he still shout at people? "Well—yes," he said. Then he added quickly: "But I'm a lot better." "You say you're still shouting at people," I said. "I know," he said, "but you see I've started shouting at the right people."

In a way that's what's happened to all of us. We still shout. We still dispute passionately the shaky throne of our brains. We still expect others to act with a virtue that we ourselves find inconvenient. Our capacity for folly is no less vast, our claim to maturity no less slender. But we're no longer twisted. We no longer shout at the wrong people.

Our change is comparable to that of a tormented man

who's been for long in love with a fickle and enigmatic woman. Every object in his world bears meaning only in terms of his jealousy. The hands of a clock mark the hour of a possible assignation. A trace of lipstick on the end of a cigarette in a friend's ashtray makes him pause and wonder, is the color hers? In this weird and one-sided world he inhabits, such a man is no logical animal.

Then, in a matter of moments, something happens. He falls in love with another woman. Overnight his earth is another planet revolving about a warmer pole. The clock merely tells the hour. Lipstick is lipstick, a friend a friend.

Has his nature changed? Not at all. Is he stronger, weaker, more or less intelligent? He's the same man. But the removal of one overwhelming frustration has changed his entire perspective. And now he looks back on his former ways—if he remembers them at all—with a silly grin.

The removal, almost overnight, of one engrossing frustration from our lives has restored the perspective of an entire people. We've fallen in love with another woman. And the particular hatreds and neuroses and irrationals that came to their climax in the age of the wars draw as perplexed a stare now from the average man as did, let's say, the superstitions and medical taboos of the nineteenth century from the average man of the period when you couldn't sell a breakfast food without advertising conspicuously its vitamin content.

Insanity, like pain, is not easy to remember.

I look back now across the frantic years and I find myself subdued with wonder. Why didn't we see what we needed sooner?

In a sense, we did. I remember the bitter suppressions of the Second World War. As a nation we'd gone into that war with our internal conflicts unresolved. Like a man facing bankruptcy who visits an amusement park and checks his

load of economic anvils, headaches, and nightmares at the door, we knew what the check-room girl had waiting for us the moment we came out. So we fought the war with a sort of nervous brilliance, dreading the peace more intensely than the battlefield.

Didn't we know we were sick? We did, although many of us in the anesthesia of battle managed somehow to forget. Still some of us remembered and we could even agree on our disease: we were men going nowhere. But never could we agree on a place to go.

I was no wiser than the next man. Let me keep that in mind as I sit here now in the smug shade, surrounded by complacent flowers, and indulge myself in the omniscience of hindsight. I was no wiser than the next man. I was a liberal, which is to say, I was attracted by nothing. I looked on the economics of political freedom and I cried for justice. I looked on the economic justice of socialism, and I cried for political freedom.

My dilemma had not even the exquisite delight of being exclusive. Millions shared my apprehensions and my sterile loves. How could a man be free, and live in justice? How could a man find justice, and keep his freedom? We quarreled, we beat out our brains.

Well, that was twenty years ago. And when less than ten years later a pattern appeared, it was found to be no more than a simple product of necessity, common sense, and plain American ingenuity. The same kind of ingenuity that had made airplanes fly and automobiles run and radios speak clearly about products we didn't want to buy. It was a pattern neither brilliant nor unique. Dozens of similar patterns—some perhaps better—might as easily have been found.

Why didn't we find something sooner? I don't know.

I don't know, but I can't help wondering. What if we had found something while the war was still being fought?

Would the war have been shortened? Would our casualties have been less? Would a free people have worked harder, fought better, quarreled less with a glimpse of something to fight for?

Or would we have quarreled more? Was the time ripe? Were we as Americans morally unprepared for a single standard of behavior?

No one can say. I have a hunch—and it's only a hunch—that had the particular plan that appeared ten years later appeared while the war was still being fought, we should simply have ignored it. Because it wasn't a plan, not truly. It was a policy, no more. And what we cried for during the war was a real plan, a completely integrated blueprint for Utopia, with all the specifications and directions on the back, in big clear print.

This was no blueprint. It wasn't even a true solution. It was a partial solution at best, the first step up a long flight of stairs. But it led in the right direction.

I'm afraid that what we were looking for was the express elevator. And we were too lazy, or else too blinded by unreality, to try or even see the stairs. And so we went on with our groping, and our shouting at the wrong people, and our hatreds and our neuroses, on into the illusory solutions and the inevitable disasters of the post-war years.

But again. You wonder. Were we truly lazy? Were we truly blind? Was it compulsory that history should prepare a cradle of horror for sanity's birth?

I sit here now, twenty years after the Second World War, and indulge myself in the game of hindsight.

I get out the old and battered typewriter and prepare to write the recollections of a reporter assigned to the U. S. A. Years of disaster, hours of triumph. I'm no historian, so this can't be a true history. I'm no philosopher, no economist. All I can hope to do is to set down a few anecdotes, a few

reflections, a few experiences that I seem to have survived, a few scenes that I witnessed with my own eyes or heard about, as we say, on good authority.

Why do I write it at all? Well, perhaps only because, when a man grows old, he feels an urge to bore the young folks with his past. And since I'm a writer I must set it down on paper. It's my profession.

Or is there a deeper reason?

My life has been of no particular consequence, and these reflections, coming now, can be of no earthly good. But what if they had been written twenty years ago?

Am I not now, perhaps, appeasing some sense of guilt? Am I not, out of a shallow belief in better-late-than-never, recording a story that, had it been told twenty years ago, might have contained a grain of value?

This is obvious nonsense. My story, told at the time of the last war, would have been sheer prophecy. I possessed no such foresight. Had I been so gifted, I'd have gone straight to the track at Jamaica and won a fortune on the horses and my personal history would have been quite different.

Even so. Was foresight necessary, at the time of the war, to the telling of this story or a story of similar substance? Weren't the broad outlines of our future as plain as the despairing lines on a starving man's face? Did it require more than reasonable intelligence, reasonable honesty, reasonable courage to read them?

This story could have been told at a time when it held some value. It could have been told as pure fiction, not in the spirit of prophecy, only in the spirit of suggestion. And it might, for all I know, have stimulated in minds wiser than mine ideas superior to any I could offer.

I shudder.

I shudder at the criminal inaction that was my guilt and the guilt of my fellows. We dared little, we went out on no limbs, we told no tall tales about times to come. And when crisis came, we were quite unprepared. We saw freedom survive, but by luck alone.

## JOHNNY CAME MARCHING HOME

**T**HE SECOND WORLD WAR WAS OVER.

It had been like a big wind that had blown for so many years we hardly knew how to walk without it.

It had been like a hated and tyrannical neighbor who finally died. The street wasn't quite the same without him.

The Second World War was over. And glad though we were, profoundly thankful though we were, we as Americans came to miss it.

That wasn't how we felt at first of course. At first it was a simple, intimate, honest, personal matter of thanksgiving. The casualty lists were done with. The war was over. Peace.

And that simple inner reaction lasted for a matter of moments only. Then we who were in the services turned our thoughts and our emotions towards home. To move, to get going, to go home: we yearned, we shouted, we demanded. And we who were civilians and who were home already wanted immediately to go somewhere else. To move, to get going, to go away. Anywhere that we had no business to be. To fish, to swim, to walk in the woods. To do anything other than what we'd been doing through all the long war years.

In all our emotion and desire and release and thanksgiving was there no exaltation? Some perhaps. I don't remember it now. Never had there been a war of greater heroism and less glory. Never had there been so great a victory with

so little sensation of triumph. We had fought a negative war; we had won a negative peace.

And our immediate desire to do something other than what we'd been doing was the essence of all that we'd fought for.

Well, our desire ran up, of course, against the first fact of peace. Peace is something you make, you don't just step into like fresh air. Even in physical terms you can't convert overnight an arsenal into a hunting lodge. Peace—the peace we'd fought for—that consisted of bicycles promised to our children, good whiskey promised to ourselves, transportation home promised to our soldiers—this sort of peace was not available. Not yet.

And so it became that the dilemma of the first months of peace was this: Those of us who wanted to come home, found ourselves unable to come. Those of us who wanted to go away, found ourselves unable to go. Those of us who had other things to do, found ourselves unable to do them. And those of us for whom the war had meant good jobs, good wages, and the fullest expression of our abilities that we'd ever enjoyed, found ourselves bereft.

And so it was that we Americans came gradually to miss the war.

Sometimes I think that among our many war-time failures perhaps the greatest lay in our assumptions concerning the nature of men. We planned. We argued. We built post-war worlds on paper. One school of thought drew all its plans from a premise that man is good and rational. This man doesn't watch his neighbor's house burn down with a tingle of excitement. Where there's an automobile accident, he runs to the scene with one desire, to help; never simply to gaze on the magnificently dismembered body. The human being that this school planned for never feels an impulse to strike a baby, or to leave a woman he loves for the

sake of one he doesn't. He fights wars for one purpose, a better world. He knows his own interest or if he doesn't he'll join with enthusiasm in any logical struggle for his own good, as soon as that good is pointed out to him. This might be called the Rover Boy characterization of the human race.

There was another school of thought that did considerable planning during the war. These planners considered the human being a sort of susceptible booty. Never, according to this gospel, is man stirred by a curious tenderness for his fellows. Never does he see beyond tonight's bed or taste beyond tonight's corn muffins. This fellow has an ego like a chimney stack and a mind as lucid as the Missouri River at Council Bluffs. His actions are compounded of prejudice, vanity, idiocy, and greed. Fear is his engine, want his rudder. And the only good that will ever accrue to him is the good that the chosen will set before him. . . . This might be called the Useful Dog theory of the human being.

During the war there were few other schools of thought. The loudest of us was Rover Boy. The quietest, Useful Dog.

I mention all this in apology for the unreality of the plans we laid while the war was the wind we leaned on. Few of us could visualize a post-war being who might hold the highest hopes for peace and yet miss the war, and the headlines, and—yes—the casualties. Perhaps, because of the war, we had tended to think in pictures, black and white. You were alive or you were dead. You were slave or you were free. You were good or you were bad. You were the victor with your heel at the throat of your enemy. Or you were the vanquished.

Peace brings back the color to the earth's landscape, and the pastel twilight to night and day. When the peace we had fought for arrived, we looked in vain for that symbol we Rover Boys had visualized: Man, triumphant and free,

standing on a hilltop in need of a haircut. And likewise we looked in vain for that symbol of peace that we Useful Dogs had imagined: Man, on hands and knees, rooting with dirt-caked nose for buried bones.

No. Peace, when it arrives, is discovered to be a grey and yielding substance, light to the touch, that sifts through the fingers easily. It resembles common clay. Separated by chemical analysis its ingredients are found to be irritation with rationing, which still persists; relief from anxieties of the flesh; devious wire-pulling to secure demobilization of favored soldier sons and husbands; bitterness for our leaders who could most certainly have finished the war much sooner; and subdued, inarticulate, deathless hope.

This was peace. And this was the peace-time being.

As soon as we encountered him, we knew that something was wrong. He wasn't Rover Boy, most certainly; and he wasn't Useful Dog. And we knew—some of us—that our blueprints for a better world, drawn as they were on the boards of war, were worthless.

Nations would form alliances. Treaties would be signed, agreements solemnly accepted or solemnly rejected. War might, by common consent, be relegated like the black death to the pages of history. But peace is not the absence of war.

Johnny would soon come marching home. What should we tell him? What could we offer him?

Or would Johnny give a damn?

The train was stuffy. The war was over but the trains were the same. A lieutenant colonel was sitting with three enlisted men. Maybe he was democratic; maybe there was no place else to sit.

The boys were Easterners. They were quite young, all of them. I gathered that they were being shipped from Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, to Fort Bliss, at El Paso, Texas.

Where the lieutenant colonel was going, I don't know. He seemed a quiet sort of man. He had a kind, amused mouth, and he twinkled as he listened to the boys talking. But his eyes were very pale, even when they twinkled.

One of the boys was a corporal, and he seemed very wise about everything. Another of the boys looked too young for the Army, and he seemed very confused.

"The war's over," he said as if to himself. But he looked around helplessly. The corporal nodded. That made the war over. "I don't get it," said the boy.

"You don't get what?" said the lieutenant colonel.

"I don't know, sir," said the boy. "The war's over and I think, sure, I'm going home.—I'm not. I'm going some place at El Paso, Texas."

"Orders are orders," said the officer, and smiled.

"I know, sir," said the boy. "But I live in Rhode Island." The corporal and the lieutenant colonel exchanged a democratic smile. The boy blinked. He wore glasses. He seemed pretty short-sighted to me, to be in the Army. "I don't get it," he said.

"You shouldn't expect to be demobilized that quick," said the officer.

"But the war's over and they're sending us to Texas."

The corporal was looking worried. In front of an officer. The lieutenant colonel just smiled, however, and patted the boy's knee.

"First thing you know, they'll be sending you out to the Pacific."

"The Pacific?" The boy blinked.

"Why not?" said the officer.

"But the war's over."

"There's plenty of work still to be done."

"But there's fellows over there already, sir!"

"They may need more."

"Gee, I don't understand," said the boy. "The war's over."

"The fighting's over," said the lieutenant colonel. Then he added significantly: "Who knows about the war?"

The boy just sat confused. Even the corporal looked confused. The third boy—a little bit older—leaned forward.

"I don't think I quite understand, sir."

The lieutenant colonel shrugged. I began to understand. The lieutenant colonel decided to be confidential. He lowered his head a little, and lowered his voice.

"You know what I mean, boys. This war's over. All right. But you never can tell. We have to be ready." And he named a certain country.

The boys just stared. Even the corporal stared. I looked out the window. I'd heard this Army cliché so many times. It'd never come to anything, but we didn't know, not then. And you heard it so often, and you felt almost as sick the thousandth time, as you did the first.

At last the dark-haired older boy found words.

"But she's our friend, sir."

The lieutenant colonel raised his eyebrows a little, and decided that even in a democratic army, democracy can go too far. He looked out the window. The boys glanced at each other and then looked at their knees. By now the corporal had regained his dignity. He nodded, gravely.

The short-sighted boy blinked.

"The war's over," he said. "I don't get it."

"How many men are ten million men?"

The public relations officer was a good guy. We all liked

him. We sat with our pencils waiting, and the backs of our envelopes clean. He was a good guy. He was just tired. He was beginning to ask rhetorical questions.

"Fellows," he said. "You're reporters. You work for newspapers. You get around the country more than I do. You should know how many men ten million men are. I just sit in this god damn office and blow smoke rings."

He was getting satirical. He must be tired. Well, we could wait.

The public relations officer went to the water-cooler and got a drink of water. Then he went back to his desk and sat down. He played around with a paperweight for a minute.

"No fooling, fellows," he said, "no fooling. I don't know how many men ten million men are. Nobody does." He saw the *Chronicle* man starting to take notes and he remembered the *Chronicle's* line on the Army, and he spoke quickly. "That's no quote." The *Chronicle* man stopped writing. "Do you think I want to pick up the paper tomorrow and see a story how the Army doesn't know how many men are in it? I just work here."

I was beginning to feel sorry for him. It was true. He just worked here.

"We still want to know about demobilization," said the *Chronicle* man.

"Who doesn't?" said the public relations officer. "My family's in Cleveland. I had to send them home. I couldn't afford to keep them in Washington. Nobody can afford to live in Washington. The President can't afford to live in Washington. I love my wife. My wife loves me. Who isn't interested in demobilization?"

"We understand, Major," said the *Times* man, carefully. "But you know how it is. The war's over."

"Men are being sent home," said the major.

"We know."

"We've been sending men home since before the armistice."

"Sure."

"You can't turn ten million men loose on this country overnight."

"At the present rate of demobilization," said the *Chronicle* man, sharply, "the last man'll be turned loose in precisely five years and four months."

"Oh, for God's sake," said the major.

"We've plotted the curve," said the *Chronicle* man.

"Why don't you take one of your curves some day and plant it in a pot and watch it grow into a rubber plant?"

"Speaking of rubber—" the *Times* man started to say.

"Oh, shut up," said the public relations officer, and the *Times* man scratched his nose with his pencil. We all waited. Public relations weren't doing too well. The major sighed. "I'm sorry."

"We've got to have a story," I said. "We've got to have some kind of a story."

"I know," said the major.

"People are getting impatient," I said.

"The married men are released, aren't they?" said the Army man. "We've let them go home to their families."

"You let them go home to their jobs."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't make us explain something like that," sighed the *Times* man. "It's ABC. Everybody knows it wasn't any sentimental gesture. The married men mostly had jobs to go home to."

The major looked at his paperweight. "Okay," he said, "but don't quote me."

"I was going to say," I said, "it's more than impatience."

There's a certain suspicion. Industry isn't doing so well at the job of converting back to peace. If you released men any faster—"

"You don't want unemployment," said the public relations officer. "We're trying to arrange things so men'll be assimilated into the peace-time economic structure—"

"And if you released men any faster it'd be noticeable how industry's fallen down on the job—"

The major was looking at me sharply.

"That's all," I said. "There's just a deep suspicion in certain quarters that there's a conspiracy between industry and the Army to keep the public from knowing what goes on."

"That's nonsense," said the public relations officer. "Industry's screaming for men."

"That's a front," I said. "It's what makes it a conspiracy. You know damned well industry couldn't handle the men if you released them."

"What do you mean this makes it a conspiracy?"

"There's been an agreement. Industry'll holler and the Army won't listen."

"Who says all this?"

"Nobody says it. It's just a suspicion."

"It's a lie!"

There was a very long pause.

When the public relations officer spoke again he spoke hard.

"It's a lie and if you want to know why it's a lie, I'll tell you. Because the Army isn't holding the bag for industry." He got up. "Business! They could convert their industries to war. Because the Army was giving them orders. Now they try to convert back to peace, and they make a mess of it. Boys, believe me. If the Army could take over the job of

running industry now, there'd be jobs for everybody, and demobilization'd be finished in six months."

The *Chronicle* man was writing fast. The rest of us were sitting stunned, looking at the major.

And then suddenly he became conscious of the *Chronicle* man taking notes, and of what he'd just said.

"Hey! You! That's off the record!"

The *Chronicle* man stopped. The major sat down, picked up his paperweight. We were all looking at him. He tried to grin. It wasn't very enthusiastic.

"What's one man's opinion?" he said. "I wasn't speaking for the Army."

We all waited. The *Times* man scratched his nose with his pencil.

"We've got to have a story," I said. "We've got to have some kind of a story."

Reaction is no mere bird of prey, no hawk that you can bring to earth with a single well-placed charge from a shotgun. Reaction is no one man sitting down at a polished desk and saying to a beautiful secretary, Take a reactionary letter.

Reaction is simply a point of view. It's the way the country looks to you if you're riding on a machine that's bound in the wrong direction. You seldom realize that your point of view is reactionary; no more than you realize that your machine is going in the wrong direction. Things look the way they look. You can be honest, you can be quite intense, quite idealistic; your reaction may possess the highest and most noble of purposes. The only trouble with your point of view is that it's no good. The beaches of history are cluttered with the unremarkable remains of dead reactionaries. They swam against the tide.

During and immediately after the Second World War we who opposed reaction possessed a curiously naive attitude towards our enemy. We were very moral about our struggle, which mixed things up no end. But worse, we were very personal. We had the odd notion that reaction was something that somebody thought up. We talked a great deal about fascists. These were the people who night and day thought up reaction. We hunted fascists like witches. When we found somebody—and it wasn't often—who seemed without a doubt to be thinking up reaction, then we accused him of immorality. This as a rule flabbergasted the gentleman who in all probability considered his life rather dull. To top it, we called him a fascist. This would make him feel much better, since being a fascist was obviously occupying a position more important than he had realized.

Then we'd go off, feeling much better ourselves, and hunt for another fascist. And when reaction kept mounting we'd just shake our heads sadly and say that we were doing all we could. Our hands were clean.

It will be apparent that we who opposed reaction were not above taking the easiest way.

Well, we'd come, all of us in time, to understand the nature of reaction. We'd come to see that it's the machine, not the man. That if in a society there's a machine going in the wrong direction, it's somewhat presumptuous to expect the riders to be aware of its incorrect destination. And we'd see that hauling the riders out of their seats and treating them to a first-class tongue-trouncing would hardly change the course of the machine.

We should, in fact, come to realize that occasionally the destination of the machine may be wrong but still necessary.

This was the case of the Army and the war. War is a machine going in the wrong direction. It may be necessary. It may be inevitable, and we as riders may have no choice

but to mount it. War may be right and good,—like the Second World War—and lead through high though obscure purposes to ultimate human triumph. But war is still a machine going in the wrong direction, and if you as a human being ride on it long enough, and see enough of society and mankind's affairs from the point of view of the war machine, then you will get off the machine a reactionary.

Whether you are great or small, rich or poor, selfish or altruistic, socialist or individualist, wise or stupid, good or bad, young or old, blond or brunet, soldier or civilian, whether you have fought your war on battlefields or ships' decks, in office or factory or shop or wheatfield, whether you have fought for great purpose or no purpose, for exalted ideal or two dollars an hour, because you wanted to fight or because you couldn't get out of it, because it was fashionable or because it was exciting or because you wanted to get the damned thing over with,—it makes no difference: war is war, and it is a machine going backwards; and your point of view, when you get off the machine, will be that of reaction; and it will be quite some time before you're reoriented, or before your body is found on the beach.

The effect of the Second World War on America and on the world would pass. In the meantime, we met men like the major in public relations, who was a good sort of a man, but who had seen just enough of affairs from the point of view of the war machine to know that an authoritarian army, with its roots in discipline and acquiescence, is more efficient than a competitive civilian management. And we met men like the lieutenant colonel, who may for all I know have had no love for war, but who had seen just enough of it to believe in war as an instrument of international relations. And then we met our brothers and sons.

We met, returning from overseas, the first stream of men from the foxhole, the assault boat, the sad and lonely outpost. The ordinary men, the shavetails, the corporals, the

privates, the plain men who'd been drawn from office desk and stockroom and work-bench and tractor to the bloody job of war. The men for whom a machine of reaction traveled quite in the wrong direction. And as we began to learn about the particular machine that is war, so we learned in time about other machines that men must ride if they are to eat and live and have wives and children to cherish. And as we learned, we found that calling names and being very moral was somewhat less than enough.

"Listen. I'm not telling you this on account of I'm trying to start arguments. So quit arguing. I'm telling you what happens when I get home. Here's a union and they're hollering about who's going to collect the dues, them or the company. They're trying to call out the men. I says, frig it. I says, I know you guys. I'm working for fifty bucks a month overseas getting myself full of shrapnel so I look like a fruit-cake. What were you doing? Don't tell me, I know. You were pulling down ninety a week and screaming how you couldn't live on it. Frig you. Working for ninety a week, hitting it off with your girls regular, eating off tablecloths, sleeping on beauty-rest mattresses, what the hell did you care about me then? Just about as much as you care now. You want the dues and that's all you want and that's all you ever wanted and I'll cross a picket line if I want to, go on, scram, you horse's mouth. That's what I told them and you wanted to know what happened, all right, but don't argue! I don't want no conversation."

"It's funny how a fellow comes to go to church regular," said the young man with the gentle, threadbare mustache.

"Sure, when I was a kid and the depression was on and I couldn't get a job—the first job I ever got, it was foot-soldiering for Uncle Sam—I don't know, I got kind of lost. I guess I didn't believe in anything. None of the kids did. Ah, we didn't talk about it, but you could tell. A fellow that went to church, there was something screwy about him.

"Well then, I don't know, something happens. You've got no idea, mister, how lonesome it can get where people are fighting. You've got a job to do yourself, you've got an objective. And you do it. Sometimes you aren't thinking anything, you haven't got time, just sweat and crawl and keep your head down and hope if there's anything dirty's got to be done some other guy'll get there first. Then other times you're just sort of stranded. Waiting. Oh, Christ, that waiting. You're with a fellow but you almost hate to look at him in the eye. Maybe in ten minutes he'll be in pieces, or you'll be in pieces. It scares you to look at him and it scares him to look at you. It's embarrassing.

"It's times like that when something happens inside you. You're thinking about God. You're not ashamed thinking about God. You need Him. You need Him bad. He's all you've got. If you haven't got Him, you haven't got anything. You lay there with your face in somebody's mud and all the stories about Jesus and the things they talked about in Sunday School when you were real little, they come singing through you're head. Why, it isn't but a few years since anybody talked about heaven you laughed at him. You don't even remember that now. You lay there with your cheek in the mud and you know how it's true, this isn't the only life we've got, it can't be. There *is* a reward in heaven, there's got to be. And you feel better. You've got strength all of a sudden and your belly stops shivering. You're praying and you're not ashamed. There's

nobody looking at you, but that doesn't matter, you'd go right ahead praying now if the whole of Branch Avenue was standing over you. You've found something.

"Yes, sir. It's the thing I got out of the war, and I'll be grateful till the day I die. Maybe things'll get bad and jobs'll be scarce but I'll never get that lost feeling, never again. This is a free country. I can go to church on Sunday, and there'll be nobody to keep me out, not even if I'm poor. I've found something, and I know now this isn't the end, and if things are bad in this world, well, all right. If I'm decent and behave myself, I'll get my reward some place else. I'm telling you, it's a comfort."

"What's going on here? That's what I'm asking you, what's been going on here since we went away? I was never so sick in my life. I'd been counting on it, sir, counting on it. Getting home, getting back to my old job, punching that clock every morning, punching it again every night. Sitting up to my work-bench—golly, I reckon I just about dreamed how that work-bench was pure gold. Then I get home. I come down to the shop. I'm not going to work till next week, but I can't stay away from taking just a little look around. And who's been sitting at my bench, sir? The fellas tell me. Everybody tells me. A nigger.

"I swear to God I could kill somebody. A nigger's been doing my job! Sitting where I got to sit, sticking his feet where I stick my feet, handling my tools, my wrenches. I'm sick to my stomach. Is this what I've been fighting for? What was all that talk about freedom? Is this freedom, some goddam stinking nigger taking my job? What kind of a country have we got here?"

"I don't know, sir. I tell you, it makes me sick inside just thinking about it. It's like a nigger'd come into my house, and sat himself down at my table, and said to my wife, I'm as good as you are. . . . Working at my bench!

"It ain't going to happen again. I can tell you that. If we've had the kind of a government that'd sneak up behind your back while you're off fighting for liberty, risking your life, and let a nigger take your job—well, believe me, we'll never have that kind of a government again. Not if I've got anything to do with it. And if we do ever have that kind of a government again, well, I'm telling you, there's fellows like me know what to do. The niggers could get away with it while we were some place else. They won't while we're here.

"I'm telling you, I'm sick. I'm ashamed. I can't hardly face my kids. A nigger's been sitting at my bench, doing my job."

"You know, there's one comfort in getting back home. It's seeing what's happened to the isolationists. Lord, all the worrying we went through overseas. I don't mean all of us, I mean the ones of us that had some education and knew the war'd be wasted if we came back and found the U. S. hadn't learned anything. The average fellow wasn't worrying about anything but girls, of course. You know how the average fellow is. He went all over the world and all he could see was how the natives didn't have bathrooms and didn't talk English and how he wished he was back in the good old U. S. A. But that's the average fellow. He's got no insight, not to mention background. We weren't all that way. I know for myself, everywhere I went I learned something. And the most important thing was what a hell of

a lot of world there is, and how close it's all going to be to home, with all the planes and things. No more isolationism. It's impossible. Not that I'm particularly keen on any of these we're-all-common-men-together propositions. That's all right for speeches but it won't work. People aren't the same. Some countries I was in, they were a hundred years—five hundred years behind the United States. I mean culturally, economically, psychologically. No, that equalitarian stuff isn't going to work—you understand of course, that's the only reason I'm against it. I'd say the only way to make this world safe for freedom, and liberty, and economic opportunity, is simply for us to go out there and run things. America, I mean. Participate in international organizations. That's okay. But what I mean is, dominate. England's day is over. Spend a month there, you know that. Russia? Russia's going to be fixing up the ruins for fifteen years. We've got no competitors if we get at it now.

"This is really the beginning of something new and wonderful," he said. "We've got every advantage. Our aircraft industries, our shipbuilding capacity, our whole industrial potential. The only thing that could have ruined things would have been an isolationist bloc, and here, thank God, that's gone. As a matter of fact, from what I can judge, most of them are thinking now just about the way I think.

"It's great. What a day we've got ahead. I don't suppose the ordinary men in the Army could see it. The ordinary man's got no imagination. But I could see it, everywhere I went. What a day we've got ahead. It's good, isn't it, to be an American? I hope I live to a ripe old age."

It was beginning to snow. Flat idle flakes stuck to the windowpane and melted and ran down across the sill. To

one side, out the window, you could see the grey tarpaulin-shrouded outlines of construction machinery. Bulldozers, tractors, a stiff-necked crane. They hadn't been used in months, and now the snow was whitening the folds of the tarpaulins. Beyond was the bumpy, unfinished, ungraded airfield, and a mile in the distance the edge of the uncleared Indiana oak scrub. It lay obscured by the snow flurry like a foggy unlighted shore.

Hara was shaking the grate in the pot-bellied stove. The construction shanty smelled pleasantly of whiskey, coal smoke, tobacco smoke. I turned from the window. The clock said four-thirty or twenty after six. I couldn't make it out in the shadows.

"November," I said. "The days are getting shorter."

"Thirty days hath September," said Hara. "All the rest hath thirty-one. With certain exceptions. Turn on a light."

"I don't know," I said. "I think I'm sick of being able to see things. I'm sick of looking around. Let's leave the light off."

Hara chuckled amiably. We sat down, felt around for our drinks, and tilted back on our stiff wooden chairs. Hara could balance himself like an angel on an uneasy cloud. It was a talent men acquired in construction offices.

"The trouble with you," said Hara, "is simply that you're a writer. You make a profession out of worry. You try to outsmart yourself. I'm an engineer. I know better. I outstupid myself. I get farther."

"I still like to sit in the dark," I said.

We watched the red glow coming through the isinglass window of the stove, and didn't say anything for a while.

Hara was my friend. He was my oldest friend. We had gone through school together during prohibition and roomed above the same speakeasy. We liked to drink to-

gether because we became irrational at approximately the same pace. I saw him, as a rule, not more than once a year. I'd be crossing the country and come within hailing distance of his current construction job. Then we'd sit up all night drinking and remembering the Granada Café in Chicago and we'd sing about the little old sod shanty on the claim. At about five in the morning Hara's wife would see that we went to sleep on our beds, not under them. Once she forgot and I woke up about dawn with my hands full of bedsprings. Normally, I'd wake the next day only in time to make my train, and Hara and I would look at each other and remark without enthusiasm that maybe we weren't equal to this sort of thing any more. And I wouldn't as a rule see him for another year.

This time, however, it had been considerably more than a year. Hara had spent the early stages of the war building huge assembly plants in the middle west. Then the Army had snatched him, just as construction was about to start on a megalomaniac's dream, a bomber plant in Indiana. Hara went off, disgusted at missing the fun. He was sent somewhere in India to finish the building of an air force repair depot that had had a bad record for sinking into the ground at various stages of its construction. The job finished, Hara was shipped back to a base hospital in San Francisco, full enough of fever to light a fire. He recovered, after a while, and expected to be shipped out again immediately. Instead he was released from the Army, and returned to the bomber plant in Indiana.

Hara was tickled. This was what he wanted. He couldn't know that the war would be over in a few months. He found the bomber plant, on his return, with its walls and roof completed. The main building was something less than eyeshot long, something more than earshot wide. Hara

wandered about it, the first day, in a kind of ecstasy that only an engineer can approximate. The next day orders were received to stop all construction. In the next few weeks the machine tools, which had begun to arrive, were hauled away. He was left with his shed. His great brick shed. He was still there this snowy November afternoon, and the war was over.

"What are they going to do with it?" I had asked him, when I'd first arrived and we'd stood inside an immense door, gaping up at the cavern.

"Oh, there's rumors," said Hara. "I hear the weather bureau may take it over."

"The weather bureau?"

"Mm. Fair and warmer at this end, storms and high winds at the other. We'd supply the whole East-Central market."

"Science is wonderful," I said.

"Yep," said Hara. And he grinned sadly at the ceiling we couldn't quite see. "If they'd only made it a little bigger," he said. "They've left the stars outdoors."

He was Irish, and I forgave him, and we went back to the construction shanty that crouched like a shivering pup beside a monument to a hound. And we stirred up the fire and had whiskey and talked about the peace. We talked about a country that before the war had had more plant than it knew what to do with, and now had increased its plant forty per cent. We talked about a country that so recently had exceeded all records of peace-time production—without the aid of some ten million men in the services. And now those men were coming back.

And I mentioned reaction. I said something about the popular reaction that I as a reporter ran into wherever I went. And Hara told me I worried too much.

So we sat and looked at the red glow that filtered through the smoky isinglass window in the pot-bellied stove.

"Oh, God," I said after a while.

"Oh, God, what?" said Hara cheerfully.

"I don't know. You make me wonder if perhaps I am getting to be one of those professional mourners."

"Oh, no," said Hara, "you're much more complicated than that. It isn't the funeral you delight in. It's the anxious seat. You look on the anxious seat as a kind of throne. As long as you sit in it, you feel superior."

"Thanks," I said.

"Nothing at all," said Hara. "Come down to it, it's kind of clever of you. You recognize that the world's so bass-ackwards a man can't make use of wisdom for purposes of exhibitionism, not any more. A man who pretends to know what it's all about is an obvious fraud. So you glorify confusion. According to your standards, the more confused a man confesses himself to be, the more clever he is. So you paint yourself as a totally abject, panicky, unfortunate animal, a hero among men. What a character."

"All right," I said, bitterly. Hara laughed.

"Now you take this reaction thing," said Hara. "You're all worked up. The war's done something bad to people, you think. It's changed them. You're crazy. All it's done to people is make them moreso."

"Moreso?"

"Moreso," said Hara. "Whatever they were when the war started, now they're moreso. Look at yourself. Christ, you're a writer and I'm having to tell you where to look for answers. Look at yourself. What were you when the war started?"

"Worried, I suppose," I said glumly.

"Exactly," said Hara. "Worried. Now you're moreso."

"I suppose you were as determined as hell to be detached and now you're moreso," I said.

"Maybe," said Hara cheerfully. "Now look at these people you're talking about. The popular reaction you're talking about. Here's a man who used to be rich and he wanted to hang onto what he had. All right, now he's the same only moreso. Here's another fellow that got satisfaction out of hating Negroes. He's gone through the war and he's moreso."

"This is a very pretty picture," I said.

"Very pretty. Take the man who was suspicious of unions in the first place. Take the fellow who always wanted to run away. Take the poor kid who wanted to get rich. Take the Jew-baiter, take the idealist, take anybody. We all managed to fight a war on the same side—how? Because we fought for freedom. Freedom's what we won, and freedom, by God, is what we're going to have."

"You can't call this freedom."

"No? Well, it's what we fought for. We gave up a lot for it. It's whatever it meant to us. The freedom to push the next man around. The freedom to be a scab, to be a Jew-baiter, to be an escapist, to worry, to not worry, whatever. You can call it reaction if you want to, that's all right with me. But whatever you call it, I can tell you it's the freedom we fought for and hung onto the hard way, and you can't blame people for making use of it."

"You're not being just a little bit cynical, are you?"

"I don't know. I don't think so. Matter of fact, I'm being very hopeful. I think it's wonderful."

I got up and moved to the windows. There was a rack of dusty rolled-up blueprints and I had a desire to hit Hara with one of them. I could hear Hara chuckle.

"I think it's wonderful," he was saying. "It's going to get

here fast and we'll live to see it and it's going to be wonderful."

"What?" I said automatically.

"I haven't the vaguest idea," said Hara. "Whatever it is that we're in for. The showdown. The pay-off. The Pearl Harbor. Whatever it is."

The snow was getting thicker. You couldn't see the oak scrub any more. I looked around at Hara slowly. I didn't realize at first what he meant.

"Say that again," I said.

"There's nothing to say. We're a nation of idiots. Believe me, I include you. I include myself. We're a nation of idiots but somehow our idiocy has never quite come off. We've never been bad enough off."

"What in the name of God do you want?" I said. "Our idiocy's never quite come off! Hara. You and I are pushing middle age. We're that old, but we're not old enough to remember anything much but emergencies. We've lived through one crisis after another ever since we grew up. War and depression and bankruptcy and personal disaster—We've seen boys and girls graduate from school into unemployment; love, and what to do with it; go along for years wanting to get married and no chance; off to war; love, and what to do with it; the boy gets killed or he doesn't; he waits in some God's end for demobilization; not till there's a job for him; boys and girls, getting older; love, and what to do with it; they'll meet in an old folks' home. We've never been bad enough off. What do you want for your money?"

Hara had been shaking his head as I talked.

"You're only saying what I'm saying," he said. "We've never been bad enough off. Emergencies, right. Crises, right. But something's always saved us from ourselves. So we go on. We go on, we go on. We piddle and pray. We

do everything but learn. Because we've never been bad enough off."

I sat down slowly. After quite a while I said:

"Would you mind making a guess? How bad off do we have to get?"

Hara shook his head. I looked back over my shoulder at the grey window and the grey light. Hara chuckled.

"What's the matter?" he said.

"Nothing."

"You scared?"

I didn't say anything.

"You ought to be," he said. "I am."

The tension inside me was something you couldn't sigh out. I got up again. I moved around. I touched the dusty comptometer, the forsaken desks, the blueprints that'd never be used. I had that old, old yearning to go away some place.

Hara was speaking again, quietly.

"You can be sad about this reaction you talk about if you want to. I'm not. It's forcing us towards the showdown. The Pearl Harbor. It's pushing us ahead, it's speeding things up. And I thank Christ. I'm scared, but whatever's ahead, I want it. I want it soon. However bad enough off we've got to get, let's get there and get it over with. I don't want to spend the rest of my life in a war of nerves. I've got kids. Let's get this thing done with."

The telephone rang, and Hara answered. I moved around the shanty and I didn't listen to what was said. I had one of those nightmare sensations of suffocation and horror and inability to move or even cry out.

Hara put down the phone. He moved to a desk.

"Front gate," he said. "Somebody sneaked under the barbed wire onto the grounds. They tracked him through the snow. He's in the plant."

Hara got a gun out of a drawer and put it in the pocket of his sheepskin coat.

"Manhunt?" I said. "Is all that necessary?"

Hara shrugged. He seemed annoyed. "Federal property," he said. "It's supposed to be serious."

Pursuing a trespasser in a vacant building large enough to house a hundred thousand men held little charm, but I went along. I don't know why. Perhaps I just didn't want to be left behind. We stepped out of the field office into the swirling snowstorm. Hunched over, keeping the snowflakes out of my neck and my eyes on the snow that packed itself on the heels of Hara's boots ahead of me, I followed him to a door in the windowless bomber plant's limitless wall. I was trying not to think about a time when we'd be bad enough off.

The instant I entered the plant I regretted my coming. A wind blew out of the void inside through our open door, and my coat flapped. I took a few steps into the plant and I could see nothing at all. Away from the draft by the door the air was still and I could hear no sound. Utter silence. Total darkness. I had a sudden unreasonable horror of blindness. Hara drew a flashlight from his pocket. It was a lighted match on the prairie.

"Hara," I said. "Give up. You can't find him."

Hara flicked his flashlight around and said nothing. I thought of Jean Valjean and the sewers of Paris. I thought of the caverns at Carlsbad, and the other side of the moon.

"For God's sake," I said, "you can't find somebody in here!"

Hara moved away from the slim security of the doorway. I followed him in a kind of panic. I stumbled over a railroad track and almost turned my ankle on a tie.

"Keep farther this way," said Hara.

Hara's voice was no longer the voice I was accustomed

to. It was small, distant, diminished. I looked up for a ceiling. I looked around for walls. I could see nothing. The door behind me was a tiny frame. Hara's flashlight was a small insecure white cone.

"Keep away from the wall," Hara said. "There's junk lying around."

"I don't want to go out in the middle," I said.

"Keep away from the wall."

He moved on and I had to follow him. I found I was walking with my hands in front of me. It wasn't walking in the dark. It was walking in your sleep.

"Hara," I said.

"Oh, shut up," he said, irritably.

"Listen," I said, "I'm acting silly but I can't help it. I never got claustrophobia in a place this big before."

"You never were in a place this big," said Hara.

There was a sudden movement, somewhere off in the dark, and then a scampering sound. I stood stiff as a post.

"Rabbits," said Hara. I heard him laugh cynically. "They got built in. We find dead birds around too. How they get in I don't know but they can't get out. They fly around for a while bumping into things, then they starve to death. We find them all the time."

My heart started pounding again. I was filled with foolish impulses. I wanted to get down on my hands and knees. Hara turned off his flashlight.

"Hey!" I said.

The instant the light went off, I no longer knew where he was. I looked back for the door and couldn't see it.

"Hara!" I yelled.

"Shh!" I heard him say, somewhere. "Listen."

I listened. I could hear no sound. I had a frightening insane sense of things close to me. I backed away, turned, then tried to find Hara. I moved a few steps and my sense

of direction was entirely gone. I strained to see. Anything. The dirt under my feet, my hand in front of my face. I could see nothing. I wanted to yell at Hara again. I had a flooding sense of shame. Then the feeling of things close to me overwhelmed my brain. I tried to back away. My legs didn't work. I staggered. I flailed about with my arms.

I fell flat on my back.

Hara's flashlight came on and the beam was in my eyes.

"Maybe you like it down there," I heard him say.

I crawled to my feet. My legs were trembling. I could hardly control them.

"Christ, you're white," said Hara. "The trouble with you is, you don't eat regular."

I couldn't say anything. I was humiliated. Hara made no further comment and turned away and poked about with his insignificant flashlight beam. I clung to it with my eyes. The beam was a lighthouse for my senses; as long as I could see it, I could keep my balance. My legs were weak and they seemed to belong to somebody else but I followed Hara like a dog.

Suddenly I was filled with rage. Rage at myself and my puniness. Subtract from a man his last sensation of order and security, and he falls down. He's a baby again, he's an animal again, he reverts to all-fours. My thighs shook. Hara's light disappeared for only an instant and my panic returned like a running rat. I flailed again with my arms. Then the light came on and now my rage turned against this monstrosity in brick and steel whose black bowels I inhabited. Lacking the courage to admit my fragile human claim to an upright position, I turned my anger like a hose on the unreasonable structure that stifled me, overpowered me, denied me dignity, security, humanity, that allowed me only humiliation and rage.

Then suddenly I remembered why I was here. I was pur-

suing a man. There was a man in here, and he was a trespasser, and he was wanted. My anger dissolved into abject depression.

Far, far away I saw the tiny light of another flashlight beam.

"Could he have a flashlight?" I said to Hara.

"That's no flashlight," said Hara. "That's the men from the gate. They've brought in a car. That's its headlights."

For the first time, I wanted to laugh. The beam turned our way and I could see it was double. Headlights. This nonsensical building was so large I'd mistaken a headlight for a flashlight. And even as my error appalled me my objectivity returned and I wanted to laugh and then I was filled with rebellion and exasperation and I wanted to get outside and stand in the normal snow.

"Let's get out of here," I said. "You couldn't find anybody in here with less than an army."

"We'll find him," said Hara. "This has happened before. You just walk around with a flashlight so he'll know where you are."

"But he's trying to hide!"

"Wait and see," said Hara.

I didn't understand, and I didn't care to understand. The whole operation smacked of the lunatic fringe, and I wanted no part of it.

But Hara was right. A few moments later he caught the figure of a man in the beam of his light. And the figure wasn't running away. The man approached us, stumbling. He tripped once and fell to his knees, then he came on limping. Nothing made sense any more so I just stood around.

The man wore a heavy ragged overcoat and if once he'd had a hat, then by now he'd lost it. I could see his face gleaming with sweat as he approached.

"Get me out of here!" he said.

He looked back over his shoulder at the darkness and the emptiness and his hands were trembling.

"Get me out of here!" he said.

"This is Federal property, buddy," said Hara. "You saw the signs."

"I was only looking for a place to sleep!"

"Take it easy, buddy."

"I was only looking for a place to sleep—" He looked over his shoulder again like an animal pursued and I couldn't watch him any longer. I felt myself flailing about in the darkness again, and I knew how it was, and somehow it was indecent prying into him. I heard Hara asking who he was, and I heard the man crying again to be taken out of this place, and he was passing over identification papers.

I glanced at them over Hara's shoulder. One of the papers was a citation for bravery beyond the call of duty. The other was an honorable discharge from the Army.

I could see Hara's face in the reflected light from his torch. He folded the papers carefully, grimly, and returned them to the trespasser.

"Where'll you go?" said Hara.

"What's that to you? Get me out of here."

The car came up from the other end of the plant. We all got in. We drove out of the bomber plant into the warmth and the comfort of the falling snow. At the gate we let the man out.

"If you need some place to sleep bad enough—" Hara started to say, but the trespasser didn't answer, or he didn't hear. He walked off down the frozen road between the oak scrub and the barbed-wire fence. He was hunched over, his hands in his pockets, his head bare, and after a while the swirling snowstorm closed behind him.

The guards said nothing. They turned and went back to their gate-house.

"Let's go up to the house," said Hara. "My wife'll be waiting to see you. We can always get drunk."

By the following spring the conversion of the American plant from the needs of war to the needs of peace was fairly well advanced. It was agreed, at the suggestion of business, that sound American traditions would be quite enough to lead America and the world into an era of peace and prosperity and good will.

And business was right. American traditions and the wisdom of corporate ownership were indeed enough to lead us into such a splendid era. It last all of five years.

## DARK TIDE RISING

THE AGE OF THE WARS WAS THE AGE OF THE CHANGING myths. Magic political words appeared like clouds in an April sky and disappeared as quickly with the changing winds. No phenomenon of our times carried with it so clear a comment on our disintegrating order.

The myth of the decade that followed the First World War was national prosperity. And it vanished, as some of us may remember, like a lovely dream before the ravages of an alarm clock.

The myth of the following decade, the nineteen thirties, was national security. And it was overwhelmed like a haunting violin melody by the brasses and tympani of the Second World War.

The myth of the decade that began before that war was ended was internationalism. It was a global dream of prosperity and security all rolled in one. And internationalism, like its predecessors, came to the rudest of endings.

Our myths could not endure because they lacked any manner of foundation. They were lofty cathedrals footed on quicksand. They had beauty and purpose and character and inner light. Their only fault lay in a tendency to fall down.

This shifting from myth to myth was a pursuit that seemed, to the contemporary eye, quite logical, quite hopeful. Even as it seems now, in retrospect, quite ridiculous,

quite hopeless. Our pursuit was, in truth, all of these things: logical, ridiculous, hopeful, hopeless. Our myths were natural shrines along the flight from reality.

There was a dead body in our cellar and it stank.

This was the reality we fled.

We caught our first sniff of the deceased shortly after the First World War. Understandably we did not like to go down in the cellar and find out who was dead. Understandably we did not like to admit to our neighbors that our cellar harbored a fragrant, unidentified corpse. And so we proceeded to manufacture, out of the paper called private credit, a kind of home-made perfume that would conceal from our noses the fellow downstairs. This was prosperity. It didn't work very long. We didn't have enough paper.

What next? The stench drove us out of our homes. Still we lacked the courage to don gas masks and go down in the cellar. But where could we obtain a perfume stronger than any of us as individuals could provide? Why, of course. From the government.

And this was the nineteen-thirties, and this was national security. Out of the seemingly limitless paper called law, and regulation, and government credit, we went to work manufacturing a new perfume. But the stench rose again. Higher and higher. The nation wasn't big enough for it. War shattered our myth. And again our perfume had been insufficient.

Now the war was drawing to a close. We were desperate men. Peace stared us in the face. Where could we turn? No, not to that dreaded cellar. But if as individuals we weren't big enough, and as a nation we weren't big enough, then what under the sun was big enough? The world itself?

In last resort (and it had to be our last resort, for the moon was too far distant) we attempted to manufacture, out of the paper called treaty and international credit, a

perfume of such wondrous potency that at last we might live without holding our noses.

It need hardly be reported that the corpse continued to stink; that the world's roses were not enough; that at last, because we had to, because there was nowhere else to turn, we went down in the cellar and disposed of our honored dead.

This is the dreadfully oversimplified story of the age of the changing myths. It is the ridiculous yet logical, hopeless yet hopeful record of a people's march into chaos. Political tides might sweep this way or that; social conflicts come to this or that outcome; international tensions rise or relax; only the schedule of our march could be affected. Perhaps sooner, perhaps later, we must some day be bad enough off.

It was a long journey. An incredible journey. I look back on it now—not with pleasure, but because I must; because there can be no understanding the events that were to follow without an understanding of the way we were—and I marvel at every step we took. What a gay, abandoned carnival our excursion might have been. But it wasn't.

I have heard the last stages of our journey referred to—with romantic understatement—as the Era of Hard Feeling.

Had we Americans been content merely to flee reality we might have had a rather pleasant time. But we weren't content. We doubted. In some cold dark corner of our hearts we doubted. And this was our sense of showdown; our sense that a time would come.

I remember how, during the Second World War, farmers fought for higher prices at the risk of ruinous inflation.

I remember labor blackmailing the war effort itself in an effort to hold onto its hard-won gains.

I remember the savage and successful efforts of industry to keep down taxes and shift the maximum cost of the war, through the national debt, to the shoulders of our children.

What was all this?

Our wartime behavior was the first great cruel demonstration of our sense of showdown. The sense that a day of reckoning lay not too far away. The urgent, tragic, relentless necessity that drove every man to feather his nest. To hold what he had, to get what he could, while the holding was still possible and the getting was still good.

The Era of Hard Feeling was under way.

It's my opinion that even had we possessed an intelligence that our flight from reality denied us, and even had we laid claim to a moral equipment that our sense of showdown made impossible, we should still have found rough going in the sea of revolutionary forces unleashed by the Second World War.

The first of these forces was the communications revolution. It was, of course, nothing new. The West Indians who came down on the beach to meet the sailors of Columbus might have marveled at what was happening to communications. But the bombing plane of the Second World War dramatized like nothing else the shrinking of a planet.

Instant communication. There was something about the new idea that caught the restless American spirit. If this was to be the new kind of world, then this new kind of world was ours.

*In a shrinking world, it becomes day by day more impossible to build a fence around anything. You cannot fence peace against war. You cannot fence liberty against tyranny. You cannot fence wealth against poverty. Not in a shrinking world.*

The law of the shrinking world, as a political tenet, was magnificent. It was simple. It lent itself to illustration. It caught the American imagination. It was true, true, unassailably true. It rang with the highest of moral overtones.

And best of all, as a political statement, the law held within itself ample room for hypocrisy.

Our new and pleasantly moral internationalism could now take shape and body. By the simple and largely unconscious expedient of ignoring the ultimate implications of the shrinking world, American corporate ownership found moral justification for the new economic imperialism.

Pre-war political empires were sins against the edicts of the shrinking world. They were fences. Empires must go. (We, of course, had possessed no empire to speak of. We had little to lose. And the break-up of political empires would open new channels for our trade.)

Freedom of the air meant an end to another kind of fence. And freedom of the air meant freedom for the greatest airpower, America, to dominate the globe.

Our traditional American anti-trust philosophy was likewise an outworn fence. How could we as a people accept a moral mandate to raise the world standard of living (and compete profitably in the world market) if we retained such provincial antagonisms against cartels, monopolies, and intercorporate working agreements?

And tariff barriers and import quotas. More fences. Industry, even at a certain sacrifice of the domestic standard of living, must have imports to balance in part its lucrative export trade.

How far might our internationalism have carried us? I have no idea. We saw farm and business happy as a pig in the puddle of world trade. We saw labor forced, step by step, into the new nationalist position which was the old and vulnerable isolationist spot. To the bewilderment of intellectual idealism, labor cried for U. S. withdrawal from foreign commitments, armed isolationism, high tariffs, economic nationalism.

Well, it all had to end. The law of the shrinking world

had ultimate implications as well as immediate opportunities. But economic imperialism, for the United States of America, was impossible with or without the shrinking world. We were an almost self-sufficient people. We could buy but a little. We were selling on credit. Sooner or later the credit would give out.

It all had to end. But had it been necessary for us to wait until national bankruptcy arrived by normal channels to plunge us into our well-deserved chaos, we might be getting there only now. Instead, the synthetics revolution blossomed, unheralded, to smash the American dream of world domination. Our imperialists had put all their eggs into one basket. Now industrial chemistry dissolved that basket into an acetate goo.

Synthetic chemistry. Such a drab notion. Was that why we didn't see the revolution in its hydrocarbon heart? It was so drab, so technical, so smelly, so unromantic?

A Roman candle bears a remarkable resemblance to a roll of shelf paper. But touch a match to it.

Synthetic chemistry, as we all know, is the industrial process whereby the ordinary ingredients of coal, or wood, or the air or the sea are broken down and put together again into chemical duplicates of rubber, or silk, or gasoline, or cotton, or fertilizer, or coffee, or even beef.

Ideally, it's the process whereby men can make out of whatever they have whatever it is they need. As such, the synthetics revolution has social implications almost as vast as that of the communications revolution. But the immediate effect was quite special, and pertained to our precious world trade.

As a nation we could sell. And at the beginning of our post-war economic imperialism—as I've said—we could still buy. A little. For the rest we could speak of a favorable balance of trade and extend credit overseas; that is, pile

more ciphers on the end of our incomprehensible national debt.

But meanwhile the synthetics revolution was at work. Our tung oil from China, our quebracho from the Argentine, our rubber from the Indies, our silk from Japan, our magnesium from the Soviet Union all disappeared from our import list. Year after year we took less from overseas in exchange for products sent abroad. And whereas once we'd been able to buy a little, now we could buy almost not at all.

Still we sold. Our debt mounted and mounted. Business could not retreat. And the final blow was yet to fall.

*In a shrinking world it becomes day by day more impossible to build a fence around anything. You cannot build a fence around ideas. Not in a shrinking world.*

Chemistry, like music and war and love, speaks an international tongue. Nations willing to accept our credit and our exports yet dreading our domination strained and sacrificed to build up their own synthetics plants and achieve self-sufficiency.

Cotton.

It was an Englishman, as I remember, who discovered a cheap process for making an excellent cotton substitute out of coal.

And our American South promptly arrived at the end of its long and weary journey into hell.

Aluminum.

I remember very well the day that the story came into our wire room about a new Norwegian plastic, almost as cheap as the wood-pulp it was made from, that had been accepted by British aircraft manufacturers as lighter, stronger, and more durable than aluminum. I remember, because I owned ten shares of Aluminum Corporation stock, and it dropped twenty points that day.

### Beef.

The protein synthetics, as long as they remained expensive and unattractive laboratory curiosities, were looked upon by Americans with considerable amusement. But when synthetic foods came into devastating competition with the foundations of our economic order, they became sins against God. Western ministers clambered into their pulpits and quoted Scripture in high emotion. Western legislatures forbade the eating of meat substitutes on Sunday. The Catholic Church announced that whatever else might befall mankind, fish was still fish.

As Americans we might try every trick of legislation and prejudice and social compulsion at home. We could do nothing abroad. To nations striving for self-sufficiency, the protein synthetics came as incredible godsend.

Our stunned and stable West collapsed. And with it went our American imperialism.

In our flight from reality we had substituted credit for buying. We could substitute nothing for selling but poverty itself.

Unemployment, that old grey stranger, emerged from his cave and looked about the land.

America, proud possessor of the greatest industrial plant on earth, found herself unable to move the wheels.

America, richest continent of all, found herself like an adult idiot unable to feed herself, dress herself, though food piled high on the pantry shelf, and clothes hung gay in the closet.

The day of American reckoning would soon be upon us. Still, while we could, we'd flee it. Corporate ownership, disgraced, would retire from Washington. Farm and labor would turn, as they had turned once before, to a program of national security. But old myths are dead myths. Our economic nationalism would die aborning in the rigors of

a shrinking world. And our social security would crumble beneath the weight of new and hideous economic facts yet to be encountered.

Our time would come. Soon, very soon, because there was no place else to turn, because we had to, because at last we were bad enough off, we'd go down into our cellar and find out who was dead.

But the time was not quite yet. Let me look back now to a springtime when the men of facts and ownership still clung to their seats in Washington. Farm and labor alike prayed for autumn and elections. It was a season when our sense of showdown had never been so keen.

The nation feared and hated. The Era of Hard Feeling was in most bounteous bloom. But humanity was rising in a dark and welling tide.

I seemed quite alone on the road to Pascagoula. A gusty springtime wind whipped in from the Gulf of Mexico. Despite the hot young Mississippi sun, the air was fresh and smelled of the sea and fish. I drove along, and I kept thinking of the old days on the Gulf Coast, and the white sand and the white houses and the islands off the shore. I yearned to stop my car and lie down somewhere in the sun. I didn't dare, of course. There were Negroes back in the palmetto thickets. I couldn't see them, but they were there. And I was uneasily conscious of being white.

As I neared Pascagoula I could hear the hum of planes ahead and now and again I caught sight of Navy fighters from the base at Pensacola as they skimmed low over the town. At the city-limits roadsign I came on a barbed-wire barrier. I gave my military pass to a soldier. He went into the sand-bagged sentry box. I waited.

An officer came out. He was young and polite and quite pleasant. What did I want in Pascagoula? I was a reporter. I realized, didn't I, that the city was under martial law? I knew; I wouldn't be here otherwise. What was my paper? I told him. The young officer went back to the sentry box and I could hear him speaking on the telephone. After a while he came back and returned my pass to me.

"We advise you to go on to New Orleans."

"This is a military pass," I said. "It was given to me in Washington. It permits me to enter any military area."

"Local headquarters wouldn't think of countermanding your pass," said the young officer pleasantly. "We simply advise you to go on to New Orleans."

I thought this over. I tried to grin. "In other words, local headquarters doesn't like my paper."

He just smiled. A gust of wind from the Gulf uprooted the officer's hat and he chased it behind the sentry box. A shower of soft pink oleander petals fluttered against the side of my car and through the window beside me. There were petals in my lap and on the seat beside me. The odor of the sea and the South and the springtime lay gently about me in the wake of the wind.

"If you drive back half a mile," said the young officer, returning, "you'll find a road to the left that'll take you around Pascagoula—"

"I know the country," I said, starting my car.

"Okay. But be careful. Have you got a gun?"

"Yes."

"Don't stop anywhere. You're white. Ignore stop signs at state roads. The niggers like to wait by them." He waved cheerfully as I drove off.

The drive to New Orleans was long and trying, but quite without incident. The sense of lurking waiting Negroes was everywhere, but I saw only a few.

When I arrived the city was quiet and muggy. There was plenty of traffic on Canal Street. The Sanger Theatre had a big film, and there were crowds going in. The lobby of the St. Charles Hotel was crowded. But still the city seemed quiet.

I tried to pump the barber at the St. Charles, but all he'd talk about was last winter's carnival season. I talked to a newsdealer on Royale Street and a girl selling pralines opposite Solari's and a watch repairman who recognized immediately that there was nothing wrong with my watch. Nobody would talk to me. New Orleans was like that, when something was brewing. I remembered the Huey Long days.

I had dinner at Galatoire's with Jimmy Mellilo. He covered New Orleans for a Shreveport paper. He was thin, bald as an egg-plant, and blind. He carried a white cane but he seldom used it. He was the only blind reporter I ever knew. He had Negro friends from Vicksburg to the Bayou Lafourche. Negroes loved him. Because he was blind, I suspected. There are so many blind Negroes.

Mellilo was uneasy. Galatoire's like the city itself was crowded but curiously quiet. Mellilo seemed constantly to be listening to nearby diners, while we talked about food, and fox-hunting up in the Louisiana pine-barrens. Mellilo was a good shot if he could get close enough to hear what he was shooting at.

At last I mentioned Pascagoula, and he made no comment. Then I asked what had happened at Hattiesburg. He stiffened, but he said nothing.

"The news was entirely suppressed," I said. "We got rumors up North that as many as a dozen Negroes had been killed. Is it true?"

Mellilo had been fingering his white cane and now he dropped it. It made a dull thick sound. I realized it was

loaded with lead. I noticed a heavy-set man at a nearby table turn his head to listen to us.

"Jimmy," I said softly, "I'm not down here to write another *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. You know that. But you know Negroes. You understand them. And you understand southern whites." His knuckles were white around his white cane. "What's going to happen? That's all. It isn't just me that's interested. It isn't just the North. A billion Asiatics are interested. China's watching. Asia wants peace. They'll play along with us. But Asia's got an intense curiosity concerning the real intention of white Americans towards the colored races." I could tell that Mellilo was listening to all the tables around us. His hands were still white on his cane. I persisted. "There's a fair possibility that an American Civil War, now, could have the same relation to the next world war as the Spanish Civil War had to the last one. You know what I mean."

Mellilo jumped to his feet.

"Will you stop saying Negroes when you mean those goddamn niggers?" You could hear him all over the restaurant. He strode out. I was dazed. Everybody was looking at me. I could see the heavy-set man getting up from his table. I threw down some money for the waiter and got out.

Mellilo was standing outside. He grabbed my arm as soon as I reached the sidewalk.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry," he whispered. "I have to live in this town. You don't."

We walked off to the south through the Vieux Carre. We didn't say anything. I kept thinking how New Orleans was a French city. How there'd never been the kind of racial tension here that you found in some southern cities. New Orleans was different. Yet even here a man like Mellilo didn't dare say Negro, or associate with a man who did. We passed the Cabildo. A gang of young men under a

street lamp watched us. We passed the Cathedral. We crossed to Jackson Square and sat down on a bench in a corner of the little park. We were all alone under the live oaks. It was warm. The doors of the Cathedral were open, and music came out from inside. Children were singing. Mellilo sat in silence for a long while, and then he began to talk.

He talked about cotton, and how cotton was through. He talked about the new synthetics plants at New Orleans and Baton Rouge that month by month were killing off the cotton market with the new fiber made from sugar cane. Louisiana was prosperous, because it was a sugar state. But Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, the cotton belt—

"Two million Negroes," he said, "and they've never done anything but chop cotton, pick cotton. They don't know anything else. We never let them learn. Every spring a few hundred thousand more of them evicted from their cabins, chased off the plantations with shotguns. They're milling around the South like cattle in a corral and a storm coming up. They don't even know how to rebel. Not yet. We never let them learn."

"What's going to happen to them?"

"Get killed. Starve. Die gradually."

I was a reporter. I had to keep asking questions.

"What about the whites?"

"Scared. Scared like we always were."

"What if the Negroes do rebel?"

"That's what we want."

"Like at Hattiesburg?"

"Like at Hattiesburg."

A white man detached himself from the gang under the street lamp and came into the Square. Mellilo gripped my arm with one hand and his heavy cane with the other. The white man passed us and we sat in silence. He came back

and asked for a cigarette. I gave it to him. He glanced at Mellilo in the match-light and went away. He rejoined his gang by the street lamp.

"One more thing," I said to Mellilo, softly. "Why are the Negroes moving down to the Gulf Coast?"

"I don't know," said Mellilo. "They remember, I reckon. They remember the war, and the shipyards and the shops, and when there was work."

"But the yards are gone. The shops are all closed. It's years."

"I know," said Mellilo. "But when you're a Negro, and the cotton's gone, you don't have much to remember."

I felt that chill sensation that I'd had in the Indiana bomber plant. I watched the gang by the lamp-post go into the Cathedral. The clear sweet sound of children singing came out of the door and across the street and under the live oaks to where we were.

### "FIRE!"

I heard the shout and I jumped out of bed and I didn't know where the fire was or who was shouting, I only knew this was what I'd been waiting for. I stuck my head out of the second-story hotel window and people were running down the dusty Main Street, and I could see that over all of the little West Kansas town there was a tremendous red glare so I threw on my clothes and ran down the hall and the stairs to the hotel lobby. In the lobby I met Paul John Thompson, of the Chicago *Daily News*, and Everett Dill, the photographer from *Life* magazine. Dill had a car outside and we all jumped in. They didn't know just what had happened either. We drove through the crowds. We tried to get out of town before the state troopers could block the

roads. We saw men fighting on the sidewalk in front of the Owl Café, and there was another group up a side street throwing rocks at the windows in the Farmers and Merchants Bank. This was part of what we'd been waiting for but we couldn't stop for sideshows so we kept driving and we began to hear sirens in the distance but it was all right, we were out of town.

"Christ," said Dill. "Christ. The tank farm."

We'd come over a rise in the rolling Kansas plain and we could see a tank farm about two miles away and two of the huge oil storage tanks were burning like great squat torches.

"How did they do it?" said Paul Thomson.

"God knows," said Dill, trying to watch the fire and stay out of the ditch.

"The operators have guards swarming over those tank farms like mice," said Thompson.

Even as he spoke, another storage tank blew up. It split in half, neatly, slowly. I was dumbfounded at the slowness. A great orange and black flower bloomed out of the crevice and rose and spread and rolled in on itself and then a long yellow tongue shot straight up from the flower like a stamen, higher and higher, and I got just a glimpse of a plane almost caught by the stamen of fire.

"Planes!" shouted Thompson. "They're using planes!"

"Where?" shouted Dill, hanging onto the wheel.

"It's gone!" I said.

"They're using planes! The strikers are using planes!" shouted Thompson. "They're dumping dynamite on the storage tanks!"

"Christ, Christ," moaned Dill.

"Get me to a telephone!" Thompson was shouting.

"The hell with your telephone! I've got to get pictures,"

Dill cried, and I hardly remember anything more, just a dim sense of my arms out and flying through space.

When I came to, someone was bending over me and I was lying beside a barbed-wire fence. I must have passed out again because the next thing I knew I was in an ambulance. There were half a dozen other men in the ambulance and they were all burned. None of them was Dill or Thompson. I knew by now that we'd wrecked our car and that I'd been picked up in the road. I inspected myself like a man looking for fleas and I couldn't find anything wrong except that my face was bloody and my left hand wasn't in good shape. I guessed that I'd gone through the windshield. I cursed Dill for losing control of the car. It wasn't till later that I found we'd hit a dead hog in the road. The strikers had killed hogs and left their carcasses on every road to the tank farm. There were cars turned over like ours all over the countryside.

At the moment I had only one idea, and that was to get out of the ambulance. It was taking me away from the disaster. The burned men were moaning and one kept screaming, "Don't! Don't! Don't!" over and over and over. I tried to open the back door but it was locked. Just then we made a turn and came to a stop and a state trooper opened the door from the outside. I didn't wait. I jumped past him while he shouted at me and I ran around the nearest corner.

I was back in Shelling. There'd been a few people fighting when we drove out of town, but now there were knots of men wherever you looked. The sky was as red as a sunset, dogs were barking, men yelling, and I saw a woman hit a boy over the head with a bottle and I saw the boy fold. I knew I had to get back to the hotel, as long as I was in town anyway, and get out my story if I could find a phone. I began to hear gunshots off to the south of town so I

ducked along a side street to the north. I stumbled over a man's body and fell on my hurt hand and did some cursing and managed to get up and go on down an alley. Most of the fighting was on Main Street and to the south, and where I was it was deathly quiet. I came up on the hotel from the rear past a dozen oil derricks and let myself in a back door. There was nobody around. I went to my room and got out my typewriter and went to work. I knew the story cold and it didn't take thirty minutes to write. I wasn't even bothered by the people yelling and the glass breaking in the street under my window.

The situation was simple. Shelling was the heart of the new West Kansas oil field. It was the biggest strike since East Texas. The oil leases were almost entirely held by big operators. Shelling had boomed and experienced riggers had swarmed in from West Texas, East Kansas, and the Gulf Coast. For a while there was work for everybody and the pay was good. Then lightning struck. Eastern industry, trying desperately to keep up the export market, made deals through our business-controlled government with Mexico, Britain, and the Dutch to let in oil duty-free if they'd make certain concessions on other American products. The oil companies co-operated because they owned many of the new synthetics industries and they had a stake in world trade too. If they lost money on oil, they'd get it back on synthetics. The government explained the deal to the public as a means of conserving our oil reserves and making gasoline available to the masses at a price they could pay. The wholesale price of oil dropped one-third, and the following day wages in the industry dropped almost half.

If the workers in the field had been organized, there'd have been an immediate, orderly strike. But they weren't organized. Operators and workers alike, in the conservative Southwest, had always resisted unions. Now, with the wage

cut, there was chaos. Work stopped. Racketeers and sincere union organizers alike poured into the territory. The men were swayed now towards one organization, now towards another. They took no united front but broke up into dozens of protesting groups.

The operators saw their great opportunity. Kansas City, Omaha, Chicago, Fort Worth were swarming with out-of-work hands from the cattle ranches and the packing houses. Since beef had started its decline in the face of competition from the protein synthetics there was no lack of manpower on the Plains. Men were rounded up by the trainload and shipped to the West Kansas oil fields.

That was when I arrived at Shelling. Violence was the promise on every man's face. The governor of Kansas, an oil man, hesitated to proclaim martial law. It'd be a public confession of industrial weakness. Better for the oil companies to bring in armed guards and try to control the situation without government aid. You could as well control a storm at sea.

Now, tonight, strikers had bombed a company tank farm. Now, in the scarlet midnight sky, violence was keeping a promise.

I finished my story. I felt my face and it was dripping and I thought it was blood again but it was just sweat. I heard, several blocks away, the muttering of a machine gun and terrible cries. I went down the hall and found a phone and to my utter astonishment an operator answered. I got my call through to New York and while I was phoning my story Dill staggered up the stairs. He was bloody and he could hardly walk but he clung to his camera. I finished my story and followed him to his room. He didn't know what had happened to Thompson. He'd fished himself out of the wreck, found his camera, and gone on down the road towards the tank farm past the dead hogs. He took

dozens of pictures and got within a few hundred yards of the storage tanks. The grass was beginning to burn around him, and the leaves of the cottonwoods were wilting and smoldering. Only then did he find that the lens in his camera had been cracked in the wreck.

I left him on the bed and went down to the street. Things seemed to be quieting down. The fighting, earlier, had been within groups of men. Now it was between groups, at longer range. I didn't know that I was standing in No Man's Land. I noticed that half of the hotel's neon sign was still lighted. I noticed two limp forms slumped against the open door of a parked car. I saw a woman step out of the glassless window of a hardware store, her arms full of gleaming new pans. I stepped out from the shelter of the hotel doorway, and I saw a great blue and white flash like an immense old-fashioned Fourth of July sparkler, and it seemed to be inside my eyeballs, and I thought I heard somebody falling, a long way off.

This time, when I came back to consciousness, I was lying in a neat quiet hospital room in Dodge City and there was a red-headed nurse arranging zinnias in a milk bottle beside my bed.

"What's big business ever done for you?"

From where I sat against the blotchy trunk of a sycamore tree I could watch the grim faces of the men in the front of the crowd. There weren't many overalls present. Common instinct had recognized the importance of the speaker. Iowa farmers had got out their town clothes and come to the rally from twenty miles around. I could smell hamburgers frying beyond the speaker's stand.

"I'll tell you what big business's done for you. It's

knocked down the price on your corn and your hogs and your hay and your chickens. It's pushed up the price on everything you got to buy. Go and try and buy a tractor and see how much it costs. Pick up your electric bill, see how much they're charging you. Go to the bank, try and borrow some money. See what they ask you for interest. You been sold a bill of goods, that's what you been sold. Big business said, We'll sell your hogs all over the world. We'll sell 'em in China, we'll sell 'em in Russia, we'll sell 'em in Europe. What happened? Do I have to tell you what happened?"

A man in the crowd shouted, No!

"I didn't think I'd have to tell you what happened. Big business didn't sell your hogs, they sold airplanes and generators and machinery instead. Then China and Russia and Europe says how are we going to pay for 'em, we got no money. And big business says, That's all right we'll lend you money. And they pass a law and they holler about reconstruction and it's our obligation to some yellow-face Chinaman bastard to reconstruct China and the government lends 'em the money and who pays for it? *You pay for it!*"

"No!"

"You don't, don't you? What do you think that sales tax is for? What do you think that hog tax is for? What do you think that income tax is for? What do you think that federal acreage levy's going to be used for? Building schools in Iowa?"

"They can go to hell!"

"Every dollar you make, thirty cents goes to the government. Every dollar you make, sweating in the fields, big business is taking thirty cents—"

"Try and take it! Try and take it!"

"Wait a minute, boys! It's the government. They got an Army. They got federal men in every county, every township, spying on you, watching you, keeping books on you.

They got your names in black and white. They got men in this crowd this afternoon taking down every word I say!"

"Booo!"

"Write to your Congressman! Go on! Write to him, see what happens! They bought your Congressman lock, stock and barrel. Go to Washington. Go on! See the President! See what happens! They got a company of infantry sitting on the White House grounds. Boys, I'm telling you, the people got no more to say about the United States government than an Eskimo's got to say about the Panama Canal! This country's ruled by force. Force, you hear me? What happened to the fellas in the oil fields out in Kansas? What happened to the dairy farmer's union in Wisconsin? Look down South. What's happening to the cotton farmers down South? The government's turning the niggers loose on 'em! I swear to you if the people don't find a strong man that can stand up to the government and see the people get what's their's—"

There was a yell from the crowd.

"If we don't find a strong man that can answer force with force, guns with guns, if that's what we got to do—"

There was another yell from the crowd of embattled farmers.

The minister's face was white. He was the kind of man who got whiter and whiter with passion because he didn't have enough blood to go around. He was leaning forward over his pulpit.

"Is it unseemly that in this house of God we pray for the strength with which we may restore order to our nation? I say no. God's voice has been challenged by the vandal, by the barbarian, by the hating unbeliever in every state, every

county in the United States of America. Evil walks on every street, in every lane, casting its dark shadow on the homes of the righteous. Foreign atheists have come among us and uprooted the tree of faith. Godlessness has cast man against man, wife against husband. Civil disturbance is the order of the day, and terror the guardian of the night.

"We hear the cry of the shiftless, of the improvident, of the indolent, of the irresponsible. We extend our pity and our charitable hand, but we say in the name of God, these disturbances must cease! When you destroy property you destroy the foundations of our society. When in your fancied grievances you attack your fellows, you destroy your own souls. What material gains can you ever achieve that will justify the spiritual loss in your hearts? Is it justice you demand? Is it truly freedom, and opportunity, and economic hope that you say you lack? Or is it faith in yourselves? No man can achieve inner peace through outward violence. No man can have faith in himself, who has forgotten his God.

"We say to the strikers, and the vandals, and the rebellious through all the land—have faith. Find in your hearts compassion for your enemies. Forsake these violent courses you pursue, God is merciful and just. You have nothing to fear but yourselves. But beware. For if you continue in violence and transgression, then the righteous will rise and find among themselves a man with the strength and the wrath of God, and order will be restored, and evil perish.

"I say to you, now, now before wrath and holy justice are loosed on the land, forsake these violent ways!

"Let us pray."

The time was at last autumn. In California, the snow was moving down the purple shanks of the Sierras, down

past timber-line, down to the roads and the mountain passes. In New England the oaks and the maples and the birches were turning red and yellow and russet as is their custom; and as is their custom city-folks were appearing like gophers from their burrows to observe the miracle. In Florida the rooming-house people were applying their customary minimum of paint to the patio furniture and hiring plumbers for a minimum of repairs to the sanitary system in preparation for the winter invasion from the North. In Michigan farmers harvested the last of their grapes, and in Iowa the last of their pumpkins, and in the Hood River Valley, out in Oregon, the last of their apples. In Chicago and Pittsburgh the coal smoke thickened, and men prepared to change their white shirts every day instead of every other day as they had since April. In Detroit and Des Moines, in New York and St. Louis, in Boston and Nashville and Rochester, Minnesota, daylight saving time shifted to sun time, and people tried, as they had tried for a generation, to remember whether you changed the clock forward or backward.

In every corner of the nation the impact of new and undreamed-of events was felt, and the shock recorded on the delicate seismograph of the pay envelope, the dinner menu, and the oldest son's allowance. The world was upside down. Black was white. Our homes trembled to their last mortgage and our businesses shook to their last stockholder. And yet, in this autumn when the new technology had quite disrupted our economic order and the skids were being greased for the descent of business to an elected hell, what was the campaign issue debated on every radio? The protective tariff.

Such is the matter of men's minds: not what is, but what has been. When, at some future date, the earth starts revolving about the moon and gravity throws pot-lids into interstellar space and apples fall up and bread emerges from

the oven frozen stiff as a fish, we'll all observe these wonders with sinking hearts and argue about daylight saving time, and crime waves, and the protective tariff. It's all part of the fun, and the comfort, and the occupational hazard of belonging to the human race.

So it was that in this autumn of our discontent, the farm-labor popular front campaigned on a reactionary platform of nationalism and protect the American people. And business made its last stand on a liberal platform of internationalism, free trade, and world brotherhood. The people demanded a decent country. Business demanded a decent world. Whether anybody succeeded in fooling anybody but himself, I'm not prepared to say.

There was this to be said in favor of business: it was hypocritical. Business was campaigning for its own survival, of course. But business knew by now that some kind of internationalism was inevitable. Business, therefore, while pursuing self-interest at least pretended to a larger interest and by that pretense acknowledged the inevitable's existence.

Hypocrisy is a relative virtue. The hypocrisy of the northern white, who gave lip-service to racial equality yet treated the Negro as an inferior, was better than the honesty of a southern white, who believed with whole heart in white superiority, treated the Negro as an inferior and made no bones about it. When honesty is ignorance, hypocrisy is a shining thing.

Thus it was that the popular front, demanding in all honesty survival-through-isolation, had not even the virtue of intelligence. The platform of business demanded disaster in the name of a better world; the platform of labor and farm demanded merely disaster. It was most unpretentious.

Well, the elections came on and they were bloody, as might be expected in this era of growing violence. Business was smothered and sent home in disgrace, and this was

good; not because business had been greedy or hypocritical or selfish, but because it had failed. Business was through, and the electorate knew it, and political justice was served. The popular front won by a landslide, and this was right and just; not because the popular front represented humanity, or was a step towards a balanced society, or possessed any superior tools for the solution of American problems. The popular front had not the vaguest notion of the insuperable obstacles it faced. But at least its victory was the last necessary step on the flight from reality. We should soon be bad enough off.

The snow crept farther down the shanks of the Sierras. Florida greeted its winter invasion with sticky chairs and the customary stopped-up plumbing. Citizens of Chicago and Pittsburgh gloomily accepted their coal-soiled shirts as a fact of life. The stores reported the Christmas trade as better than expected. The nights grew longer, the days shorter. The clocks having been changed, daylight saving time was forgotten till spring.

## CITY OF THE ANGELS

February 6.\*

IT'S ONLY A HUNCH. I'M MOVING MY WIFE AND KIDS OUT TO the Murdocks', in the Santa Maria valley. The Murdocks have a ranch out there. They raise beef for the luxury trade, but the ranch being isolated is just about self-supporting. The Murdocks don't like the looks of things any more than I do. They're laying in a supply of dehydrated fruits and vegetables and staples, and gasoline for the generating system. I'll get out to the ranch when I can, but I'll be working around Los Angeles most of the time.

Murdock says things are at last getting interesting; he's glad he's lived this long. That's one way to look at it.

February 12.

I've got an apartment in town. It's on Alvarado near Olympic. It's not much of a place but it's central and there's good transportation. Los Angeles is crawling with foreign correspondents. Chinese, Russian, French, Swedish—every bar you drop into, some overseas reporter starts practicing

\* We think of the year of the terror as a thing apart. Actually it was the culminating year of the period of rising violence that began during the business administration with the breakdown of internationalism. . . . I write here about what occurred in Los Angeles during the terror simply because I happened to be in Los Angeles. Similar events occurred everywhere. . . . Incidentally, I write this in diary form not because I kept a diary, but because the form seems to tell the story best.

his English on you. I have no doubt that all around the world people are reading about the North American powder keg.

I went out to the airport this afternoon on a routine assignment. The suspense out there is thicker than a Boston fish chowder. Overseas planes come in jammed with government people, newspapermen, adventurers, social missionaries. They go out jammed with refugees—American business men and their families bound for obscure South Pacific sanctuaries. I watch them disappear into the planes with a certain fleeting shame. They're operating on the same hunch I had when I settled my wife and children in the Santa Maria valley. Well.

This is Lincoln's birthday.

February 20.

I've been anxious to get acquainted with some of the visiting correspondents. I've been staring at the U. S. so long I have the sense of being hypnotized. I hoped that getting acquainted with the objective viewpoints of some of these foreign observers might break the spell.

Well, it doesn't work. Either there's no such thing as an objective point of view, or when I run into one I can't take it. The overseas men, as a group, strike me as immensely happy that the U. S. is in a bad way. It's the natural reaction of the neighborhood, I suppose, when the fat boy gets the belly-ache. But it's as if, in the last ten or fifteen years, we'd learned nothing. We still don't understand that what happens in one part of the world must invariably affect the rest. Their talk, now, sounds like our own talk back in the years between the wars, when Germany was in a mess. We didn't care then, and they don't care now. And I don't like to think of where this may lead.

The British are an exception. They're gloomy, and they

say very little. Britain's almost as bad off as we are. British social experiments have run farther to the left than ours, but we've come to much the same crisis in the end. And the British correspondents seem to know that whatever happens here will probably happen, a little later, there. The result of this understanding, however, can hardly be called good fellowship.

The French, on the other hand, follow the general overseas line. They resent us with a cheery, outright, insolent satisfaction. This springs, I've got no doubt, from the hurt French pride incurred in the last war and the way we pushed them around afterwards. I can't say that I blame them. But it's no pleasure to have a man look at you with an expression that says: "How are you feeling today, my friend? Worse? Good. Good."

The most intolerable of the lot, however, are the Soviet correspondents.

When I listen to one of these gentlemen talk I find myself remembering those English lecturers that came to Chicago when I was a boy. They gave us to understand that there were two kinds of people: Englishmen, and heathens. That there were two kinds of culture: British, and paleolithic. We'd listen in a kind of awe while insult piled on insult. Afterwards the lecturer would pocket his fee and go on to his next engagement praising God for a people who would pay to get themselves insulted. And we Chicagoans would go home in a marvelous lather of virility. It was an international transaction of the most perfect mutual reward.

The visiting Russian has inherited from the old-time English novelist the mission of insulting America. But unlike the Englishman, he has learned not even the irreducible minimum about Americans: that we will pay to be insulted. The Soviet correspondent pays for the drinks, and with that

tender, contemptuous gesture destroys whatever gaiety our transaction might contain.

This is the world brotherhood of mutual aid, comfort, and understanding that we dreamed of at the end of the Second World War. Our international community has turned out to be a collection of the most fervent, bigoted, instinctive nationalists ever drawn together by mutual distaste. We seem to have only one thing in common, beyond our dislike for each other. I can't find anybody that has any use for war. And that, I suppose, is something.

Well, among all the overseas characters I find just one people that I can call good companions. The Chinese. They're neither sanctimonious nor bigoted nor gloomy nor patronizing. And they're the best reporters I've ever seen. They watch everything with a sort of affectionate detachment. They have one angle: race. They want to know where American racial intolerance is leading, what it springs from, whether it's a strictly domestic matter or whether it'll some day affect China. They allow themselves no such luxuries as fear or resentment or preaching. They have a job to do for their people, and they do it with selflessness and maturity.

The Chinese are magnificent. Their only deficiency, from my point of view, is their courtesy. I get the feeling that they understand America better than any American, and in my handsome befuddlement I yearn for enlightenment. But they're too damned polite. They won't say.

March 2.

Rain. It's been raining for days. A bad outbreak in the Mexican quarter, out on Figueroa Street, between Mexicans and Negroes. Nobody can make head or tail of it. I went out to see what was happening. I've been shy of street fights ever since Shelling, Kansas. So last night, out on Figueroa

Street, I was perhaps too discreet for good reporting. I realize now I could have taken more chances. The Mexicans and Negroes paid us no attention. They just fought between themselves. There was the biggest display of cutlery this side of the Connecticut Valley. A man'd get bloodied up and the rain would wash him off, and he'd be gone again into the mob. It was the quietest street fighting I've ever witnessed. Five dead, a hundred or so hurt. Our foreign reporters were fascinated.

March 3.

I've got, I think, the lowdown on the Figueroa riots. I can't write it up.

I had dinner last night with the legal counsel for one of the best industrial unions in America. It's a union that's never gone into the Washington labor set-up. I still remember the full-page ad this union placed in the *New York Times*, just before the last election. They recommended that American voters go to the polls and write in for President the Man in the Moon. No other figure in the American scene could they with conscience recommend. The ad appeared in a dozen key papers, and I know for a fact—although the write-in count was suppressed by election officials—that the Man in the Moon got close to a quarter of a million votes. Sometimes when I find myself getting a little bit cynical, I remember those quarter million votes with pleasure and ineffable hope.

Regarding the Figueroa riots: It's generally assumed that the Negroes attacked the Mexicans. There's a rising feeling against the Negroes, as a result. The union man says, no. It was the other way 'round. Conservative labor is worried. The administration's not working out. There's a great fear that when certain impending events take place (the union

man didn't know what they were, or wouldn't say) there'll be a rebellion in labor, and the dominant labor group will split up into factions. A decision's been made that labor needs a common enemy to unite against. There's a necessity, also, for a general blood-letting and emotional whirligig that'll leave not only labor but the whole electorate exhausted and guilty in time for the impending events.

The unemployed roaming Negro is of course the unanimous choice for common enemy. Los Angeles was chosen for a trial balloon. Very few unions here allow either the Mexican or the Negro into their membership. The rumor was spread in the Mexican quarter that the bars would soon be lowered—for the Negro, not the Mexican. The Mexicans responded by isolated attacks on Negroes. The news of these attacks was suppressed. Only by word of mouth—through the police—were the attacks reported, and in only one section. Down on Central Avenue, where the Negroes live. The Negro response was the invasion of the Mexican quarter and the Figueroa riots.

I don't dare write the story. I haven't any facts. And if I did have the documents, I still couldn't write it. I'd be passing ammunition to the anti-labor California land-owners.

Christ. What am I doing in the newspaper business. Why didn't I learn an honest trade?

March 10.

Still raining. I got worried about the Santa Maria River and flew up to the ranch. The desert's soggy and you can't get in to the ranch except by plane, but there's no sign of flood. Everybody's fine. I've got to manage to see the kids oftener. . . . Back to L.A. this afternoon. Coming in from the airport I saw the long lines of men and women trying

to get work at the San Fernando valley aircraft factories. All these years, and the word aircraft still holds magic. There's still the notion that where aircraft are made, there must be jobs and prosperity. It's a sort of superstition. . . . There's been a Mexican-Negro outbreak in South Texas. It sounds suspiciously like the one here. The labor papers are playing it up.

March 12.

Things are getting tense. Colored servants aren't showing up for work. Our mail didn't get delivered at the apartment house till late afternoon. Then a white postman showed up in place of the usual Negro. No explanations.

A lot of talk about how you can't trust Negroes, they aren't responsible. I understand attendance at school is dropping off. Mothers are keeping their children home. I keep wondering if things are this tense in Los Angeles, how are they in Memphis? This is no Jim Crow town. There's never been a first-rate Negro problem. That is, there's never been an actual fear among whites of Negro competition. There's far more traditional feeling against Mexicans and Asiatics. . . . Department of Labor unemployment statistics, supposed to be out today as of February 1st, didn't show up. Union sources likewise secretive. Nobody wants it known how bad things are. I'd make a guess that Los Angeles is better off than most of the country. The long home-building boom, now pretty well petered out, still gives some support to the furniture industry. Motion picture studios are going along fair. Aircraft's taken a bad slump this winter with the new foreign trade restrictions. Oil's busy, but chaotic; nobody's making any money. Dehydrated fruit depended mostly on foreign markets, and it's in a mess. Landowners around here hate the new Administration but

what can they do? Nothing, for the time being, except cut wages. The rumor's going around that Negro refugees from the Texas cotton fields are camping in Arizona, trying to get into California to pick crops. True or not, the rumor's having its effect on the whites.

March 13.

Talked to my labor friend again, the legal counsel for the good union I mentioned. He says the South Texas outbreak was precipitated by the same method as here, with one exception. The rumor among the Mexicans concerned the hiring of Negroes on the coming public works program. They couldn't intimate that Negroes would be taken into unions. That would be too ridiculous, in Texas. I asked him point-blank if he knew what the government was preparing us for. He wouldn't say. He suspects, but he won't take the responsibility for passing on such a suspicion. . . . I'm sinking into a depression of sorts. I try to put two and two together and I end up drinking too much. The labor lawyer is a responsible man. I've known him for years. He'll tell me that he suspects the government of preparing a race war. I can think of no more horrid suspicion. Yet he refuses to say what the government's motive may be; that's out of bounds.

March 17.

My nerves are going bad on me. If something doesn't happen soon, I'll be inclined to start a riot myself. I've been reading Whitman, trying to put myself to sleep at night. I get furious. Did Whitman have any conception whatever regarding the ingredients of the common man? Was he an utter romantic? Was he a fool? I've had a tempered faith in humanity all my life. I was born in Illinois, and the

Lincoln legend's been part of my bones like cornfields and strawberry shortcake. But I think about the violence and the suspicion and the intolerance that's been growing and growing through all the years of my life, and I want to throw Whitman out the window. . . . I took a walk in Beverly Hills this evening. The flaming eucalyptus is blooming. The rains are over, I hope.

March 18.

I regret what I wrote last night. There's a distinct possibility that such emotions are precisely what the government wants me to feel. My labor lawyer friend said something about a race war exhausting us and giving us a sense of guilt. If by any chance the administration wants authoritarian powers, this could be the right preparation. To make Americans sick of themselves. . . . The schools in Boyles Heights have been closed. Downtown theaters have stopped admitting Negroes. I've got to get out more. I sit around the apartment too much, writing and reading. If I'm a reporter, then get out and report. If I'm degenerating into a thinker, then admit it and shoot myself.

March 20.

I'm hiring a plane, along with Lao Hsu Teh, a Chinese correspondent. We're splitting expenses. The rumor's getting thicker that the Negroes are piling up along the Colorado River trying to get into California. Migratory workers in the San Joaquin Valley and around San Bernardino are organizing to protect their interests. God knows what they think they're protecting, the wages they get. But it's always true that you get the worst racism in the whites that have almost nothing. They're the ones that'll lose the little they've got—or think they will—if the Negro moves in. I

suspect there aren't any Negroes at all along the California line. The thing's all part of the whispering campaign. We'll go see for ourselves.

March 23.

There were Negroes, all right, but there couldn't have been more than a hundred. They were camped in the willows along the Colorado, above and below Needles. We saw caravans of cars coming back across the Mojave desert, while we flew over on our way to Needles. We knew something had happened. It was all over when we got there. There were a dozen stiffs, all colored, in the Needles morgue. The mob of whites had driven in from the desert, done their work and fled. Nobody tried to stop them. Lao Hsu Teh and I flew down the Colorado, low, for thirty miles below Needles. We saw at least three more bodies that had floated down the river and stuck on sandbars.

We've been trying for the last two days to find some Negroes that'll tell us what happened. We can't find any Negroes. They've disappeared. The local whites try to make out that there were thousands camped in the willows. It's a lie. You can find the pitiful camps where they stayed. There couldn't have been more than a hundred.

Lao Hsu Teh is a good man. He's wise, detached, understanding. But I can't look at him. I'm ashamed. We're going back to Los Angeles this afternoon.

March 24.

The story that's gone across the country is the usual one. A white woman got raped. Two thousand indignant whites rose in spontaneous protest and crossing the Mojave desert with miraculous speed struck the Negro camp within half an hour. The story's believed. Lao Hsu Teh is coming over

to my apartment tonight. We're going to get methodically drunk. There is nothing so comforting to the spirit as getting pasted with a Chinese.

April 1.

I can't seem to remember things well. It's been a week. If I get things wrong, what's the difference. Why do I write it down at all.

It was midnight a week ago last night. Lao Hsu Teh and I were getting well into a profound, soul-bleeding, melancholy drunk. I was trying to teach him *The Little Old Sod Shanty On the Claim*. He turned on the radio. There was a confused sort of racket and it sounded like a football game. I began to gather that it was a spot news broadcast from a mobile transmitter. I still didn't know what it was all about—we were full of liquor—when I turned on the video. The screen wasn't distinct. It was a bad pick-up. There was a lot of red that looked like fire, and figures were moving about and you could hear an unholy lot of noise. Then I realized one of the shadowy faces wasn't shadowy, it was black. It was a Negro coming straight at the pick-up. There was a confusion of bodies and something crossed the screen that was probably a man's back, and a crushing sound, and when things cleared up the Negro's face was gone, and I could see in the background, down some street, the ornate Coca Cola sign on Central Avenue below Olympic.

Lao and I got out of my apartment so fast we didn't even turn off the radio. I kept thinking, *The sons of bitches, it's started and they've got a televisior unit out there just to make sure everybody sees with their own eyes what's going on, they've even got it arranged so the Coca Cola sign shows up so all of Southern California will know where the riot is, why didn't they send out engraved invitations, oh, Christ,*

it's started and why did I have to get drunk, why of all times do I have to be drunk?

We drove east on Olympic and Lao suggested that we stop at a drug store. I didn't have the strength to wonder why. He went in and came out with an emetic and a couple of glasses of warm water. We took the emetic and vomited soberly in the gutter for a while. Then Lao returned the glasses to the drug store, and we drove on east feeling considerably better.

The traffic was jamming up so bad with cars heading for darkytown that we cut off to the south and made a big circle and came in on the Negro section from the quieter southern side. Lao made me stop at another drug store and he came out this time with a can of brown shoe polish.

"I'm eating no shoe polish," I said.

He just shook his head and pointed out that he was Chinese and the Negroes wouldn't bother him, but I was white. We were coming into the danger area from below, that is, from the black side. Smear my hands and face with the shoe polish, and I'd be taken for a Negro.

"And get killed by the whites," I said.

"If you get in trouble, you can wipe the stuff off," said Lao.

"I can't do it," I said. "This isn't any comic opera."

He was smearing the stuff on me already, and I was still objecting. I knew he was right, of course. Nobody would look at me close in the dark. It wasn't intended to be a disguise. Camouflage was enough. Even so, out of some odd romantic quirk, I still rebelled.

What was going on up on Central Avenue was dignified. It was horrible, it was moronic, it was sadistic. Still the race war had the dignity of Catastrophe. Something was going on under the street lights, in the dim back alleys, in shad-

owed doorways, that had begun for all I know in the primal slime of man's beginnings.

Through all my lifetime I had watched this black thing grow. It had enveloped conflicts of greater issue, overshadowed struggles of more pressing moment. Like sex and hunger, it had bowed to no logic. Primitive, irrational, bestial, profound as the jungle, this crashing drama had absorbed the varied angers of a nation. Here was Tragedy. Here, in this black and grappling thing, was the fatal flaw in a heroic people. And here was I, entering Catastrophe covered with shoe polish.

Lao smiled at me. And then suddenly I was laughing myself, a little ashamed of my romanticism. I accepted the shoe polish.

What I didn't grasp—what I couldn't grasp—was simply that I was a white man. And that, through the seven days of the Catastrophe, I was to be a Negro.

We left our car behind the Santa Fe freight yards. The sky behind a couple of weebegone palms had a tinge of red, but the cool California night was quiet. We wondered if the whole thing might perhaps be a false alarm. Then we remembered the jam of cars driving east on Olympic. We started walking east and north ourselves.

The streets were deserted. Houses were dark and where there were lights the shades were pulled flat to the sill. I remembered Pascagoula and the palmetto thickets, and I had a sense that Negro faces in the dark upper story windows were peering down at us. But only once in the first few blocks did we see anyone. Then a big and very black man opened the door of a cottage and hailed us. He came down the steps. He glanced at Lao, saw he was Chinese, and addressed me.

"They doing it?" he said.

"I don't know," I said. I was self-conscious. I'd never

heard quite this tone from a Negro. I can't say now what the difference was. But for the first time in my life, I was being addressed as a Negro. I felt a sudden panic.

He didn't say anything more. He looked off towards Central Avenue and the low red glow in the sky. Several small children had come out on the porch in their night-gowns.

"Get in there!" he said.

They didn't stir. They stood close together looking at us. He seemed to forget them immediately. He looked off towards Central Avenue again, and I could see the whites of his eyes shining in the street light.

"Julius!" came a woman's voice from upstairs.

"Shut up, you woman!" cried the Negro in anger, and I could feel the wave of panic from his huge black body, like heat from a lamp, that had nowhere to go but into anger at his wife.

He looked towards Central Avenue one last time, and then he turned without another word and went up the stairs, his suspenders trailing, and herded his children through the door and slammed it behind him.

Lao Hsu Teh and I went on down the silent street past the unseen eyes in the darkened windows. For a couple of blocks we saw nobody. Once a dog scurried across the street in front of us. I remembered the thousands of roaming dogs in darkytown, and I wondered if they were hiding too. Then we came to a street corner, where there was a small unlighted grocery store, and as we came opposite the door it opened and half a dozen Negroes came out. They paid no attention to us. They looked off towards Central Avenue and stood on the corner lighting cigarettes and saying nothing and hesitating.

At that instant all the street lights went out. Why the extinguished lamp that hung over our heads should have

been of such sudden and profound importance to me, I don't know, but I found myself staring up at it. Lao was looking up too, his mouth a little open. The half dozen Negroes, their cigarettes glowing, stood in a huddle every head turned up. Then without consultation they all turned and ran into the dark grocery store and the door closed.

The moon wasn't up yet. Lacking the competition of the street lights, the stars were sharp and white, like holes in a black tent. Lao touched my arm and we walked along slowly to within a block of Central Avenue. Then we turned and walked north on the street that ran parallel to it. Now we could hear occasional shouts and the distant honking of cars. Lao stopped me, just short of a corner, and he was listening. In a moment I heard it. There was a long low murmuring sound in the night, like surf on a Pacific beach.

Just then a young Negro woman came running around the corner. Lao tried to dodge her but she tripped over his foot, fell hard on the sidewalk, picked herself up before we could help her and ran across a lawn. Before she could disappear behind the houses, four or five men came running around the corner after her. In the dark we couldn't tell as they came whether they were blacks or whites but we threw ourselves into the shadow of a fence, and they ran on past us. They were white. They were just in time to see the colored girl's white dress as she ran back between the houses. They followed her, vanished in the dark. There had been no shouting. The girl hadn't cried out, even when she fell. I lay stiff against the fence. Lao was picking himself up. I could hear that distant murmur again of surf on an unknown shore.

Behind the houses there was a single scream.

I groaned and I got to my feet. Lao was holding my arm. I struggled to get away from him and I was full of heroic

gestures. Lao just held on. Then I stopped struggling and I knew how it was as I'd known all the time. We walked around the corner.

We'd no more than turned it when a car came into the sidestreet from Central Avenue and caught us in the beam of its headlights. I was blinded and confused by the sudden light. I could hear the car scream to a stop and I heard shouts and I was aware of men piling out of the car and then, as they crossed through the headlights, I saw them waving clubs and Lao was shouting in my ear and I was running.

I can't tell you where we ran or what I thought while I was running. I know I could hear the voices of white men shouting behind me about nigger bastards and I had no real sense that they meant me. I only ran and had a sick dread of falling, and Lao was faster than I was, and I saw him cut between a couple of houses and I followed and we went over a couple of fences and I could hear the whites behind me going over the same fences and then we were on Central Avenue in the midst of at least a hundred Negroes. I know I stopped running and had a sense of safety as soon as I saw the black faces around me, and I turned just in time to see the first two white men come running out after us, find themselves in the midst of the Negroes, try to run away, and get cut down by a dozen clubs. One of the white men lay where he fell. The other picked himself up and started to run. The Negroes were after him. I found myself with a club in my hand. Where I'd found it I don't know. I ran after the white man, but he was already down and there was a black pile of humanity on top of him.

Even as he fell a line of cars came charging up the street from the south. The black crowd was breaking up, trying to get out of the way of the cars. I saw a woman get hit and thrown to one side by the first car, and get run over by the

second. Then I heard shots and I saw white faces in the windows of the cars and the red bursts from guns. I was running again, trying like an animal to find a hole to crawl into. All about me were Negroes, screaming and running.

Then, up ahead where the first car had passed, there was a smashing ripping crash of a collision. The blacks had pushed a car down a sloping alley and let it roll out into Central Avenue just as the first white car arrived. The white car hit it a glancing blow and both cars turned over. The second white car plowed into the wreckage and the line of cars behind broke up in a confusion of yelling brakes. The Negro mob that an instant before had been running for cover turned on the whites who were crawling out of the wrecked cars. Some of the whites were shooting and others had lost their guns but the blacks knew only that the whites were surrounded, and there was a rending triumphant shriek. I was shouting too, running at the cars. Negroes were pouring out from the side streets. There were hundreds of us now, thousands for all I know, and only a few dozen whites. A white car that hadn't been wrecked tried to back up and turn around and escape. It locked bumpers with the car behind it. I was part of a mob that flung itself at the cars in the face of the gunshots. A Negro, struck, hurt, was screaming behind me. I'd lost all sense of safety or desire to run away. I only remember opening a car door and dragging out a white man. He was yelling for help and he dropped his gun and somebody hit him and he went down and when he came up again he had his gun, and his face was still screaming and his eyes were the color of a blotchy disease and he was coming straight at me and I discovered the club I'd been carrying was a baseball bat and I hit him with all my strength across his nose and his right cheek. There was a crushing noise and he went over backwards, his arms out, and he fell against the car. I hit

him again and again on the head, on the shoulders, on his arms. I hit him with all the power I had. He was sinking lower and lower against the running board and the front wheel and I kept on smashing him. I could hear voices singing inside me like a mighty choir. I could feel a glorious rhythm that was marching feet and beating drums and making love. Then somebody was pulling me away, and I was still shrieking and stamping my feet and pounding the pavement with my baseball bat, and I heard a voice, a Negro voice, "Lay off, boy! Lay off! Lay off!"

There was a strong red bursting light from a burning car, and the moment was over, and I was limp and dizzy and trying to vomit and I couldn't. Then there was a new kind of shouting around me, and panic again, and I could see beyond the burning car an immense spread of white faces like pale blobs on a canvas, and I was running down the street, away from the faces, in the midst of the yelling black mob.

To pursue, to be pursued. To chase, to flee. To strike and be struck. To yell with rage and insensate pleasure. To scream with fear and animal panic.

There was grey in the sky and dawn in the stirring breeze. A broad white moon hung in obscene splendor among the fragile branches of a eucalyptus tree. Where I was going, I didn't know. What I was doing, I couldn't say. Who I was, what I was, I didn't care. I and a dozen Negroes clambered into a loft above a garage, and hid, and groaned, and slept. Jammed side by side as in a cell, we slept.

I woke. The loft was heavy with the smell of sweat and blood. There were no windows. A few thin shafts of sunlight penetrated the cracked and weathered roof, but they brought no more than pallid accent to the gloom within. I turned my head very slowly. I could see little. I looked

again at the sickly sunbeams, and calculated their angle, and judge the time to be late afternoon. And then I was conscious of my closest neighbor. A soft Negro girl lay sleeping with her face against my arm. She must have been unaccustomed to sleeping alone. Her leg was bent over mine.

I tried not to think about her. I lay looking up at the dim and cobwebbed rafters. I tried to wonder what had happened to Lao. I tried to wonder what the papers were saying.

All I could think about was the weight of her leg on mine. And I knew, for the first time in many hours, that I was white. The weight and the guilt and the shame of centuries lay on my thigh. I raised my hand to my face. Shoe polish.

Now suddenly I saw before my eyes a picture of myself the night before. I saw the baseball bat in my hands and a white, crushed face before me.

My guilt was too much for me. Anger flooded my veins as water a parched valley below a broken dam. I raged at the snoring Negroes. I wanted to rise and shout, "Niggers! Stinking niggers!" I wanted to sink my fingers into the girl's soft body and tear her till she screamed.

I must have trembled. The girl woke. I tried to rise.

"It's daylight," she whispered.

"I'm getting out of here," I said, thickly, and I tried to push away her leg so I could get up. She gripped me with it.

"They'd see you. They'd kill you." She clutched my shirt.

I could just see her eyes in the shadows. They were black and soft with terror not for herself but for me. And her tenderness dissolved my guilty anger. I lay helpless, groping, grateful.

And then I felt something happen to her. I felt her leg move back slowly from mine and her body withdraw.

I peered through the gloom trying to see her face. She was peering at me, trying to see mine. Then she put up her hand very slowly and touched my cheek. She raised her hand above her head into a pale thin beam of sunlight. I could see the shoe polish on her fingers.

"Grease!" I said. "I got all over grease."

She wiped her hand on her dress. She said nothing. After a moment she turned on her back and looked away at the rafters and the cobwebs.

Frantically I debated with myself what to do. She couldn't have guessed from my appearance that I was white. It was too dark in the loft. She must have guessed by my voice. But did she know for sure?

One of the men woke and sat up and held his head and then rose unsteadily and let himself cautiously down the ladder to the garage below. I didn't dare follow him. If I tried to leave now she'd know for sure.

Still she looked away at the far end of the loft. I knew only that I mustn't speak.

The men began to wake and curse quietly and stretch and groan and inspect their bruises. They muttered among themselves and the sound was like a brook among stones. I thought of one ruse after another by means of which I could leave. None was any good. The sweat dripped from my armpits.

And then suddenly there was a scraping sound in the garage downstairs and we all sat frozen.

There were steps below. Somebody was coming to the ladder. One of the men drew a blackjack from his torn shirt and stretched silently, almost lazily, towards the opening in the floor at the top of the ladder. Then the head of

the Negro who'd gone out while the others slept appeared through the floor. And everybody sat back and laughed.

The man who came up had a box under his arm and a jug of some kind of liquor that smelled like new shoes and was probably rum. He passed it around while he told us that white civilians had been patrolling the district with rifles all morning, but about noon soldiers had come and disarmed the whites. Thereupon the whites withdrew to Central Avenue and put up barricades at the street intersections. The soldiers were left to patrol the sidestreets. Now, about an hour ago, the soldiers had all disappeared.

The men were baffled. Martial law would protect the colored. Why had the soldiers been withdrawn?

Then they all started thinking about Central Avenue, and the barricades, and the disarmed whites, and I could feel the anger stirring again like dry leaves in a hot wind. Despite empty stomachs and aching flesh, despite the interlude of sleep and reason last night's mood began to return. And last night's weapons to appear from pockets, from torn shirts and split sleeves.

The man who'd brought the jug opened the carton he still clutched under his arm. Somebody asked what it was. He shook his head. He pulled out a small flat can about two inches across and an inch thick. I didn't quite forget the girl or my danger, but I was curious. I leaned forward with the others to peer at the can in the semi-darkness. The man passed it around, and pulled out more from the carton. There must have been a hundred.

Suddenly a man with a black bullet head grunted in recognition.

"Where'd you get these?" he said.

"Fella that give me the liquor," said the man with the jug.

"I seen these before," said the man with the bullet head. "They're grenades. Torpedoes."

All hands became gingerly.

"What do you mean, torpedoes?" said someone whom I couldn't quite see in the dark. He had a quiet, school-teacherish voice.

"That's all. Torpedoes. You pull out that pin. Then they go off anything they hit. I seen 'em used in strikes."

"What happens if you drop one?" said the quiet voice. There was a nervous giggle from all the men.

"Nothing," said the man with the bullet head. "Not if the pin's in. If the pin's out it'll blow off your foot."

There was a moment's silence.

"Somebody's helping us," said the man next to me. He had long thin fingers and I could see them curling around the can, understanding it with every muscle. I saw his fingers tighten. "This ain't no nigger stuff! This here's white stuff!"

"Where'd you say you saw these before?" said the school-teacherish voice, sharply, to the man with the bullet head.

"Illinois."

"Strikes?"

"Coal strike."

"What happened?"

"Folks got killed."

"You! Josey!" came the school-teacherish voice, speaking to the man with the jug. "Who gave you these things?"

"Told you. Fella that give me the liquor."

"Where'd he get them?"

"Union fella."

"Union fella? White folks?"

"Sure. Same union fella said last week maybe pretty soon the unions start letting us in."

Somebody whistled. Then the Negroes started laughing

and slapping their thighs. This could only mean one thing. The unions were with them.

But bits and pieces in my brain connected with a flash like a blue spark. I remembered the union lawyer and the story about turning the blacks against the whites.

The bullet-headed man was waving one of the small flat cans in his clenched fist. "Wait'll it gets dark!" he was saying. "Wait'll it gets dark!"

"No!" I cried, jumping to my feet. "That's what they want you to do!"

Every shadowy head turned towards me. It was too late. In my horror at the whites' latest move, I'd forgotten that I was white.

I looked at the girl. A sunbeam had moved and fallen slanting across her face. I could see her eyes. They were fixed on me.

"Who's that?" said the school-teacherish voice. It was hard and hostile.

There was no turning back now. I had to finish what I'd started.

"Listen to me," I said. "They're afraid the riot's over. They want you to come out and fight. They don't just want you to hurt people. They want you to kill people. They want you to do things that white folks'll never forget."

The Negroes were looking at each other through the gloom. I had to keep on going.

"I'm telling you, leave these things alone! Don't use them! It's what they want! They gave you these torpedoes so you'd blow off white men's heads, and white men'd hate you forever!"

"He's a white man," said the girl, quietly.

I hit the ladder in one spring and slid and fell into the garage. I heard the yell behind me. Once more I was running. Once more I was the hare with the hounds on my

scent. But this time I was a white hare, and the hounds were black.

It was getting dark. They didn't chase me far. I was getting more experienced at the ways of back alleys, and fences, and broken outbuildings.

I hid till dark in a lumber pile. I knew that when night closed in, I could resume my black and anonymous identity in the creeping, shadowy mob. But something was gone. I'd been discovered. I couldn't again forget I was white.

I lay in the lumber and looked at the empty sky. Somewhere nearby azaleas were blooming. Somewhere, farther away, Negroes were singing. I could hear their voices. Negroes were still going to church, and singing about the Jordan, and a land across the river.

I wept. It was the singing. I lay in the lumber and wept. I thought about Judas and shoe polish and azaleas and cotton fields and a land across the river. A breeze moved through the eucalyptus trees and the California sky turned darker blue. In the west I saw a star. Star-light, star-bright, first star I've seen tonight. A forsaken child weeping in a lumber pile, filled with the dread and the hope of night, and the guilt and the crime and the loneliness of men. I saw an adult white man with shoe polish smeared on his face beating an adult white man without any shoe polish smeared on his face. He beat him with a baseball bat, crumpling him, smashing him, and the horror was not the broken human body but the pleasure and the ecstasy and the marching feet. I turned my face against my arm and my hands burned with the splinters I'd got off the ladder. But I couldn't make the memory of pleasure go away.

Somewhere I heard a sharp explosion, and another and another, and yelling. Somewhere else voices kept on singing about the Jordan and a land across the river. I knew that now the night had come, and men were fighting again. I

knew that somewhere beyond the fighting white men's voices were singing too, about peace and good will towards men. That white men were sending their children upstairs to bed, and walking the carpets of their living rooms, and listening to the radio, and avoiding the eyes of their wives. I knew that by tomorrow night good white men and good black men, who loved their children and sang of heaven and yearned for peace and sanity, would be screaming and gouging and killing and maiming and running through shadowed alleys. To pursue, to be pursued.

That night the Negroes, with the aid of explosives acquired none knew where, drove the whites from the barricades and out of the Central Avenue stronghold. By dawn the blood was so thick on the sidewalks a cur dog could not keep his footing. By dawn, when you slipped and fell, your out-thrust hands found bodies that were not merely limp or stiff, but shattered beyond identity, and parts of them were missing, and what was left had once been white.

But soon after dawn, atrocity's trumpet was rousing the white community from Santa Monica to San Pedro, from Pasadena to El Segundo. By the middle of the morning all business had ceased, and white men were moving towards the place where the black men lived. Churchmen, teachers, aircraft mechanics, filling station attendants, motion picture executives, file clerks, bank tellers, all the white community was moving on Central Avenue. And there was dread, and excitement, and horror and anticipation, and the mistaken assumption that the Negro alone had gone insane.

By noon I was again a reporter.

Seven days of terror. Why do I sit here now, writing these notes? Why do I sit in my apartment on Alvarado Street,

every light burning, fighting to forget, yet forcing myself to remember?

The terror's over. I'm home. I listen to the radio. I know by now that what I've seen has been duplicated in every city and county in the United States of America, wherever there were Negroes to be found.

I know why I write. I write to humiliate myself. I write to torture myself and to see in unforgettable typewritten words the record of my guilt.

All over Los Angeles, all over America tonight, men are trying to erase from the pages of their minds the black-and-white sketches of faces smashed and children with elbows bent wrong. But no one erases a line or a word. Instead we recount and recount. Because it gives us pleasure.

It gives us pleasure. Admit it. Put it down in words you can't forget. Our shame is like a sultry bed, and a woman we loathe gives us horrid pleasure.

I don't think I can write any more.

April 2.

The official blow that a nation has been officially prepared for has fallen.

The United States of America is bankrupt. Our idiocies have at last found us out.

What has happened?

The national blindness that made possible the Second World War found its just reward in a national debt of fantastic proportions.

Still, with wisdom and sacrifice, we could have paid the price of our folly. It was not beyond our power to pay for the Second World War.

But we did not turn to wisdom or to sacrifice. We turned instead to idiocy and greed.

And we piled debt on debt with our hopeless imperialism.

This debt we cannot pay. This post-war lunacy has broken the nation's back.

In the month of March, three billion dollars' worth of federal obligations could not be met by refinancing. In the month of April, fourteen billions more will come due.

What has been done in the crisis? Congress—all factions agreeing—has quietly passed a law the essence of which is the removal of all backing from the nation's currency. We have entered a period of legal, outright, uncontrolled inflation.

What's going to happen? I don't know. And I don't know that I care.

That's what sickens me. How I don't care. I can't see anything but Central Avenue.

The government's cynical preparation has worked. On me at least.

April 3.

Maybe I can look at the inflation thing a little more clearly today.

Remember our national debt at the end of the Second World War? It doesn't look too large, if you compare it to the debt today. But it was large. It was enormous. It was so enormous that we couldn't comprehend it. And that was our pitfall.

When economists said our debt didn't matter, that a nation's internal debt can't be reckoned as a liability, we didn't argue. Because we couldn't comprehend it.

Our debt at the end of the Second World War did matter. It mattered, because as a nation—whether we could

understand it or not—we were still equal to it. We could still pay it off.

But we didn't. We chose instead to expand it.

Through the post-war decade we built that debt higher and higher. Expansion came easy. When something's so large that you can't comprehend it, growth seems of no significance.

But another kind of growth was going on. Something within human grasp. The Treasury was finding it more and more difficult to finance the debt at the old low interest rate. And every rise of one-half of one per cent in the interest rate added over two billion dollars to the annual budget. This was something you could grasp.

Our budget was rising. Our national income was shrinking. And our tax yield was shrinking with our income.

Still economists said it didn't matter. A nation's internal debt can't be reckoned as a liability. By now we had to agree. By now there was nothing else to do.

Then there came the collapse of world trade and the drying up of industrial activity and suffocating unemployment and the final disgrace of the business administration.

The popular government, taking over from the business government a year and a half ago, offered a virtual duplication of the security program of the nineteen thirties. Staggering public works to relieve industrial unemployment. Credit to relieve farmers. Credit for building homes, credit for anything that would revive the economic machine. It had worked before, it would work again.

It would not work again.

The security program of the nineteen thirties was based on unlimited government credit. Such credit no longer exists.

The security program is stalled. The public works have not been started. This spring our administration faces the

absolute necessity for providing relief for farm and labor or there'll be a rebellion within the party. But the Treasury, far from being able to finance new debt, cannot refinance the old.

What can be done? What are the alternatives? Well, the alternatives are compulsory extension of government bonds—virtual refusal to redeem them—or inflation.

Bond refusal strikes property hardest.

Inflation strikes the people hardest.

Our people's party has chosen inflation.

Now at last our two-party political system stands revealed in all its pastel glory. One party, now out, is presumed to represent the interests of property. The other party, now in, is presumed to represent the people. But in the ultimate showdown, the party of the people sides with property.

I don't mean that our administration should have chosen bond refusal. But when faced by two equally disastrous alternatives, the one favoring human rights, the other property rights, the party of humanity has chosen to go down on property's ship.

Well, anyway, that's how it is. What happens next? I wish I had the drive to really wonder. I don't. Something's gone out of me. Some cynical psychologist in the administration, when he played our American democracy's ace in the hole, the Negro pogrom, must have known me to a T. They've been saving that ace for a long time. Well, there it is. I lose.

April 6.

My apathy seems widely shared. It comes out in small and curious things. This morning, for instance, I stood on a Wilshire Boulevard corner, waiting for a bus. Several other people waited with me. When the bus came it didn't

stop. We could all see that the bus wasn't full, but no one even muttered or spit. We just waited for the next bus.

Well, perhaps it's not important.

Lao Hsu Teh showed up yesterday. He's all right. I was afraid something had happened to him.

My stomach's acting up. I go around feeling like a hydrochloric acid ice cream soda. I can't find a doctor. They're all still working on the Central Avenue casualties.

April 7.

I went to the airport with Lao Hsu Teh. He left for China on the afternoon plane. To make reports on the race war, I presume, that our censorship won't let pass.

While we waited for his plane to load, I talked about my apathy as I would an operation. With wonder, and detachment, and neurotic pride. How I seem to have no capacity for anger, or rebellion, or indignation. How I can't get worked up about the inflation or the labor sell-out. How I seem to have no sense of public necessity, or what's happening to the country, or the future: what little emotion I have concerns the past. And how others seem to be much the same. Lao listened to it all, and thought for a while, and at last he said:

"Yes. I know. That's how my people were for a thousand years."

I don't think I said another word till he got aboard his plane. Then we said good-by, and I came home.

That's how the Chinese were for a thousand years. It keeps going around in my head.

April 10.

I've got to sit down and write. My teeth are on edge from the acid. I can't sleep. And when I do drift off, I wake cold and startled, and I've been seeing myself in my sleeping

mind's eye, my face covered with shoe polish, a baseball bat in my hands, my mouth wide open and screaming.

What is it about men? Is it true that we're damned by some ancient and original sin? Is there hope or isn't there?

I'm willing to fight and work for a world that my children can live in. Who isn't? I'll go farther than that. I'll work for a world my grandchildren's grandchildren may live to see. I don't ask for a pillar of fire, or a sky filled with singing birds. I ask for no miracle tomorrow. If my grandchildren's grandchildren can have justice and decency and a sense of belonging, then I'll settle. That's soon enough.

But is such a world possible? Have men ever possessed a society that was better or worse than themselves?

It's all right for poets to say that once upon a time it was necessary for the fish to emerge from the water and discard gill-breathing. Or there could have been no men. I owe my presence on earth to the courage of the fish.

It's all right for the anthropologist to say that man is an imperfect being in a period of transition from the animal to something else. Give us another hundred thousand years and we'll have perfected this instrument of self-consciousness known as the brain. Until then we may have a little trouble.

The anthropologist can say that. But I just work here. I have to make a living and write stories for newspapers and sleep nights and resist the luxury of open upper story windows.

I'm willing to fight for a just and decent and rational world for my children to live in; or my grandchildren's grandchildren's grandchildren. I'll go that many generations. But if it's going to be a hundred thousand years, I'll have to think it over.

For the immediate present, I know my own worthless-

ness. I've taken a leave from the paper. I'm going up to the ranch for six weeks and sit on the edge of the desert and play with my children.

May 1.

I'm back. It's only three weeks. I stayed as long as I could. It had something to do with the kids. I couldn't look at them any longer. I couldn't look at my wife any longer. Whether I can look at the City of the Angels again, I don't know. At least I can try.

The Jacaranda trees are blooming. There's one across the street that floats between the houses like a little lavender cloud.

I'm waiting to get a call through to my New York office so they'll know I'm on deck again. I've unpacked and shaved and I don't know what else to do. I don't know why the call's taking so long.

May 2.

Something's happened around here that I can't understand.

I shouldn't say, here. It doesn't seem to be just Los Angeles. It took two hours to get that call through to my New York office, and then it took another hour to find the chief. That isn't like our office.

I can only describe what's happening in terms of little things. None by itself is significant. Totaled together they form some kind of a pattern I don't understand.

My toilet is running. The janitor keeps saying he'll come up and look at it, but he doesn't come.

The paper is full of traffic accidents. There's no apparent reason for such a rapid upward spurt. I noticed downtown last night that Angelenos—they've been trained for a gen-

eration not to cross streets against the lights—weren't paying much attention to the signals. But the rise in accidents isn't confined to pedestrians.

And other odd little things besides traffic accidents. On the bus coming home last night—a regular Olympic Boulevard bus—the driver pulled up to the curb in the middle of a block and went into an apartment building. He didn't come back for ten minutes. When he did return, and a passenger said, "What the hell goes on, buddy?" the driver instructed the passenger most definitely as to what he could do to himself.

I ate alone downtown last night. In a restaurant I gave the waiter my order, and he came back after half an hour and asked what was it I'd ordered. When I got a little sore, he walked off. I hunted up the manager but the manager just shrugged and looked harried, and I ended up at a counter in a drug store.

I needed to get a telephone number that wasn't in the book. I called information. The service has been temporarily discontinued. Suddenly, for no reason at all, so many people have given up using the book and call information when they want a number, the company's had to cut off the service entirely.

There's a box of groceries outside my door. It contains among other things a gallon of olive oil and a two-pound jar of peanut butter. I detest olive oil; peanut butter gags me. It's not my order, all I asked for was milk. The store admits some orders got mixed up. They're supposed to send up a boy with my milk, to take the oil and peanut butter away. The boy hasn't come yet. The stuff's been out there since yesterday.

God knows where my mail is. Of the curious assortment of letters I found in my box yesterday, there wasn't one that was mine.

I've only been out in the desert for three weeks, and in that time something's happened to the whole routine of living and working. What is it? Is it some form of protest against the government and society? Can it be that in three weeks' time some fantastic scheme of sabotage has been organized?

May 4.

My idea about sabotage is the cry of business as it turns out, so it's not likely true.

It doesn't even seem to be conscious protest. The janitor, for instance. He fixed my toilet at last. He grumbled a lot about too much to do and high prices and how's a man going to live. He cursed the government but he did it with the same sort of fatalism with which one curses the weather. There wasn't any hatred or sense of reprisal in him.

The same with the grocery boy. The same with the mailman. The mailman apologized for all the wrong deliveries, and said the stuff comes to him so badly sorted he has to spend most of his time sending things back, and when he comes to delivering his own district, he hasn't enough time left and he makes a lot of mistakes. He didn't seem particularly perturbed by his mistakes, just sad about things in general.

Things in general are something to be sad about. Money's gone crazy. Newspapers went to ten cents yesterday. Milk's thirty.

Why am I looking for reasons and motives concerning work habits? Money's going to hell. In a money-motive society what have people got to work for?

I know how it feels. The last story I wired to New York got so garbled by Western Union the office has called me

and asked for another copy. It so happens I've lost the carbon. I feel like telling them to go chase themselves, it's not my fault.

May 7.

No, it's not just the money. Money's part of it, but things are happening that have no strict relation to money, or wages, or jobs.

I went downtown to check up on traffic accidents. That was an item that made no sense to me. It still makes no sense. In the past month the number of accidents caused by driving on the left-hand side of the road has skyrocketed.

While I was at the city hall, I remembered a newspaper story about a fire in Burbank that burned for an hour before the engines arrived. It seems the fire companies started out as promptly as usual—no criticism there—but signals had been twisted and they all had the wrong address. By the time they got straightened out and found the fire it was out of control. . . . That can be explained I supposed in terms of jobs and wages and carelessness. But they tell me false alarms have trebled in the same four week period. How do you explain that?

One horror story, likewise inexplicable. The churches have been raising Cain about juvenile delinquency. I was checking on that with the police department and got the following story that can't be published but's true without question:

There's a certain vacant lot out on Venice Boulevard that might be called Lover's Acres. High school kids have been parking their cars there for twenty years and indulging in pleasant and moderate necking. It's almost a tradition. The police have kept an eye on the place, but there's been a sort of gentlemen's agreement that the kids don't go too far, and the police don't come too close too often. The parents know

about the spot, and most of them remember when they were young.

But lately the patrolman who comes on duty in the morning has been puzzled by the growing deposits of pop bottles in the weeds around the lot. He put it down to some sudden craze for soft drinks and let it go at that. Certainly there can be nothing wrong about fifteen-year-olds sitting in their cars in the moonlight and drinking pop. But finally the collection of pop bottles became enormous. He had to ask the Department of Streets to clear up the mess, and in connection with this he sent in a routine report.

Now, it so happens that similar requests were coming to the Department of Streets to clear up the pop bottles in other romantic vacant lots around town. So a whimsical sergeant at headquarters, as much amused as mystified, phoned a soft drink company to find out how business was doing. The answer was that business was nothing special. The sergeant has 'teen-age kids of his own, and he was utterly baffled. He determined to go have a look-around at Lover's Acres that night.

Well, the mystery of the pop bottles has been solved. A certain brand of orange-and-soda has climbed to sudden popularity with the high school girls. Shaken up, it can be made to provide at least the illusion of a douche.

It's an ugly little story. A year or two ago I'd have dismissed it as just another of those meaningless, sordid little tales that float around any police-court press room. But right now I can't seem to dismiss it. Whatever's happening, this story is part of it.

May 8.

I think I know what's happening. If I'm right, God help us.

The active agent of human behavior that we think of as personal responsibility is breaking down.

It's hard for me to describe what I mean. Let me find a parallel.

Supposing something happened to electro-magnets. Every day the electric current that produces a magnetic field produces a little bit less than the day before.

No one understands what's going on. Nobody has the vaguest idea that something has happened to electro-magnets. But consequent phenomena are all about us.

Doorbells don't ring as loud as they used to. Every day you have to listen harder for the postman.

Motors don't turn with their old r.p.m. Every electric motor in the land is slowing down. You have trouble starting your car. It's as if the battery were run down, but when you have it tested, you find the battery's fully charged. If you work out at the Douglas plant and live downtown, then you take the Pacific Electric to work. But every day the car moves slower, and you get to work later, or you have to start earlier.

Your electric clock, contrary to all guarantees, is running slow. Slow. Slower every day.

Food spoils in your icebox. You turn up the rheostat but it still spoils. The elevator takes an interminable time to reach your floor. You order a milk shake at the drug store and by the time the machine's got it mixed, the milk shake is lukewarm. In a sort of desperation you call up your wife, and you can hardly hear her voice and you shout at her to get closer to the phone, and she shouts at you to get closer yourself, and you quarrel, and you try to get the operator to give you a better connection, and the operator can't hear what you're saying.

Something has happened to electro-magnets.

No society can achieve the complexity of ours without

being based on a few simple premises of human behavior. And if any single one of our premises goes wrong, or proves false, a society as complex as ours will fly to pieces like a bursted star.

Look at our American society. There are only two kinds of society, and while there may be compromises between the two, compromises are difficult and temporary. The statist society believe that, for the good of men, the state must come first. Ours is the other kind.

Now, what can happen to a society? Ours or anybody else's? What can go vitally wrong?

Well, it would seem to me that any society must meet two demands, or die. It must keep moving, and it must hold together.

The statist society—whatever its purposes, high or low—moves by the power of authority and holds together by the strength of obedience. If anything goes wrong with authority, the society stagnates. And if anything goes wrong with obedience, it flies to pieces.

Now look at our own society. The individualist society—whatever its character, good or bad—moves by the power of individual initiative and holds together by the strength of personal responsibility. If anything happens to individual initiative, the society stagnates. And if anything happens to personal responsibility, it flies to pieces.

Look again at America.

No man can interpret with confidence the ultimate meaning of a scene in which he is himself a player. But as I look at the phenomena of American life all about me—the undelivered groceries, the garbled telegrams, the mailboxes stuffed with somebody else's letters, the fifteen-year-olds with their pop bottles in Lover's Acres—I can come to but one conclusion, and I pray to God it's hysterical. I can only conclude that personal responsibility is a disintegrating force,

and that the phenomena we all observe are the first flying fragments of our shattering America.

How could such a force decline overnight? How could the habits of centuries break up in a few months?

I think back to the sources of responsibility. Religion. The family and children. The conservative instinct in men that begins in babyhood and dreads chaos. The gregarious instinct in men that dreads loneliness and accepts responsibility as the price of friendship.

These sources couldn't disappear overnight. They couldn't disappear at all.

But then I think about capitalism, and how closely, for some centuries, it's been associated with individualism. How Jesus Christ and Benjamin Franklin and the Marquis of Queensberry and Horatio Alger and the U. S. mint have made contributions to social and economic responsibility alike. Goodness. Thrift. Fair play. Hope. Stability. Each has become a foundation stone, part moral, part economic, in our structure of responsibility.

But what have we done about these foundations?

How were the teachings of Jesus Christ affected by Pearl Harbor? Could we ever again accept with enthusiasm the ethic of doing unto others as we would have others do unto us?

And Franklin. How did Franklin's morality of thrift survive the winter of nineteen thirty-two? Could a man who went to the bank and found a single word on the door—CLOSED—have ever again the same moral inhibitions regarding extravagance?

I look back at our times, our wars and our peace, and I see ourselves allowing the sources of responsibility to dry up one by one. The slipping away now of a stable currency is merely the last straw. We allowed personal responsibility

to become, at last, dollar responsibility, and now we've lost even our dollar.

It is the tragedy of our times that a people endowed with the richness of a continent, the vigor of youth, a vision and ingenuity and resourcefulness unparalleled in the history of mankind, should have spent none of its vision, none of its ingenuity, none of its vigor on the fundamentals of its social order. We didn't care. We didn't look. And now it's too late.

I remember what Hara said, long ago in Indiana. We've never been bad enough off.

All right. Now we're bad enough off. Now comes the pay-off. The showdown. Will it lead, as Hara hoped, to something better? Or something worse?

We're a society of almost one hundred and fifty million individuals. We've got to keep going. Something's got to hold us together. What else is there besides the personal responsibility that we're losing now?

I know what else there is. I know the alternative. Obedience. Obedience and discipline and rule by force and decree and fear and marching men.

This is it. This is the sanity and justice we come to.

NO!

I find myself groping for typewriter keys that I've lived with for thirty years.

The end of the American experiment. We face the end of whatever it was that budded at Lexington and flowered at Gettysburg. I think of Jefferson and Thomas Paine and Abraham Lincoln. I think of the dead on the fields of Yorktown, and Shiloh, and the Marne, and Guadalcanal. We hold these truths to be self-evident. With malice towards none, with charity for all, with determination to do the right, as God gives us to see the right. Lincoln, dead, in a box at Ford's Theatre. Woodrow Wilson, dead, in a field

of withered dreams. Valley Forge, Antietam, Belleau Woods, Bataan. The end of the American experiment.

Do I deceive myself with sentimentality? Do I shrink from freedom's end only because of self-interest? Because I'm a writer? Because without freedom of speech and of conscience, I'm nothing? I'm a typist?

Should I welcome authority and obedience? Bury my personal loss in the good of the state? Concede that individualism was a wrong guess? That the kind of freedom we've had has caused the bad, not the good, to flourish? Admit that man himself is unequal to freedom?

Should I see myself again, in my mind's eye, my face covered with shoe polish and my mouth wide open and screaming? Should I have the courage to admit that I need and demand a keeper?

I can't. I can't. I believed in freedom.

May 12.

Wildcat strikes at one of the great California aircraft plants. Union leadership has lost control. Management threatens to close the plant.

As the whole panorama of the American collapse becomes apparent to me with greater and greater clarity, I find myself watching, at times, with a suicidal sort of enthusiasm.

Take the inflation.

The inflation seems to be stopped—for the time being at least—by the simple use of federal force. Congress has granted emergency powers to the White House. And the White House has issued, in the last twenty-four hours, decree after decree.

Absolute price ceilings on all foods and commodities have been established. Rent control is in force. Wages are frozen. The stock exchange has been closed. Trading in commodi-

ties has been put under strict federal control. Black market operation, or violation in any way of any of the new regulations, is punishable by the most drastic and unheard-of penalties ever to appear in American law. If I were to buy or sell one dozen eggs at five cents above the price ceiling, I'd get a minimum of ten years in federal prison and a fine of one thousand dollars.

The fine may seem anti-climactic. It is not. The entire fine is paid over by the government to the man who informs on me.

The effect of this has been to create, in just twenty-four hours, a brand new profession. The informer. Literally thousands of men and women—mostly unemployed—have appeared from nowhere and stand around every grocery store, every drug store, every saloon, every gas station. They have no official status. They live in hopes.

There's no popular resentment against the price decrees. Everyone says it's about time. The only anger is directed against the informers.

The net effect of all this is the temporary end of the inflation.

But I watch the whole process, as I say, with a neurotic enthusiasm. The political uses of inflation have become apparent to my omniscient, sophisticated eye. Out of the chaos of our money, our economy is being nationalized with the consent of the people. Out of the dregs of the unemployed, a secret police is being enlisted. To my intense pleasure, I recognize both the symptoms.

Then I get sick of myself and I go home and sleep and I dream that a man with grotesque red lips like a split beet is waving typewritten sheets of paper in my face. He keeps shouting, Did you write this? Answer yes or no!

Letter from Hara. I can't make sense of it. Evidently he's written other letters that never reached me. He just says,

"Come or don't come, but say something. I've got to leave here in a couple of weeks." It's written on the stationery of a hotel in Indian Pass, Texas.

I tried to call him but after two hours' negotiation with the telephone company, the best I could do was the desk clerk at a hotel in Amarillo. When you get a wrong number these days, you really get a wrong number.

I'm sending Hara half a dozen wires in the hope that one will get through to him.

May 14.

There's such fear of the black market laws that prices have actually receded slightly below ceilings. Like a margin for safety.

The aircraft company's closed. A name associated with the Second World War, that'll appear in history books as long as children go to school, is gone.

The management claims that operation is no longer possible under conditions of labor anarchy. A long and bitter statement in this morning's paper about America being sold out by the American people.

No statement from the other aircraft companies.

May 15.

I got my courage together and went down to Central Avenue for the first time since the terror. I don't know why I went. It's like a criminal revisiting the scene of his crime.

Most of the Negro district was burned, of course. The ashes are dry, and you keep getting stuff in your eyes. Tons upon tons of broken glass lie all about, and the weeds are growing up around the fragments but still the earth glitters. The path of violence in the modern world seems to run towards broken glass.

There aren't many Negroes about. Most of them are

occupying the long-deserted war-time Japanese concentration camps, up in the Owen's Valley. They were moved there after the terror with the excuse that their homes were gone, and this was the only practical means of caring for them. But I understand that the barbed wire's been repaired, and the war-time searchlights play back and forth, all the night through.

Some Negroes remain, however, in the Central Avenue district. I realized, when I saw them poking around in the ruins, that these were the first black men I'd laid eyes on since the pogrom ended. The Negroes who had fled their jobs in the white community never returned. They were replaced by whites. Most of them ended up in the Owens Valley. The few that are left here don't leave the district, for obvious reasons.

Part of Central Avenue itself still stands. The glass and the rubble and the broken window frames and the demolished store fittings have been raked into orderly piles in the street, like heaps of dirt beside excavations. There isn't a window left on the Avenue. The buildings stand vacant and eyeless, like forgotten monuments to the blindness of mankind.

I don't know whether I'm better or worse for having gone back to the Central Avenue district. I expected my nightmare of shoe polish and clubs and myself screaming to rise up from the ruins. It didn't.

I felt, instead, a sort of loneliness. The kind of loneliness and fruitless regret that a woman must feel when the years are gone and she has no children.

I remember standing for a moment, before I came home, beside the blackened, twisted remains of a gas station. I could see the length of the scarred and silent street. It was so like the desert. It was so like one of those ripped and twisting scars in the Mojave, where once upon a time a

flood came along, and the water hurled itself across the desert floor. Now the water has gone, and the violence; and only the desert remains, and the scars.

Off to my right, an aged white-haired Negro poked about in the ashes that had once been a house. He was the only human being within eyesight. He and I were alone among the ruins. And I wondered why, long, long ago, we hadn't seen that there was no Negro problem, as such. That when we talked about housing conditions, and economic competition, and social prejudice, we talked nonsense.

There isn't any race problem. There never has been. There's no such thing as anti-Semitism, or nationalism, or religious intolerance. They don't exist.

There's only frustration. There's only some deep and horrid and incurable frustration in men's lives that suppresses at once our ego and our destiny. We sense it, though we know it not. And deprived of man's fulfillment, we revert to fulfilling the animal that lies always waiting within us.

Even as men have created God, in the image of the good that lies within us, so have we created racism, and nationalism, and intolerance, in the image of the bad that must be satisfied.

There is no race problem. There is no problem of Jews and nations. There is only human impulse. The impulse to achieve and learn and rise and fulfill; the frustration, whatever it is, and the perversion to destroy, and kill and hate, that must logically follow.

I came back to my apartment on Alvarado Street feeling very wise and equally silly. There's a wire here from Hara. He says there's a story in Indian Pass, and come on if I've got any sense.

I haven't any sense, but no matter. I've looked up Indian

Pass in the atlas. It's a town in West Texas, out in the trans-Pecos country. It's on the Southern Pacific railroad, in the Davis Mountains. Population 2,417, according to the last census. If I can get out of Los Angeles, I think I'll go.

I seem to have outgrown my usefulness here. If I ever had any.

## A BETTER MOUSETRAP

**P**ERHAPS ONCE IN A MAN'S LIFETIME ALL NATURE, AND ALL reason, and all that is magnificent and illogical in men combine themselves by some mysterious chemistry into a dazzling gem. And that gem is a day in the years of our life. And that day is hope.

On such a day does a man meet a woman. Her dress resembles a hundred thousand others. Her hair is done in the fashion of millions. Her eyes are brown, and they differ in no manner from the eyes of all the brunet women in the world. Or her eyes are blue, and they differ in no manner from all the world of blue-eyed women. But a man on this day looks into the eyes of a particular woman, and destiny chimes like cathedral bells, and voices sing, and the earth in immense preparation stands for a moment still.

On such a day does a Dan Boone cross the Alleghenies, and standing on a hilltop see before him, swelling, rolling, beckoning, vanishing in dreamy mist, the sweet blue wilderness, Kentucky. Gone in an instant are all regrets for things undone and passions unrequited. Gone is the sadness of the seaboard and the cities. Present only is the instant and the blue and dreaming wilderness.

On such a day I stood before my hotel room window in a town called Indian Pass in the western part of Texas. My watch said five-thirty. The sun, half a diameter above the eastern horizon, was bright as noon yet somehow soft and

glowing. The morning air was fresh, like spring water in a pine-swept valley in the Rockies. To the north the sky was that clear and green-touched blue of the Gulf of Mexico on a tranquil day. To the west the round red ramparts of the Davis Mountains divided the yellow Texas plain from the green-blue Texas sky.

A breeze ruffled the lacy tops of the locust trees outside my window.

I knew only that this was a town called Indian Pass, population 2,417, according to the last census figures. I hadn't seen the town; I had arrived late the previous night. I knew only that the yellow plain beyond the locust trees was the trans-Pecos country of remote West Texas. That it was dry, and lonely, and five hundred miles from anywhere that mattered. That many people detested it, though I on this morning was not among them.

I knew only that there was a story here; though I hadn't seen Hara yet, and I had not the slimmest sense as to what the story was about. I knew only that the Hotel El Paso del Indio was square and faced with ruddy-colored brick, and that it contained perhaps thirty rooms. I had no notion that while I stood this morning in my room, in other rooms half a dozen first-rate reporters—men whose noses for sensational news were such that their simultaneous appearance in any capital was enough to start rumors of impending carnage and the fall of kings—these men were scratching themselves, yawning, and pulling down their shades against the early sunlight.

Only two hints had I received that anything existed at this desert whistle-stop to warrant world attention: One, a cheerful Negro bellboy had taken my bag to my room last night. He was the first employed Negro (let alone the first cheerful one) that I'd seen since the terror. And two, the night clerk had inquired when I registered if I'd be paying

my bill in dollars or scrip. I'd been sleepy, and in my grogginess I'd brought out a roll of currency. He'd shaken his head and said he couldn't promise the room for more than a day or two. I hadn't even inquired what he was talking about. I went to bed.

Now, as I stood by my window, I couldn't know that on this day I'd hear for the first time the word *commonwealth* used in its modern sense. I couldn't know that this day in May, in the year of the terror, would be for me the sight of a sweet blue wilderness; the freckled depths of a woman's eyes.

I couldn't know these things.

And yet—I stood by my window and looked out over the weaving tops of the locust trees at the yellow brush-spotted rolling plain, and the round red cushions of the Davis Mountains, and the green-blue Texas morning sky.

And I found myself saying in the silence of my throat: *I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills.*

And I found myself thinking, in some unbeaten corner of my brain: *Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.*

And I seemed to hear the chiming of cathedral bells. And voices were singing. And the dawn-slanted Texas earth in immense preparation stood for a moment still.

Giddily I dressed. And I went downstairs to meet Hara in the dining room at quarter past six.

When I was a young man in the gin-reeking, pop-eyed, money-happy nineteen twenties, business men had a solemn saying: If a man can build a better mousetrap, though he live in a forest, the world will beat a path to his door.

What was happening at Indian Pass, in West Texas, was

simply that somebody was building a better mousetrap. And although the operation was being conducted in the middle of a desert, already the world was stamping at the door.

The world, at this particular time, consisted of half a dozen reporters, several industrial engineers, and a collection of curious and assorted characters whom I'll describe later on, all living at the Hotel El Paso del Indio; and something over two thousand workers living in tents and trailers and tar-paper shacks on the edge of town trying to get work in a sprawling dust-colored factory beside the Southern Pacific tracks.

Over the door that a nondescript world was beating a path to was a sign:

#### TRANS-PECOS CHEMICALS COM.

The COM. was not an incorrect abbreviation of the word "company." It was the abbreviation of the word "commonwealth."

On Crockett Street—the main street in Indian Pass—were several strange employment agencies. They had no authority to send prospective workers to Trans-Pecos Chemicals. But if you applied for work at the plant, and your application was accepted, then you could go home to Fort Worth or Houston or Chicago or wherever you came from and the agency would keep in touch with the plant and when your name came up the agency would call you long-distance collect. You would pay them a fee for this service.

The two thousand workers on the edge of town were skeptical individuals who didn't trust the agencies and were taking no chances.

It wasn't that the eight-hundred-odd fortunate workers who labored behind the desirable door of Trans-Pecos Chemicals emerged every Saturday night clutching wads of legal tender that would choke a pinto horse.

They didn't come out with any money at all. They came out with scrip. Scrip that said dollars and cents and was issued by the Trans-Pecos Chemicals Commonwealth and would be redeemed by the treasurer of the Commonwealth at the end of the current quarter; and not until then; and not for the face value of the scrip as translated into United States currency but for a value unstated, unpromised, and for that matter unpredictable.

But the workers wouldn't redeem the scrip. Not all of it, anyway. No more than they could help. They liked it. They liked it better than U. S. currency.

For that matter the whole town and the whole countryside liked the scrip. If you were a truck gardener down at Presidio on the Rio Grande, and you came up to Indian Pass with a load of melons, you'd part with a melon reluctantly for fifty cents in minted money. But you'd give it up in a hurry for fifteen cents in Trans-Pecos scrip.

The commonwealth, you see, had better credit hereabouts than the United States of America. The great inflation was being held in temporary check by the rigorous price ceilings and drastic penalties. Even so, currency represented a mere lien on a doubtful institution, America. Whereas Trans-Pecos scrip meant a share in the legal ownership of a thriving business. And every day it was worth a little more.

Ownership. The workers at Trans-Pecos didn't work for hire. The scrip they received had no relation to wages. An hour's labor represented an investment in something you had faith in. Because that hour's work made it part yours.

This was why the business wasn't called a company, or a corporation, but a commonwealth. They'd had to find an old word to describe a new thing.

This was why—when you invested an hour of your life that was labor—you worked as you had never worked be-

fore: with all your intelligence, with all your skill, with all your strength, with all your heart.

This was why—when as an average worker you got your return not as an employee but as an owner—your total income for the past fiscal year was close to three times that of the average American wage.

And of course this was why every worker in the Southwest who'd heard of Trans-Pecos wanted to get in on it. And how the Trans-Pecos management could pick from the tens of thousands of applicants the most skilled, the most intelligent, the most imaginative.

And all these were reasons—besides many others that I'll bring up later—why the Trans-Pecos Chemicals Commonwealth was not just making a better mousetrap; it was in itself a better mousetrap. And corporate competition was going quietly crazy, and customers and workers, and observers technical and social, were beating a silent path to the Indian Pass door.

I'm not interested in the social implications, said Hara—oh, hell, I'm interested, I'm fascinated. But you know how it is, I'm an engineer. It's the wheels going 'round that gets me. It's the industrial idea. It's the making-things idea. I'm a kid with a new electric train.

I came down here from Chicago the first of the year to do some work for the outfit. Things were dull and I didn't have anything else to do and the idea of taking scrip sounded crazy to my wife—and to me too—but I thought, oh, well, it's a good climate. . . . The job's finished. I've not only made more dough than I ever made before, but I've had more fun than I've had in a lifetime. I'm done now and I can't leave. I'm fascinated. I sit around and watch.

I guess the only way to explain the outfit so you can see how it ticks is to go back and try to tell the story of how it got started. I've sat up nights with the boys who run it—you'll notice I don't say own it—and I think I've got their story straight. You'll meet them later today.

They're two brothers name of Davis. About our age, I'd say. No signs of genius on the outside, certainly. Ben's the older one. He's a chemist. He's got yellow hair and he's tall and stooped from leaning over test tubes. He's got a pushed-in nose and buck teeth. The natives call him White Fang. The younger brother's an accountant. George. He doesn't look anything special, just plain. Thick glasses, pink face, ears that stick out like handles on a mug.

You'll like them both immediately. You'll probably figure White Fang's the brilliant one. He's the chemist and the inventor and the production engineer and he gets most of the credit around here. I'd bet my dough on George, personally. It's hard to think of an accountant as being touched with the divine spark, but I'll still put my money on George.

The whole thing started seven or eight years ago, not so very long after the war. Ben was working for Dow Chemicals. They had a plant down on the Texas coast for separating magnesium from sea water. Ben was working with a whole stable of chemists trying to find what else Dow could get from the sea water besides magnesium and a fishy smell.

But White Fang was synthetics-struck. He had a laboratory in his basement at home, and he'd work all day at Dow juggling sea-water minerals, then he'd go home and work most of the night juggling hydrocarbons. He's got a pretty little wife. You'll meet her. They had a baby while he worked for Dow. Nobody can figure how White Fang had the time.

Well, one night something happened in the basement, just what I doubt even White Fang knows, but anyway he came up goggling and pale and told his wife he was quitting Dow. They weren't well off and a baby was coming and she got panicky. Ben insisted. The next day he quit Dow—as of the close of business the preceding day.

I told you these boys are shrewd. Ben had an instinct. He'd found something. He didn't want Dow claiming he'd found it on their time.

What he'd found was simply a plastic that conducts electricity. He worked on it for all the following year. His brother sent him money from Detroit. Finally Ben developed a synthetic that looks something like rayon. You can draw it out as fine as a rayon thread, or you can extrude it as thick as your finger. In any case, it conducts electricity, with just about a quarter of the resistance of copper.

Now, stop and think what this means. It means a new material for transmitting electric current has been discovered. It's got a lower resistance than copper. That means it can conduct electricity with lower loss, or you can conduct it farther with the same loss.

Now stop and think a little longer. These days copper costs, an absolute minimum at the smelter, twelve cents a pound. Ben Davis' synthetic costs maybe one and a half cents a pound. Less, if you get into big enough production.

Well, White Fang knew what he had. There was one difficulty. His synthetic was elastic. He couldn't get that elasticity out of it. In some ways it was a fine quality. The synthetic could never break like copper does, if it gets bent too often. But on the other hand, White Fang could visualize power and telegraph and telephone lines crossing the nation with his synthetic wires drooping from post to post like a small boy's pants.

Well, of course there was the rubber insulation. But rub-

ber wasn't very strong. So White Fang went back to his basement and came out in due time with a synthetic non-conductor that was flexible but had a tensile strength close to that of aluminum.

You could squirt White Fang's copper substitute through a spinneret, set it in process as it passes through an acid bath, take it on through a tub where a coating of his rubber substitute gets deposited—any thickness you please—set that in an acid bath, and what have you got? A completely insulated conductor for electricity, light-weight, flexible, strong. And cheap. I told you the synthetic conductor was one and a half cents a pound against twelve for copper. The synthetic non-conductor is just about two cents a pound. Against twenty for rubber.

Ben Davis knew what he had. But he didn't tell a soul. Not even his wife. She had the baby on pure faith. He rolled up a dozen feet of his synthetic wire in a suitcase and went to Detroit.

Now George at this time was working for a Detroit machine-tools manufacturer. George was a crackerjack accountant. The manufacturer had an elaborate costs accounting system, and George was making all of fifty-five dollars a week. When his brother arrived, as secretive as a legendary anarchist with a suitcase full of bombs, George listened to his story, then went back to work in the morning—and resigned? No. George is careful. He took a two weeks' leave. The two brothers climbed on a plane for Washington.

They went to the Patent Office, but they applied for no patent. They just prowled around. And if it was trouble they were looking for, they found it.

The boys turned up the cheering information that a huge New Jersey chemicals corporation had patents on a precisely similar pair of synthetics. A conductor and a nonconductor.

The patents had been granted four years earlier. During the war.

Ben was crushed. Not that the formulas were the same. The New Jersey patents were entirely different from his, but as far as he could judge from the descriptions, just as good. He could still go to some other chemicals manufacturer, to Dow, to Dupont, to Monsanto. But as long as some other company was in the field, he knew his bargaining position. He'd have to take what he could get.

And the excitement was gone. The sense that he before any other man had explored a field and touched farthest north—it was all gone. White Fang went out on a three-day drunk.

George was different. He got colder than frozen custard. He spent the three days investigating further. He blinked through his thick-lensed glasses across many a desk, down at many a record.

When Ben showed up at the hotel again, carrying his hangover like a trunk full of dishpans, George was lying on the bed smoking and there was a shoebox half full of cigarette stubs on the table beside him.

"Things are worse than we thought," said George.

"If they are then I don't want to hear about them," said Ben, and he took off his head and put it in the washbasin and ran cold water over it.

"Far worse," said George, who was not inclined to rash statements.

Ben came back and stood in the door of the bathroom and looked down at his brother on the bed.

"Go on," he said, after a while. "I can take it."

"I just got wondering," said George. "Those Jersey patents are four years old. Why isn't the stuff on the market?"

Ben sat down slowly, looking at his brother. George put

out his cigarette and dropped it in the shoebox and inspected his stinking collection.

"Well," he said absently, "I guess it's pretty simple. The Jersey outfit is mostly owned by copper. Copper bought into it within six months after the patents were issued."

That was all. That was enough. Copper money had bought control of the copper-competing synthetic.

Now, the boys had been around. They didn't even argue the possibility of taking their formula to a competing chemicals manufacturer. They knew the incorporated world they lived and worked in. They knew about interlocking directorates and cartels and gentlemen's agreements. They knew that if two copper-substitute formulas existed already, then in all probability others must exist. They knew that if in four years, none of the Jersey corporation's competitors had come forward with a product, then the product would not appear. It had all been decided, long, long ago.

They debated one possibility, briefly. That of going to the Jersey corporation and blackmailing them. They dismissed the possibility. It wouldn't be worth it. And their synthetic would never be produced.

They packed up their dirty shirts to go home. George asked Ben to do nothing for a few months while he thought it over. Ben agreed. They likewise agreed to apply for no patent, not for the time being. Keep the thing under their hats. It'd be safer. George went back to his fifty-five-dollar-a-week job keeping books in Detroit. White Fang went back to his forty-dollar-a-week job inspecting sea water for Dow Chemicals.

I'd like to point out at this time that neither of these men—as far as I know and I think I'm right—approached their problem for one instant from the point of view of social reform. They were bitter, of course. They were de-

pressed. As individuals they were sunk in the gloom of being beaten by forces they couldn't stand up against.

But I don't think, even in their barren sink-hole of a Washington hotel bedroom, that their bitterness took the form of social protest. They never questioned the rights of industry to make agreements against the public interest. They never said to themselves, God, if this has happened to us, how many other men has it happened to? If they said aloud, There ought to be a law—then they thought immediately of Congress, and the copper bloc, and investigating committees. They didn't question the morality of political trades and deals in a democracy, any more than they questioned industrial deals and trades in an economy of free enterprise.

These men weren't like that. All they knew was that they possessed a formula of tremendous potential value. That it wasn't worth a nickel at the moment. What could they do about it? Well, George would think it over. And White Fang would avoid, if possible, a nervous breakdown.

For six months White Fang played with his baby and inspected the Dow-owned sea. And George thought it over.

Then George appeared at Ben's house down on the Texas coast. He carried a briefcase that bulged like a seven-month pregnancy.

"I've quit my job," said George apologetically.

Ben was impressed.

"I think we might start up our own company," said George.

Make the stuff themselves?

These two brothers have the most amazing faith in each other. If Ben says a certain production technique is feasible, George never questions Ben's judgment. If George says a certain paper-work procedure is desirable, Ben never gives it another thought. But at the moment when George sug-

gested that they manufacture the synthetic themselves, Ben's faith in George did some staggering about.

They had no money. But supposing they could get money and put up a plant and go into production. How could they compete with the half-billion-dollar Jersey corporation?

George thought they could.

But the Jersey outfit would go into production to kill them off with competition. George must understand about costs. George must understand that a small company couldn't possibly produce at the costs of Jersey.

George thought they could.

All right! Then it wasn't a matter of costs. Jersey could afford to sell the product for nothing. Jersey had capital to draw from and the copper policy at stake. They wouldn't have that kind of capital. They couldn't sell for nothing.

George thought they could.

White Fang could only suggest that George go to Detroit and get back his job and his senses. George ignored him, emptied his pregnant briefcase, and explained.

What George had done was to analyze the Jersey corporation's costs. He'd done far more, of course; he'd gone far beyond a simple examination of where corporate money goes. This was how he'd started out, however, analyzing Jersey, and not only Jersey but its competitors in the chemicals industry. Where he'd got his figures I don't know. But what he was trying to find was the weakness in corporate costs. What he was trying to find was a way for two men with an idea to beat an institution with half a billion capital.

In a way his examination had been disappointing. He hadn't found any glaring weaknesses that the boys might eliminate in a company of their own. I think George had held a vague hope that the very bigness of Jersey's financial

structure would be responsible for a big slice of Jersey's costs.

If this was George's hope, then it didn't work out. Capital took a huge toll, it was true. But in any kind of a producing organization you've got to have labor, and you've got to have management, and you've got to have capital. Machinery, that is, plant, patent rights, land, all the things you own and work with. And the boys'd have to pay for them just like Jersey.

No, George's reward for months of eye-straining calculation had little to do with a plan for redistribution of costs. Not as such. His reward came from quite a different direction.

First, as result of his determination to beat Jersey by fair means or foul, he arrived at an utterly detached point of view. You might call it, if you want to, amoral. George lost every prejudice in favor of ownership, or in favor of management, or in favor of labor. His mind got as open as a nice new sewer. I can't tell you how important this was.

And second, he came to a conclusion. And his conclusion was revolutionary. It was more than revolutionary. His conclusion was blasphemous, soul-shaking, defiant of God and Satan alike. George decided that the corporation is inefficient.

Now think. Have you ever heard the American corporation described as inefficient? Have you? If I have, I don't remember. I've heard it called a few names in my time. Oh, yes. I've heard it called immoral, anti-social, un-Christian. I've heard it called greedy and brutalizing and ruthless and inhuman. But inefficient? No. This was something new.

All right. Now what's inefficient about it? That was what White Fang wanted to know, in his house down on the

Texas coast, when he first heard the dirty word fall from his brother's lips.

Well, George explained. He explained precisely why the American corporation is an obsolete machine, and how Jersey could be beaten.

In sum, the trouble with the corporate machine is this: It's a rusty old locomotive pulling a mile-long freight. There's too much friction on the inside of the machine, and it's hauling too big a load.

Look at the machine itself. Any producing machine, as I suggested a while ago, has got to have three parts: Labor, that does the job; management, that directs the job; and ownership, that supplies the capital and takes the risks and assumes responsibility.

Now what happens in the modern corporation? It's very simple. The three parts are entirely separated and they work against each other.

Take Jersey. George doubted that two per cent of Jersey ownership had ever set foot on company property. That ownership consists of banks, insurance companies, investment groups, corporate interests like copper and oil, and thousands and thousands of minor individual stockholders.

In other words, the only way you can describe the ownership of Jersey or any other modern corporation is to call it absentee ownership. Management—from the president down to the foremen—owns almost nothing. Labor less than that. Yet this absentee ownership, this sprawling absentee ownership that's united not even by a common understanding of the business, lays down company policy. And whatever ownership gets as reward, it gets at the expense not only of labor but of management. They're both hired hands.

Now look at the thing from the point of view of labor. It's hardly necessary to point out that labor works in direct

conflict with ownership. Each has the same motive, to get the most and give the least. And the soup's got to come out of the same dish.

But here's a most important point to remember. Labor's no longer a collection of pushed-around, disunited individuals. Labor is organized, it's got a philosophy, and weapons, and power. Company policy, laid down by ownership, is subject to absolute veto by labor. Yet ownership, that's absentee, is essentially ignorant. And labor, that lacks any degree of ownership, is essentially irresponsible.

All right. Now look at management. Where does management fit in? Well, it's the man in the middle. Management's got to wrestle absentee ownership, on the one hand, to get intelligent policy, and labor on the other hand, to get responsibility and production efficiency.

Do you begin to see how, in George's opinion, this continual friction raises costs? How every force in the corporation tends to lower labor productivity, befuddle management, and make for unintelligent policy?

But another point, an even larger point. I called the corporation a rusty old locomotive pulling a mile-long freight. It's not only got the costs of internal friction; it's hauling too big a load.

A corporation like Jersey is paying for the whole damned class struggle.

It pays not just for its capital. It supports the institution of capitalism. It pays not just for its labor. It pays for the whole labor movement.

How?

Well, how often does absentee ownership fight for policies in a particular company that aren't necessarily to that company's interest, but will benefit ownership elsewhere?

And how often does organized labor fight for policies of no local importance but that will benefit labor elsewhere?

Look at Jersey. Is it to the interests of Jersey to keep this copper substitute off the market? Not at all. Jersey'd have a gold mine. It's to the interest of copper. Copper, that owns less than ten per cent of Jersey's stock, owns just enough to control Jersey's policy on this particular point. Jersey is paying, through its hodge-podge ownership, for the stability of capitalism itself.

Again. Do you remember a strike that tied up the whole chemicals industry for almost three months, a couple of years ago? Including Jersey? That strike wasn't aimed at Jersey at all. It was aimed at Monsanto. Jersey could have made peace with the unions with very few concessions. But she didn't. Why not? Why should Jersey have chosen to pay for the labor policies of a competitor? Well, it's very simple. Because her oil and banking ownership had interests in Monsanto too. And more than that. If the strike had won, it would have spread to oil itself.

Do you get what George was driving at? Every conflict between capital and labor is written into the corporation's books in red ink. Ink that's sometimes invisible, but no less red. And every entry increases the costs of production.

Look at it any way you want. Let management be superbly skillful. Let ownership be at its most enlightened, labor at its most responsible. The structure of the modern corporation is such that its internal friction makes for decreased efficiency, and its outside obligations for increased costs.

The corporation is an inefficient machine that keeps on going for one reason: Because it's in competition only with similar machines. Put it up against a better machine and the corporation will fail. Any corporation. Even Jersey.

White Fang was fascinated.

He forgot his howling infant in the upstairs front bedroom. He forgot his basement laboratory and his test tubes

and his stills. He forgot everything except what his book-keeper brother was saying. Jersey could be beaten.

But how?

By a better machine.

But what machine?

By a machine that's got no internal stresses and no outside obligations.

But for God's sake be specific!

By a machine in which capital ownership is eliminated. A machine that's owned by the men who do the work. Labor and management together.

White Fang was stunned. He was incredulous. You've got to have capital!

Of course, said George. Capital, sure. But no capital ownership.

White Fang yelled at him. What was he, crazy? Hadn't he ever heard of the rights of property?

Sure.

Well, what did he intend to do about it? Abolish them?

No. Just ignore them.

White Fang howled like a man who's been handed a piece of dry ice. And it took quite some time for his brother to quiet him down.

But this was the crux of it. I told you that George, in his long investigation of corporate costs, had lost every prejudice in favor of ownership, or management, or labor. He'd become amoral. He wasn't any economist and he was no philosopher. But something in him—his overpowering desire to beat Jersey, I suppose—had driven him to inspect, in terms of dollars and cents, the absolute moral fundament of our society. The rights of property.

And he concluded that this was the monkey wrench in the Jersey machine. Property ownership. As long as a producing machine includes a part called property ownership,

there'll be the class struggle, internal friction, limited labor productivity, limited intelligence in management, inflexibility, absentee direction, outside obligations, all the sources of inefficiency and increased costs.

Get rid of property ownership. That was the solution to the problem of how to beat Jersey. There had to be ownership of some kind, true. Just as in any enterprise there's got to be risk and assumption of responsibility. But there was no reason on earth why that ownership had to be vested in property.

Is this a little hard to handle? Do you find yourself, like White Fang, just a little bit unconscious? Well, all I can say is, bear with me.

All George knew, when he began to question the rights of property, was this: That if some kind of a producing machine could be evolved in which the risks and the rewards and the rights and the responsibilities of ownership could be shared entirely by management and labor, that institution could beat Jersey.

Just to help himself think about such an institution, George picked a name for it. The commonwealth.

A commonwealth would pay no wages, no salaries, no dividends, no bonuses. Only shares in its earnings.

There would be no ownership in the corporate sense.

Suddenly George was overwhelmed by problems. They flew at him from all directions, like over-ripe tomatoes. How could such an outfit operate? George wasn't trying to appease some inner complex with luscious, mauve-colored dreams. He was trying to beat a large and going concern in New Jersey that was as real as sweat on a hot night.

How could the damned thing work? How could it get workers, raise money, buy or rent land, purchase machinery, build a plant, obtain raw materials, defend itself in court?

The struggle that Ben had gone through to develop a chemical formula was nothing compared to the struggle that George went through to develop an economic formula.

It was to George's advantage at this moment, I suppose, that he was no social revolutionist. He wasn't trying to save the country or remake the world. He was trying to find a specific answer to the most specific question of how to beat Jersey. And this made things easier.

It was likewise to George's advantage that he possessed one of the plainest, most pragmatic American minds ever born on this continent. He believed in free enterprise because he needed it. He believed in individual initiative because he was using it. He believed in competition because it was the way to beat Jersey and make some money. There was something about George's simple, unself-conscious Americanism that made solving problems the toughest kind of going. But—and this is important—if a mind like George's *could* find an answer, specific though it was it would be mighty interesting.

Well, George struggled. And struggled. And at last he came to a solution for most of his problems. The root of that solution is something called participation. You'll hear that word a lot around here.

Participation is to the commonwealth what property is to the corporation.

It's a whole new slant on ownership. It's no more complicated, I suppose, than the slant on ownership that's called the rights of property. What's dazzling about participation is that it's an unexplored field. So far it works. God knows where it'll lead. But I'll remind you that property was that way itself, once. The first man to take a plot of land and announce to his friends that this was his for all time probably didn't figure on what U. S. Steel would make out of the idea.

To explain about participation, let me give you an idea of how it works in a particular instance.

George was troubled by the fairly routine problem of how to divide up earnings. A modern business, even a small one, is no whaling voyage. You can't very well ship a man and say: You'll get a one per cent share. It'd be like building a cantilever bridge and using Roman numerals on the blueprints.

Well, George didn't monkey around with any involved formulas. He went right to the point and hit on the idea of participation warrants.

A participation warrant is the right to participate in the earnings of the commonwealth to an extent indicated on the warrant.

Take an office boy. He's hired at the *rate* of fifty cents an hour. He works forty hours during a week. All right, on Saturday he gets a warrant for twenty dollars. Then here's a machinist with a rate of a dollar and a half an hour. He works sixty hours that week. On Saturday he gets a warrant for ninety dollars. The superintendent of personnel has a rate of let's say fifteen thousand a year. So on Saturday he gets a warrant for about three hundred dollars.

Now, those warrants say dollars, but here's the trick. They aren't dollars, U. S. They're commonwealth dollars. They'll be redeemed on a certain date, stated on the warrant, by the treasurer of the commonwealth. Redeemed in regular U. S. money. Redemption day comes quarterly.

Supposing it's the first of next July. On that date the earnings of the commonwealth are calculated for the previous quarter. That's the earnings in U. S. dollars. The treasurer knows how many commonwealth dollars have been issued during the period. He divides the earnings by the warrants. He gets, thereby, a figure that expresses the redemption value of the warrant dollar.

Supposing the commonwealth has earned a million six hundred thousand dollars, U. S., in the period. It's issued a million in warrants. The commonwealth dollar is worth a dollar sixty, U. S.

If you're that twenty-a-week office boy, then you cash in your participations warrants for the period, and you find you've made thirty-two a week, not twenty.

If you're that dollar-and-a-half an hour machinist, you find you've earned not one-fifty an hour, but two-forty.

You see? It's a simple process. And I can tell you, redemption day in this town makes Mardi Gras in New Orleans look like a quiet Sunday evening in a funeral parlor.

And do you begin to see why the workers in the commonwealth have an intense interest in the welfare of the commonwealth? Why you don't come late, why you don't spend your day in the gents'? Ah, but that's a whole story. You'll see for yourself.

Let me get back to the idea of participation. When you hold a warrant dollar on the commonwealth, you're participating in the commonwealth to that extent. Just like you'd share in a corporation with a dollar's worth of stock. But you can see right away the difference.

The share of stock in a corporation is a share in the corporation's property, and it automatically entitles you to a share in the earnings.

A participation warrant on a commonwealth is a share in the commonwealth's earnings, which automatically entitles you to a share in the property.

There is no way to participate in the commonwealth except through working for it.

And there is no ownership other than through participation. When you redeem your warrant, you relinquish your share in the property.

I know what you're thinking. Here's a plant. Here's land. Who owns the stuff on redemption day, when the warrants are all redeemed?

And capital. Work-ownership or property-ownership, you've still got to have capital. What are you going to use for that, marbles?

I'll get around to the raising of capital and George's purchase-warrant system in a minute. First let me finish up about participation.

George was worried about more than who owned the commonwealth on redemption day. This participation thing was all very fine, but its point of view was entirely short run. Something had to guarantee, in management and labor alike, a continuing interest in the commonwealth. Something to correspond to the eternal rights of property, but not quite so eternal. If the commonwealth was to have intelligent ownership, then its members must have a stake in the future as well as the present.

Well, so George hit on the idea of the five-year right to participate.

A participation warrant may be redeemed at the current redemption date, or at any later one to the limit of five years, at the option of the warrant holder.

Look at it this way. You do some work for the commonwealth. You get your warrants. Redemption day comes along and you have your choice. You can cash in your warrants. Or you can hold them all, or any part of them, till any redemption day in the next five years.

Supposing you figure that the commonwealth is doing well and the value of its dollar is rising. It's to your interest to hold onto just as many of your warrants as you can afford and cash them in when they'll be worth more.

Or supposing, during the quarter you've worked, there's been a slump in business, or some kind of disaster that's

hurt earnings. The value of the commonwealth dollar will be low, and it'll be to your interest to wait till the outfit's better off.

Or take one more example. Supposing there's been national overproduction and we go into a period of depression. Deflation. One of the toughest things a corporation has to face at such a time is paying off fixed obligations with deflated money. But in the commonwealth the debt itself deflates. You can have your money if you want it—and some of the workers will—but you won't get so much. And the strain on the commonwealth won't be so dangerous.

Do you see the net effect of all this?

When the commonwealth is growing and needs working capital for expansion, it gets that capital from its own members. They reinvest the fruit of their efforts in the commonwealth's future. This capital gets retired, most of it, when the value of the dollar's high and things are good and the commonwealth can afford to pay. On the other hand, when things aren't good and the commonwealth dollar is low, the tendency is that the commonwealth won't be pressed. And what it does have to pay goes out in money deflated in proportion to earnings.

It's a hell of a practical device. It gives the institution both stability and flexibility. And it gives the workers, from president down to shipping clerk, a stake in the outfit's long-run welfare. Ask me. I've got three thousand in participation warrants tucked away.

Well, that's how, after a commonwealth gets operating, most of its needs for capital are met by its own workers. And how, while total liquidation of commonwealth ownership is theoretically possible, it just can't in reality occur. Not as long as a single man has faith in the commonwealth's future. And do you begin to see some of the implications of that five-year limit to the right to participate?

Five years. This form of ownership, so different from property, can last just so long and no longer.

That's probably one of the most profound of the new angles on ownership that participation brings in. It's not eternal. Investment can't take a toll forever. I hold participation rights because I've worked for the commonwealth. I regard my work as an investment in the future of Trans-Pecos. But at the end of five years my participation ends. I've got to cash in my warrants. And I can't renew my rights without doing more work.

The same goes for George, and he invented the commonwealth. The same for Ben, and he discovered the material that the commonwealth produces. They share in the earnings like any office boy—a healthier share, I'll point out. But at the end of five years they go on working for Trans-Pecos, and serving it, and justifying their participation, or they're through.

Do you begin to see, at last, a certain definition of participation rising out of all this?

It's fluid ownership.

At any given instant the commonwealth has earnings and therefore participants and therefore owners.

But the owners keep changing as the earners change.

Think of it in terms of a river. The river's always there, but the water keeps changing. Think of it in terms of the human body. The man's always there, with the same skill, the same intelligence, the same face, the same grin. But the cells in his body keep changing and replacing themselves—what is it?—every seven years?

The body of the commonwealth keeps changing and replacing itself every five years.

Like I said, it's fluid ownership.

Does the idea still seem fuzzy to you? Does participation still strike you as being on the metaphysical side?

Well, I shouldn't be surprised if it does. It took me months to get used to it. And in the end you'll find, the way I did, that nobody can explain it to you. You can't even explain it to yourself. Because it *is* metaphysical.

That's the stumbler. Ownership is a subjective phenomenon. All ownership, not just participation. It's a state of mind. It's a belief, like in God, reinforced by customs, cartridges, and court decisions. The trimmings may be real, but ownership itself, I assure you, is pure mysticism.

I know how you feel. Go down to the Southern Pacific tracks. Here's the Trans-Pecos plant. There's the Southern Pacific station. You look at the plant and you say to yourself: Now wait a minute. This thing is real, you can touch it, somebody's got to own it. Somebody owns the Southern Pacific station. Somebody's *got* to own Trans-Pecos.

Well, go back to your room at the hotel. Lie down. Think it over.

I predict that after a while you'll come to agree that the ownership of the Trans-Pecos plant is no more mystical, and no less, than the ownership of the Southern Pacific station.

Participation ownership—like state ownership, like property ownership—is simply what you make of it. If you believe in it, then it exists. And that's all I can tell you.

How you hire and fire and give and take orders in a commonwealth I'll get to in a minute. That's pretty much of a story in itself. Let me tell you first how Trans-Pecos raised its capital.

I mentioned something about purchase warrants, as contrasted with participation warrants. That was George's answer to the whole problem of buying things, from material to money itself.

Purchase warrants are essentially promissory notes. They're a promise to pay a fixed sum of money, U. S., on a

given redemption day or at an earlier one at the option of the commonwealth. They carry no right of ownership, no share in earnings. But they're redeemed *before* participation warrants. They're what you might call a first lien on earnings.

There are a lot of revolutionary angles about the commonwealth. This is one of them. Capital gets its due before labor.

I can see your hair turning on end. I can assure you, you're wrong. By granting capital first call on commonwealth earnings, George stripped capital of its power. More than that. He put every force of the commonwealth into the effort to get rid of capital obligations entirely. It's one of the shrewdest angles in the whole structure.

Look how it works:

When George and Ben went out to raise money in Houston, they had only these assets: A patent of great potential value; a blueprint for a producing institution that should, on paper, beat corporate competition; and a stack of promissory notes, first lien on earnings, called purchase warrants.

Investors were flabbergasted. The whole thing sounded crazy. But they were universally impressed by George's hard-boiled plans. Many of them saw in the commonwealth a brilliantly efficient producing unit. And none was unmoved by a length of synthetic wire that could be made at one-fifth the cost of its cheapest copper competition. A patent that would be part of the commonwealth resources, royalty free.

Add to this the guarantee that capital, on each redemption day, would get its share before labor.

What was the reaction? Skepticism that the brothers would find workers willing to accept such terms.

George pointed out that this was management's problem, not capital's. They'd find workers.

Well, they got their money. The warrants were staggered so that a certain amount would come due at each redemption day for five years. Competitive bidding established a market price for the purchase warrants. No investor complained at the commonwealth's option to pay back the money sooner than stated. The yield would simply be greater. Houston investors bought up the curious paper and gave it to their wives for Christmas.

George and Ben, by offering investors a kind of security that no corporation can offer, had completed their financing without sacrifice of ownership. Trans-Pecos has been in production for a little over two years now and has repaid the entire capital investment.

How could such quick redemption have been possible? Ben's patent, of course. The first year or so of production, before Jersey could get into competition, Trans-Pecos was making a synthetic of better quality than copper at a cost no more than twenty per cent of copper. And they were selling all they could produce at a price just below copper's bottom. The profits were fantastic.

You might well say, at this point, what's all the cheering for? What kind of a success story is this? Any outfit that couldn't survive with a break like that in its favor should be given back to the Comanches, C.O.D.

Well, remember first that those profits were temporary. And remember, too, that while Trans-Pecos had the advantage of a tremendous cost differential, it had the disadvantage of any new industry that's got to build its plant from the cactus up. But most important—and in my opinion this more than compensates for any temporary profit-break Trans-Pecos may have had—the commonwealth was faced, and is still faced, by not only the competitive enmity but

the ideological enmity of two of the largest, richest, most deeply entrenched, closely held, internationally rooted industries in the modern world. Copper and chemicals. This may or may not be a success story. Nobody knows yet.

Well, to get back to the fabulous earnings, you can imagine what they'd have meant to the workers. Gravy. But George knew that sooner or later Jersey would be on the market. Prices would fall. So he kept the value of the commonwealth dollar to just about par by calling in purchase warrants ahead of time. The twenty-a-week office boy, who might have been making seventy, got approximately twenty.

And the workers consented.

The workers consented because they knew that the better was Trans-Pecos's position, the better it could stave off Jersey later.

More than that. The workers consented because this was their business, they owned it, they understood it, they had faith in the management, in themselves, in the future, and they had a clear grasp of their risks and their rewards, their rights and their responsibilities.

From here on, I'm talking about just one thing: the way men work here. I could talk about it, I suppose, forever. It's what sets you thinking at night so you can't sleep. It's what sets you wondering—not just about Trans-Pecos—but about society as a whole. The nation, the future, the qualities of men. Christ, don't let me get maudlin. I always get maudlin at this point. Let me stick to Trans-Pecos.

Work-ownership has provided production with a kind of labor productivity that capital ownership can't provide. That's what it comes to.

The corporation gave the power of the machine to the worker's hands.

The commonwealth has added something else. The

worker's brain. No, that doesn't quite say it. The commonwealth has put something into production that's faith, and heart, and imagination, and intelligence. And it all pays off in dollars and cents.

Now, responsibility for this work-satisfaction doesn't rest entirely with George. He'd planned a traditional topdown control wherein management would have complete authority. If a man didn't like the management, he could leave. But when George came to finding his workers, he got forced into what he thought was a compromise. It was no compromise. It was perfection. And the workers brought it about themselves.

It was like this:

Ben was the one who rounded up the nucleus of synthetic workers that they needed to start out with. They were good men. They were as good as you could find on the Texas coast, and Ben knew the synthetics industry.

But right from the start George ran into trouble.

There was the matter of the location of the plant. This hadn't bulked, in advance, as an important obstacle to plans. But somehow nobody wanted to come out and work in God-forsaken West Texas. Move their families, get rid of their homes, take their kids out of school and consign them to God knows what—? The men were pretty glum about it.

But West Texas was a must. Land was cheap. More important, gas was cheap. One of the biggest costs in the production of Ben's synthetic is fuel; it's a high-temperature process. Out here near Indian Pass are several oil fields that can't dispose of their natural gas. It's too far to market, so they just burn it off. Any industry can make a good cheap deal for all the gas it can consume. George made such a deal.

Another thing that dictated Indian Pass was the owner-

ship setup in the oil-fields. Near here you'll find two independent companies that are continually being pushed around by Standard, and Gulf, and the Texas Corporation. These independents inspected George's plans. He needed crude oil for a raw material. The independents could supply it direct from the wells. Just like the gas. And they'd take purchase warrants instead of cash.

George could never have made such a deal in the coast area. West Texas was compulsory.

The men understood. But even so—West Texas. The trans-Pecos country, God's end. Who the hell wanted to live in Indian Pass?

And furthermore. What was this screwy business about capital getting the first cut? What about that?

It was hot that summer on the Texas coast, when George and Ben were arguing with the men. Hot and humid. The damp came in from the Gulf and mixed with the heat from the Texas plains and the air got heavier than a Chinese laundry. Nobody could stay indoors. The argument moved out onto White Fang's back lawn. Night after night they sat out there in the dark with the fireflies and the mosquitoes and the smell of the jasmine, a dozen men, twenty men, sometimes twenty-five, arguing, protesting, suggesting, smoking their damp cigarettes, drinking their beer from sweating bottles.

Not that they weren't appreciative of participation. Who wouldn't give the shirt off his back to own his own business?

Not that they didn't understand—or come to understand—the rewards and responsibilities of work-ownership. If the man who works is going to own outright, then he's got to take the risks. That was okay. They welcomed the gamble. It was the kind of excitement they'd never had in all their lives.

BUT.

But why should some guy who's done nothing but put money in the business get a guarantee for his dough? Why should the workers just get what's left over?

George explained. Over and over.

In the corporation, labor gets the guarantee and capital takes what's left over.

In the commonwealth, capital gets the guarantee and labor takes what's left over.

But why?

Over and over, over and over, George explained that you can't have the power without the risk. If you want security, then you can't expect to run your own life and be your own master. If you want to run your own life and be your own master, then you can't expect somebody else to furnish you with security. He showed how every time you accept security, you sign away part of your rights. He showed how this was what they were doing to capital. Giving it security and taking away its rights.

Well, at last among the workers one emerged as a sort of mouthpiece. He's a gentleman that you'll meet who bears the astonishing name of Timothiticus Jones. He's got a fifty-five-inch waistline, hands like frying pans, kidney trouble, and a brain like a sieve. Nothing ever sticks in that brain but the big pieces. I've had conferences with him where every few minutes, because of his infirmity, he'd have to leave. The men say Timothiticus does his best thinking in the gents'.

Timothiticus was rabid for the commonwealth. And he understood what George was driving at: You can't have the power and security too. Okay. But what about the power?

This was it. The men would accept the complete risk if they could have the power. The complete power. The right of participants to discharge the management.

George blew his topper.

He and Ben had renounced all property rights in the patent and in the business. Wasn't that enough?

No. If participation was to have any meaning beyond dough on redemption day, then it must apply to all men who contributed their services to the business.

What a battle. It went on for weeks. You can see the principles at stake.

George, better than Timothiticus, understood the necessity for clear-cut authority. His whole dream of a producing machine that could outfight Jersey might be wrecked by insecure management, divided authority, timid leadership.

But what Timothiticus divined more acutely than George was the incentive beyond earnings that the commonwealth could afford the worker. He wanted an inner structure that would not only protect earnings—George's topdown management would do that—but would protect the individual sense of ownership that might, for all he knew, provide greater incentive and responsibility than earnings.

There's no use tracing out the staggering steps of their argument. George's commonwealth was benevolent paternalism. Timothiticus wanted economic democracy. That was the true issue. And Timothiticus won.

Timothiticus won by showing that sooner or later, if the workers possessed no check on management, then management would develop if not the vestedness of property then the vestedness of power. And the commonwealth would devolve into just another institution haunted by strikes, internal friction, and the class struggle. Just another corporation with fancy angles.

It was true, and George had to admit it.

Well, at last they worked out a management structure. Management must have its authority. But the men must

have their chance, on fixed occasions, to turn the rascals out.

And that's how it is at Trans-Pecos Chemicals. From bottom to top, that's how it works. The men can fire the boss.

Every foreman is subject to dismissal by a majority of his men.

Every department head is subject to dismissal by his foremen.

And so on up. A man's success as an executive is judged, not by the man he works for, but the men who work under him.

It's easy to see that such a system would never be possible except in a commonwealth where earnings are completely shared. Supposing you worked in a corporate setup for a fixed wage. You might admire a hard, efficient foreman, but you'd get rid of him in a minute if he was hard on you.

But look how it is at Trans-Pecos. An efficient foreman is money in your pocket. To fire him would be, in a sense, to take a chance on cutting your own earnings. You'd do it if he was too hard. But not until you'd considered thoroughly his value to the organization and to you.

Now, you can well imagine that George accepted this plan with reluctance. But what he didn't guess—and I'd doubt that even Timothiticus estimated fully—is the potential capacity, the potential ingenuity, the potential responsibility of men.

The commonwealth is a completely competitive organization. If you're lazy, you can't last. Your fellow workers won't have you. If you're irresponsible, you're out. Irresponsibility hurts everybody in the outfit. If you're dull when you've got to be bright, weak when you need to be strong, slow when you've got to be quick—bingo. That's all.

But go look at the plant. Wander around. The outfit

sounds ruthless, and in a way it is; but then—in another way—it's not. The commonwealth offers men something they've never been offered before. A man may have been lazy all his life, but when he goes to work here he changes. Something happens inside him. There's simply no reason left to be lazy.

I'd make a guess. I'd guess that most of the faults you find in men are defenses. Give a man the fruit of his own efforts, give a man control over his own destiny, give a man responsibility for his own actions, and he's got nothing to defend himself against any more.

I'm an engineer. I've built this new wing on the Trans-Pecos plant. I'm done, I should go home. But I swear to you, I hate to leave. I dread going back to Chicago. I dread going back to another civilization where men are aimless and repressed, and they've got no stake, and they hate each other.

I mean it. I've accepted that kind of a civilization because it was the only one I knew. And any alternative seemed worse than what we had. I tell you, I got so I distrusted democracy. Why? Because I'd never seen it. I didn't like competition. Why? Because the only kind I ever knew took place in a damned iron box. Christ, I even got contemptuous of men. Because I didn't know what they could be.

And now I've got to go back to Chicago.

Well, at least I've seen something else. Here, right here in this dried-up cactus-belt town, I've seen a miracle passed. I know, I'm getting maudlin again. Don't stop me. I've seen a God damned miracle passed, a miracle that's creating something new in this world. Something new that walks on two legs.

Can precisely this same miracle take place anywhere? Who knows? I don't. George has had a special setup with special problems and special answers. I know I've sat up

nights trying to apply it to the construction business. It's quite a job. I've wondered, what would you do if you were a railroader? Or an oil man? Or you were setting up a new industry that had to run for years at a loss? But that's your business, not George's.

What's been demonstrated here in Indian Pass is simply this: That there's hope.

That's all it amounts to. Whether or not you can take the commonwealth idea, the way it's been worked out here at Trans-Pecos, and apply it like a blueprint to the pickle-packing industry, I don't know and I don't care. What I've seen in Indian Pass, with my own eyes, is a demonstration that American ingenuity, the biggest natural resource this continent affords, can be applied like a can opener to the world we live in, with results quite visible to the unaided eye.

Let me speak as an engineer. In a little over two years the men working in this plant—the men themselves—have contributed almost twelve hundred minor modifications to Ben's original production process. Not efficiency engineers. Not the executives. The men themselves. How could such mass invention take place?

It takes place because the process belongs to the men. Because there's no fear of working yourself out of a job. Because every time you have an idea it's money in your pocket. And in your friends' pockets. That's as important as anything. It's prestige, it's self-expression, *and* it's friendly.

How much creative power is walled up inside the ordinary human being? God knows. But that plant over by the Southern Pacific tracks is making a stab at finding out. And every time I think about it I get high blood pressure.

Let me speak not as an engineer, but as a plain citizen

trying to get along in a society where people, whether they like it or not, have to live together.

That plant over by the tracks houses eight hundred workers. It sounds like the rat-race to end all rat-races. It sounds so competitive that a man would faint from terror if he had to stop work to scratch his behind. It's not.

The competition inside a commonwealth places all emphasis on latent skill and intelligence and imagination and ability. It's got nothing to do with speed-up or tension or overwork. You're part of a group. Your interests are co-incidental with the interests of the group.

You don't, to get ahead, knife your neighbor. Harming your fellow worker harms yourself.

You don't, trying to get ahead, despair of your own failings. There's too profound an incentive to succeed.

You don't, as a result of competition, become a frantic specialist who loses all sight of purpose and pattern and whole. Participation, again. You've got to know what the whole team's doing.

Commonwealth competition is a force for a new kind of freedom, a new kind of individualism. How much can you make of yourself and still get along with the next guy?

Participation ownership is the basis for a new morality. How well can you get along with the next guy and still make the most of yourself?

I say, as an interested citizen in a potential democracy, that the eight hundred men and women working at Trans-Pecos are making something better than the highest average earnings in America.

Every individual in that plant is making something of himself that's dignified, and confident, and able, and hopeful.

And every individual, as a member of a little society, is

making something of himself that responsible, and understanding, and tolerant, and judicious.

And it all springs from self-interest.

Self-interest. That's what gets me. How the whole thing's so human. It denies no facts of life. It represses no instincts. It fits not the man to the system but the system to the man.

Well, that's just about all I can tell you. Have I missed any odds and ends?

Oh, yes. The terror. That must have been frightening. I read about it in the papers, but it didn't hit Indian Pass. I guess people around here are too plain damn busy to waste their time beating up Negroes. And besides, prejudice in a commonwealth is an expensive luxury. There's Negroes, Jews, Catholics, Mexicans, all working together in that plant. If a man's able you're just not much interested in his race or religion. He's earning your dough for you.

Oh, yes, and Jersey. I haven't told you how that's coming out. You got here just in time.

Trans-Pecos, you see, managed to keep things pretty secret till it actually got on the market. Then copper woke up with a bang. Jersey went into production as fast as it could, to kill off Trans-Pecos with competition. But you know how things like that are. They take time. Trans-Pecos had been selling for a whole year, while copper went crazy, before Jersey was ready to hit the market.

Then copper was suddenly possessed of a sinking sensation. It had had time to look into Trans-Pecos' structure. Copper had come to realize that this commonwealth thing could produce at a phenomenally low cost. What if the competition went too far? What if the price of the synthetic got pushed too low? Jersey might win, or Trans-Pecos might win, but either way copper could lose. Consumers might be so sold on copper substitutes they could never be unsold

Copper hesitated. Copper really went crazy. And it held Jersey back.

I like to think of some of those copper board-of-directors' meetings. The Goliath of international capitalism faced by a little David on the West Texas plains. The rights of property up against the resources of humanity for the first time in industrial history. Those meetings must have been wild.

Well, finally they decided on competition and strong-arm methods too. You'll see what I mean. But more time had been wasted. Time for Trans-Pecos to clear herself of all capital costs. Time for Trans-Pecos to perfect her production process, to demonstrate that a commonwealth can function, to gain the absolute loyalty of her members and the sympathy of this entire desert community.

And time for something else. Time for the commonwealth members to make the moral discovery that the gods aren't dead, that our fate's not sealed. That they, workers at Trans-Pecos, free men, proud men, carry a torch that can light the world.

Jersey's on the market now. How'll it come out? I told you there's a story here.

Somebody had invented a better mousetrap.

I wrote Hara's story as best I could. It was the worst-written story I have ever turned out. My mind was a jumble. My emotions had the tranquil poise of a runaway truck on a down grade.

The right of a man to own as he works.

Not that there was anything so astonishing about the principle, or the commonwealth structure, or even the idea of participation ownership.

Just that somebody, out of self-interest, had taken a prin-

ciple founded on justice—the right of a man to own as he works—and within the frame of free enterprise, and without the slightest change of our democratic government, had put that principle to work. And what was being demonstrated, here at Indian Pass, was that justice can pay its own way.

I knew that the story, coming at this moment of national confusion, panic, and hopelessness, would grip every man and woman in America. I wired it to my New York paper.

Well, my story, somehow, must have survived Western Union's tangled facilities. Shortly after dinner I received a wire from my paper: NOT INTERESTED. RETURN TO LOS ANGELES.

By this time I had had dinner with the other correspondents staying at the Hotel El Paso del Indio, and I was prepared for the wire.

How could any newspaper, however liberal, that existed by the grace of corporate advertisers, that owed money to banks, that had owners itself, have printed the story of David? How could my editor have answered otherwise?

As a newspaperman who could no more desert a great story than eat pickles for breakfast, I had no alternative. I wired my paper all there was to say: RESIGNING.

And I joined my colleagues on the roof of the little hotel. Each had gone through what I had gone through. Each had written his story, received his reply, and resigned.

The night closed in on West Texas. The brush-spotted plain turned purple, and smooth, and immense.

Dimly I apprehended the forces mobilizing to suppress a great hope. Dimly I recognized the continuity of those forces that had existed for so long and had always won.

And suddenly I was swept by an overwhelming sensation of dread and delight. As a swimmer on an ocean shore is overcome by a high-piled wave and rolls head over heels in a frenzy of exalted panic, so was I in this instant overcome

by the rise and sink and tumble of a battle that was mine.

I had something to believe in.

No longer was I an observer on the edge of the conflict, torn this way by sentiment, that by doubt. No longer need I grope through a fog of confused alarums, grasping for a friend and finding a foe, reaching for a banner and clutching only the dampness of my own palms.

*I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills.*

I looked out at the dark Texas night. My enemies were numerous, but I knew them for my enemies.

*Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death.*

I looked about the roof of that little hotel, in the middle of an insignificant Texas town, and my friends were there, and I knew them for my friends.

I wanted to shout and hit with my fists. I wanted to spit in the wind.

I had found something to believe in.

A cool little breeze moved in from the plains. I could hear in the darkness the whispering of locust leaves. To the west, against the last slim glimmer of twilight, the mountains retreated like the heads of marching men.

## SIEGE

**H**ARA STAYED ON.

He furnished me with scrip to pay my hotel bill with. So I could stay on.

The register of the little Hotel El Paso del Indio took on a flavor of intrigue and mystery that might have done justice to a Grand Hotel in some neutral war-time port.

There were the correspondents.

There were Hara's colleagues, the engineers, taking notes on production processes, labor productivity, and personnel organization.

There were the government men. The FBI men and the Treasury investigator said very little and kept to themselves and seemed to be waiting for instructions.

There were the spies. There was even a traditional female spy, who wore no brassière, and reported back to Jersey.

There was the counterfeiter. We judged later on that he was the counterfeiter.

There were the saboteurs. By the time they arrived our powers of deduction were in better order, and we knew them immediately for what they were. They stayed only overnight, then moved to a motor court on the edge of town.

There was the only employed newspaperman in the hotel, a reporter from Chicago, who was being paid not to write stories but to keep an eye on what went on. We

shunned him. When we couldn't avoid him, we told him marvelous lies.

There was the con man, who lingered hopefully for quite a stay under the impression that a town this prosperous must contain larceny that he could share in. We rather liked the con man.

There was the elderly widow of a rancher who had lived in the hotel for many years, who complained hourly about the noise, and who finally checked out to visit her sister in Abilene.

There was a minister from a church in Youngstown, Ohio, who said little and spent all his days engaging Indian Pass townspeople in conversation. We distrusted him. There were the two Army officers, specialists from the Signal Corps, who yearned to see the new synthetic adopted for army field work, but who knew that, because of the copper opposition, for the time being it was impossible. We felt sorry for them.

There were transient customers, salesmen, crank writers, labor organizers, an investigating committee from the Texas legislature, credit men, utilities executives.

How did the news of the commonwealth spread? I don't know. Scarcely a word appeared in print. Americans as a people remained in complete ignorance of it. But special interest after special interest heard about it, and sent investigators to make reports, or representatives to jam up the works.

The blazing West Texas summer closed in on us but the nights remained tolerably cool. The correspondents appropriated the roof, and we brought there at twilight our ice and our beer and our guests and our arguments, and exchanged gossip on which publisher might break down first. Daytime we stuck to our typewriters, and wrote books and

feature stories and squibs and interviews, stuff that might never be printed. But then again, it might.

At the dust-colored plant by the Southern Pacific tracks, work went ahead, and expanded, and thrived. Jersey cut prices and Trans-Pecos met the cut. Jersey cut again, and still Trans-Pecos could undersell. The days of fantastic earnings were over for the time being. But the men of the commonwealth understood the fight, and there were those who swore they'd go on working if the value of the commonwealth dollar fell to zero and they worked for nothing.

By July, Jersey was selling at a sixty per cent loss, but still Trans-Pecos undersold, and still the commonwealth dollar was worth a few cents over par, and men made better earnings than they could in corporate industry. This was the proof of George's pudding. The commonwealth was a superbly efficient producing unit. Granted fair competition, the commonwealth could win.

The concept of fair competition was of course a mathematical abstraction, not unlike the square root of minus one.

The counterfeiter was a pleasant man. He was quiet, amiable, thoughtful; he had the air of a popular professor in a small college town. He wore seersucker suits that were always comfortably rumpled, and he'd take off his shoes, when he joined us for beer on the roof, and put up his feet on the low iron railing. He joined in discussions of the fiscal angles on the commonwealth with such tolerant authority that we took him for a liberal economist.

He was employed by copper, as it turned out. His mission was to flood Indian Pass with counterfeit scrip. His efforts met with such success that the July 1st redemption day was the first bad crisis in the commonwealth's short

history. Outstanding scrip, as it came into the treasurer's office, was far in excess of outstanding scrip as recorded on the treasurer's books.

At this time the scrip was still transferable paper. Farmers, storekeepers, the hotel, gasoline dealers all held commonwealth scrip received in payment for services and commodities purchased by commonwealth employees. Tracing the source of the counterfeit paper was almost impossible. Refusing payment would have created bad will in the community. There was nothing to do but re-evaluate the commonwealth dollar on a basis that included the counterfeit scrip, and redeem it all at a cheaper value.

On July 2nd, our professor left town. Copper had pulled an exceedingly neat little coup.

For the first time, resentment swept the town. Bitterness divided the commonwealth members from the community, and there was a wave of hard feeling against management among the workers. They had been forced to share in a loss that was none of their making.

It wasn't long before the source of the counterfeit scrip became generally known, and the resentments that had divided the community now united it in one great anger against corporate morality.

But George was stumped. The trick could be played again. As long as participation warrants were transferable and circulated in the Indian Pass area as more desirable than U. S. currency, the commonwealth was vulnerable. It could of course declare participation warrants non-transferable, and redeem them only from original owners. This would end the danger of counterfeiting. But it would make bookkeeping more complicated and add to the costs of operation.

A greater drawback to the use of non-transferable warrants than bookkeeping costs, or even than the problem of

furnishing the workers with cash for living expenses between quarterly redemption dates, lay in the withdrawal of transferable scrip from community circulation. The loyalty of Indian Pass was based in part on the holding of participation warrants by others than the members of the commonwealth themselves. To suspend the right of transfer might turn the community against the commonwealth.

As a matter of fact, George knew—as many of us did—that the transfer right was one of the weak points in the commonwealth structure. It had not been part of the original plan. George had believed that participation warrants should be held only by workers; that the only way to participate in the earnings of the commonwealth should be to do something for it. Expedience had driven him into making the warrants transferable.

Now he was stuck with it. If he continued the right of transfer and members went on spending warrants in local stores, any redemption day might be upset by counterfeiters. If he suspended the right, then he risked the goodwill of the community. And when an institution faced the enemies that Trans-Pecos faced, it needed every friend it could get.

In my opinion, copper did the commonwealth a favor by sending the counterfeiter to town. Something had to be done. If the weakness had been allowed to persist in the commonwealth structure, it might some day have brought about disaster.

George still had made no decision, when the decision was made for him. Just as one enemy of the commonwealth had forced the necessity for a solution, another enemy presented the answer.

I mentioned that a Treasury man stayed at the hotel, apparently waiting for orders. His orders arrived. The Treasury had obtained a ruling from the Attorney General that Trans-Pecos scrip, as long as it was transferable, was

illegal. It was money. The issue of currency is a right reserved by the United States government.

The ruling fell on Indian Pass like a declaration of war. The government was fighting the commonwealth. From Presidio, down in the Rio Grande valley, to Fort Stockton, up above the Davis Mountains, Texans who held participation warrants cursed Washington.

George showed his qualities as a politician. He issued a statement that was a monument of hypocrisy. Bitterly he condemned Washington for the ruling. The members of the commonwealth, however, were citizens of the United States; they would not oppose their government. The right of transfer was suspended. The scrip would no longer circulate in competition with U. S. currency. Outstanding warrants would be redeemed.

George's dilemma had been resolved, not by any action of the commonwealth, but by action of an outside party. All the anger that might have been directed at the commonwealth was directed at the government. The community substituted for the loyalty of participants the sympathy for an underdog. And of course, the commonwealth remained the source of local prosperity.

The night after George accepted his Washington god-send with such public display of ingratitude, the correspondents on the roof of the Hotel El Paso del Indio drank their beer with good heart. The management of the commonwealth was not lacking in political aptitude.

The popular impression that Washington was fighting the commonwealth was based on false evidence. Trans-Pecos scrip, as long as it circulated in place of money, was

indeed money. The Attorney General had been right in his ruling, and the Treasury justified in asking for it.

Nonetheless, the popular impression that Washington was fighting the commonwealth was true. The FBI men lurking about Indian Pass came to outnumber the corporate spies. Washington had other reasons than competitive currency on which to base its enmity.

There were, of course such enemies of Trans-Pecos as the copper-obligated Senators and Congressmen. These might be called the natural enemies. They formed a small minority bloc in Congress, but like all blocs they possessed a deadly one-mindedness. And they had allies.

And then there was the Treasury Department.

Trans-Pecos paid its taxes as a corporation. Its payroll was calculated in terms of the prevailing wage, and all above was profit to be taxed in one piece. Participation, in the Treasury's opinion, was no more than a poor attempt at a tax dodge. Wages were wages.

But the Treasury, just the same, sat down with Trans-Pecos' tax statements in one hand and federal long-run tax programs in the other, and did some hard thinking. What if the commonwealth, throughout all industry, should come to replace the corporation? No agency in our land surveyed the possibilities of participation ownership at such an early date.

I ran into an economist, some years later, who told me what happened. He'd been called in on the survey of what-ifs. The report, prepared by various specialists, had stated:

(1) That a change-over from an economy based on property ownership to one based on participation ownership might quite conceivably come about.

(2) That such a change-over might come about through the simple economic process of competition and survival. Trans-Pecos, for instance, might force some competing

chemicals corporation into adopting the commonwealth plan. This new commonwealth might then force other manufacturers into the commonwealth orbit. Thus the disease of participation ownership might spread, perhaps slowly, through all the industrial scene. And all because the commonwealth could produce at cheaper costs.

(3) That Trans-Pecos was therefore a threat, not just to copper, but to the institution of corporate capitalism itself. In other words, to the principle that a man or group who furnishes capital to an enterprise thereby owns and controls it. An economy based on participation ownership would be an economy that could not be dominated by central financial interests.

(4) What the characteristics of such a new economy would be was any man's guess. Huge corporations held together by financial ties would probably split up into smaller units. Commonwealths just large enough to gain the advantage of mass production, but small enough to offer the individual worker a maximum sense of ownership, would probably have the highest labor productivity and the lowest costs. . . . The standard of living would unquestionably rise. Whether unemployment would disappear as a national curse was hard to say. In theory, the spreading of purchasing power through work-ownership and the granting to labor of total participation in earnings should create an ever-growing demand for products that would put more and more men to work. But this was theory and what actually might happen was incalculable. . . . Whether the old business cycle of booms and depression that characterized corporate capitalism would carry over into this new economy was again hard to say. Certainly the commonwealth with its flexible labor costs could withstand deflation better than the corporation, with its fixed wages and capital obligations, and its eternal struggle with organized labor. And

certainly the workers in a commonwealth, owning their business, could bear with temporary set-backs for the sake of future gains in a way that wage-workers in a corporation would never do. But here of course you came to matters of faith and human conduct that no one could quite reckon.

(5) One thing, and one thing only, could be said for sure about an economy based on participation ownership. Bankers wouldn't run it.

This report was quite enough for the Treasury. It matters not a whit the political policies of a government; the basic interests and beliefs of its Treasury will be the basic interests and beliefs of the financial community. The Treasury put away the report and declared war on Trans-Pecos.

Now, you might wonder, where would a labor government itself stand on this issue? Here's an idea that has called up the immediate enmity of labor's classic enemy, capital. It's an idea that—whatever its incalculables, its limitations, its technical problems—is founded on a principle of infinite good to the worker: The right of a man to own as he works. And labor, at the moment, is the dominant force in the government. Shouldn't the acceptance of such a system insure the continuation of labor power?

Aside from the headaches of the Treasury Department, aside from the necessity of keeping the business minority appeased, what would be the real policy of labor administrators towards the commonwealth plan?

Well, the policy was simple. Extermination, if possible.

I mentioned that at the time when the labor government made its choice between inflation and default, it chose to follow the interests of property rather than the interests of

the worker. It might be well for just a moment to consider the nature of labor as a political force, and its consequent relation to the commonwealth plan.

I believe that organized labor is to labor as organized religion is to religion.

That is, in my opinion, the same discrepancy that for centuries has existed between man's inner need for faith, and hope, and good will, and that organization which was intended to supply it, the Church, has in a matter of decades appeared between man's external needs for economic justice, and the organization formed to supply it, the labor union.

There's such a strong similarity between labor and religion, the two are worth looking at together.

The Christian ethic was first advanced as a principle whereby men could live together in increasing justice and peace. But the mere existence of such an ethic was not enough. The ethic had to be taught. It had to be spread and fought for and defended. And the Church appeared as the militant defender of the faith, and the Christian religion became organized.

Through the centuries the Church acquired—in its natural and necessary role—property, and obligations, and the inner stresses and dynamics of any organized body. And as the Church became more and more of an entity itself, so it drew farther and farther away from the religion that was its source. Until finally religion existed for the sake of the Church, rather than the Church for the sake of religion.

And so the Church assumed its final role: that of the defender of the rights of property against the encroaching rights of man.

I speak of no particular religious organization. Some were better, some worse. I shall speak of no particular labor organization. Some were better, some worse.

I speak only of the normal tendency of all organizations

designed to fill human needs to depart from the original purposes, to develop interests and needs and motives quite apart from and frequently in direct conflict with the interests and needs and motives of their founders. Whether the organization be philanthropic, social, economic, religious, or political, the drift is always there. The inevitable separation of interests may be checked by the temporal sway of a strong and enlightened leader. But in the end the needs of men exist only to justify the needs of the organization.

So it is that reform turns into reaction; social revolution into tyranny; the religion of men into the atheism of property; economic liberation into economic despotism.

The need of the worker was for economic justice. The weapon with which the individual worker could fight for such justice was the union. Thus the needs of the laborer became synonymous with the concept of organized labor. Even as the demands of the Christian ethic became synonymous with the concept of the Church.

Organized religion acquired property and obligations to the interests of property.

Organized labor acquired political power and obligations to the interests of political power.

By the time of the Second World War the division between the interests of labor and the interests of the labor organization was becoming apparent. By the time of the fall of corporate internationalism, the interests of the labor leader and the laborer had become quite separate things.

Organized labor had become a political party with an existence largely dictated by political fortunes and misfortunes, opportunities and hazards. Its leaders, by necessity, had become professional politicians, and their tenderness for the worker was the tenderness of any professional politician for his electorate: Give me your vote, and I will see what I can do for you.

To the labor politician, the commonwealth represented political annihilation.

In what manner?

The labor politician draws his support from the labor union.

The labor union founds its existence upon the struggle with property.

Withdraw property from the industrial setup, and you end the capital-labor struggle.

End the capital-labor struggle, and you end the labor union.

End the labor union, and you end the labor politician.

Is it apparent how property and corporate ownership could be the trusted friend of the average labor leader? And the commonwealth his mortal enemy?

In September the Department of Justice rendered an opinion that the Trans-Pecos Chemicals Commonwealth was a subversive organization with intent to overthrow the American form of government. The Postmaster General declared Commonwealth advertising subversive literature and barred it from the mails.

We had been writing all summer. We had bales of feature stories and magazine articles ready for publication. But so far not a story had been placed.

All of us, in our time, had heard and sneered at the phrase, the capitalist press. Working newspapermen, we all recognized the limitations of a free press, and we'd seen—in growing number through the years—case after case of news suppressed because it differed too sharply with the interests of advertisers. Even so, we'd still held a certain faith in the over-all freedom of our press. I believe we felt

that a competitive press could not in the long run be anything but free.

Yet here was a case where no matter what our reputations as reliable newsmen, we couldn't place a printed word before the public.

It's my belief that the story of the commonwealth could have been printed, and have obtained wide circulation, in any previous year. The freedom and the tolerance of the American press is like a well-protected system of electric wiring. Up to a certain load, the system will carry anything. The lamps of liberty burn brightly. All seems well. But let a single impulse that exceeds the load limit enter the system, and a fuse blows. The lamps go out.

The press is quite free within limits. Within those limits there's no reason for anything but freedom, because there's no danger. The limits are defined by the unchanging interests of property and the variable tension of public opinion. The limits fluctuate with the rise and fall of public receptivity to revolutionary ideas. In a time of public satisfaction, complacency, and stability almost anything can be published and the illusion of freedom is at its peak. At a time of public dissatisfaction the capacity of the fuse automatically lowers. An opinion tolerated but yesterday is today suppressed.

In the year of the terror and the bankruptcy of the economic status quo and the disintegration of personal responsibility, public tension was mounting daily. The people could not be trusted with an idea so potent as the commonwealth.

In a sense it was a tribute to the lasting implications of the new form of ownership. Every editor who read our stories recognized immediately not only the inner strength of the commonwealth concept, but its appeal to the American imagination.

Here was no ism.

Here was no alien system conceived on foreign soil to meet the needs and the character of another people.

Here was no authoritarian solution, no system of bureaus and laws and prohibitions and demands for obedience that would crash against the anarchistic American character.

Worst of all, here was no scheme that ran counter to the school-book teachings of democracy and freedom and Americanism. It sprouted stars and stripes like a three-day beard. It hummed with the vigor of fife and drums. It fairly shouted of Bunker Hill and Paul Revere and Fourth of July orations. It was horrible.

All the hypocrisies of the American Way—the rights of man, the dignity of the individual, the virtue of free enterprise, the sanctity of competition, the confidence in the common man, the horror of tyranny, the glory of self-determination—every catch-phrase of one hundred per cent Americanism stood ready and waiting on the side of the commonwealth.

It was as if every demagogue in a century and a half of American history had been educating the public to receive the commonwealth with open arms.

With what vocabulary could the press attack the plan? Only with a vocabulary of the most blatant and temporary lies. There could be no lasting damnation enforced by such invectives as foreignism, bureaucracy, communism, atheism, subversion of the government. These were all too transparent.

There was nothing to do but keep the public in ignorance of the commonwealth plan until such time as the forces of property and government had liquidated its source. Then the story could be broken; and the commonwealth painted as the tragic failure of a group of college professors to cope realistically with the problems of American life.

We knew we had to do something. We knew that word of mouth would carry the rumor of the commonwealth across the nation, into every home and shop and office. But the rumor would be distorted by prejudice and countered by whispers. And that, at the best, it would travel slowly.

The commonwealth already was fighting for survival. Earnings were dropping. Even so it seemed always able to find customers. No truly effective boycott could be organized without spreading at the same time information concerning the commonwealth idea. But labor organizers were passing among the thousands of workers who lived on the edge of town; and they played on the natural jealousy of the men on the outside for the men on the inside. The Interstate Commerce Commission condemned the freight yards at Indian Pass as unsafe, and Trans-Pecos had to truck its shipments to Alpine, at increased cost. The barring of advertising from the mails meant that more salesmen had to be included in the commonwealth organization, and the per capita earnings again declined. One of the independent oil companies that furnished crude oil and gas, on pressure from the corporations stopped its deliveries. The other company, now in a monopoly position, raised its prices. One by one the chemicals producers that furnished Trans-Pecos with acid refused further orders. George had anticipated this, and Trans-Pecos went into production of acid itself. But again, the costs went up.

Through all of July and August costs rose higher and higher. Saboteurs put lime in the Trans-Pecos acid. A day's production was ruined. The pipe line from the nearby oil field was twice broken, and the commonwealth had to employ armed guards to cover the length of it. The guards were continually being jailed by the state police for disturbing the peace. Trans-Pecos had not only to pay for the guards, but to pay for their fines and bail. Two trucks mak-

ing deliveries to the railroad at Alpine were inexplicably wrecked. They had to be replaced. The windows in the homes of commonwealth members became the targets for bricks hurled from passing cars. The commonwealth had to come to the financial aid of the town in hiring additional policemen to preserve order.

Everything that happened seemed to increase Trans-Pecos' costs. There was only one good factor. Jersey didn't try to sell the competitive synthetic at a nominal price. A floor was reached that Jersey seemed disinclined to lower. So Trans-Pecos wasn't forced down to an utterly ruinous price figure.

There came a night on the roof, late in August, when we compared notes. We drew up a long list of the moves that had been made in the attack on Trans-Pecos. And we came to some curiously disturbing questions.

One of the independent oil companies had been forced to suspend deliveries to Trans-Pecos. The majors, with their control over equipment and markets, could have forced the other company to desist. Trans-Pecos would have been ruined for lack of fuel and material. Why hadn't this action been taken?

The Interstate Commerce Commission, when it ruled that the Indian Pass freight yards were unsafe and forced Trans-Pecos to ship from Alpine, could quite conceivably have ruled (with no more flagrant untruth) that the Trans-Pecos product was explosive, or poisonous, or in some way unfit for the railroads to handle at all. Trans-Pecos would have been stifled for want of transport. Why hadn't the ICC done this?

When supplies of acid had been cut off from the commonwealth, forcing Trans-Pecos to go into production itself, there had been no attempt to cut off the materials needed for the manufacture of the acid. One of these ma-

terials, controlled by a patent monopoly in the hands of a subsidiary of Jersey itself, could have been stopped overnight. But it hadn't been. Why not?

The ex-Hearst man, Karnes, had made a trip to Austin to look into the commonwealth's charter. He discovered that because of the peculiarity of the commonwealth's organization, its charter could be revoked at any time by a mere memorandum from the Governor to the license commission. The Texas state government, since the decline of cotton and cattle, was owned boots-to-Stetson by the Gulf Coast oil and synthetics people. Why hadn't the charter been revoked?

Why had Jersey stopped the competition in prices, thus allowing Trans-Pecos to undersell by a slight margin?

Trans-Pecos was in a bad way. But why was she allowed to go on producing at all?

Karnes went off on a week's trip to investigate. When he returned he had no direct explanations. But he possessed a sheaf of notes and a hypothesis. The hypothesis proved, later on, to be true.

The attack of Trans-Pecos was being conducted by copper through a Justice Department front. Sabotage, restraining orders, elimination of supplies, activity of state police, all forms of attack whatever the agency of execution were proceeding from a master policy. And this same master policy was responsible for the delicate restraint from certain other forms of attack.

The essence of the policy was simple.

Trans-Pecos must not be allowed the boon of a martyr's death.

That was all. Die she must, but from natural causes.

Supposing, at state order, the commonwealth's charter were revoked? Or by corporate order, she were denied all sources of materials? Or by federal order, the common-

wealth's product be forbidden transportation by common carriers?

Might not the ghost of the commonwealth rise up in future years to haunt both property and labor and become a symbol of hope for rebellious men?

There must be no ghost. There must be no martyr. There must be no symbol left unshattered.

Trans-Pecos must be cursed with the final American damnation of failure. The commonwealth must perish as a business.

How?

Well, Jersey could lower Trans-Pecos prices by competition. But Jersey herself could go just so low and no lower. Her own losses were unimportant. It was copper that counted. Copper must not be displaced from the American industrial scene. The synthetic must not get too cheap.

All right, this explained why Jersey had reached a price floor. Anything lower would ruin her copper ownership.

So now the commonwealth's income was cut to a minimum. What next? Why, of course, her costs must be increased.

And so they were. Everything humanly and inhumanly possible had been done to drive Trans-Pecos' costs higher and higher. The sabotage. The additional transportation charges. The fines paid to obtain release of guards from state custody. The rising price of oil and gas.

We realized that the counterfeiter had been the first to go to work. He had done his share to decrease commonwealth earnings through increased commonwealth costs.

And the brilliant idea of declaring Trans-Pecos advertising to be subversive. It was plain now why there'd been no collateral prosecution of the commonwealth as a subversive organization. The only desire had been to make her cost of selling higher.

No single attack was conclusive. No single action was in any sense critical. No single move on the part of government, or corporate ownership, or organized labor could ever, at some future date, be compared to the trial of Joan of Arc or the burning of witches at Salem.

The death of the commonwealth would make mighty poor reading. A thousand dull entries in red ink, in dusty and abandoned ledgers. That would be all. Nobody would be interested.

When you sat yourself down on the roof of the Hotel El Paso del Indio and looked out at the desert and the spines of the sotol, you had to admit it: the status quo was not entirely stupid. Organized capital and organized labor had conceived an admirable plan of attack.

And then suddenly you were a little dizzy, and you felt a sensation of sickness within you. This was no football game. And your side was losing.

Karnes and I, in early September, went to New York. We talked to George first. He gave us an estimate of the commonwealth dollar's value at the October 1st redemption day. The twenty-dollar-a-week office boy would be lucky if he collected nine dollars, U. S.

George sat at his desk and stared at a mess of papers through his thick glasses. When we told him we were going to New York to try to force publication of the commonwealth's story, he just nodded and murmured something that could have been thanks. He didn't lift his eyes from his desk.

Hara went with us as far as Chicago. At Big Springs, where we changed to a through plane, we had reason to remember the state of the nation. A worried airline official

was trying to supervise the mechanical checking of our plane. The mechanics seemed uninterested. I remembered the old days and the zest of airline employees. Then Hara touched me and pointed up at a wing.

There was a steady drip of gasoline.

Karnes spoke to the official. The official flew into a rage at the particular mechanic responsible for checking the tanks. The mechanic shouted back at the official, then turned on his heel and started to walk off towards the hangar. The official shouted something at him that I didn't quite catch. The mechanic turned and threw a heavy Stilson wrench straight at the official's head.

The official didn't have time to duck. He crumpled in a heap beside the tail of the plane.

"Holy Christ," said Hara.

The official was carried off the field. What happened to the mechanic I don't know. Our plane was called. The gas still dripped.

"Hey, you," said Hara to another mechanic. "What about that gas leak?"

"Frig it," said the mechanic, and started to walk away like the first one.

"Listen, God damn it," said Hara, "this crate's leaking gas! I've got no intention riding a gasoline torch."

"I'm a carriage man," said the mechanic, "it's not my department. And watch your language how you talk to me, you Jew bastard."

If there hadn't been gas leaking from the plane we were supposed to ride in, if a man hadn't just been hit in the face with a Stilson wrench, if all in an instant like a dizzy and incredibly bad motion picture there hadn't come back to me the scenes I'd witnessed in Los Angeles, I should probably have laughed.

Hara was gaping.

Karnes was giggling.

"Two bits," said Hara, "that man's an Orangeman." It was the worst thing he could think of to say.

We found the pilot. His face at the sight of the gas leak got not so much grim as weary. He went off to the hangar. After an hour's delay the tank was repaired.

We rose above the endless Texas earth. And I kept thinking uneasily of all the parts in a plane that must be inspected. Hara, beside me, must have been suffering from the same preoccupation.

"I haven't been out of Indian Pass since the first of the year," he said. "Is this what goes on?"

"It's how it was in L.A.," I said.

He sat looking at the back of the seat in front of him for quite a while. Then he tried to grin.

"This is the first time since I was a kid that I've ridden in a plane and kept listening for an engine to start missing."

We listened to the engines as far as Chicago. At the airport Karnes and I canceled our plane reservations for New York. We'd go the rest of the way by train. For the first time in my life I realized what kept a plane in the air. It wasn't horsepower; it wasn't the lifting surfaces of a wing. It was something in the hearts of men that couldn't be bought and couldn't be hired and couldn't be commanded and couldn't be coaxed. It was responsibility. And when it was gone, it was gone, like the reflection of clouds on disturbed water.

We didn't go downtown in Chicago. Hara was going from the airport to his home on the South Side. Karnes and I were to catch our New York train at an outlying South Side station. So we all took a taxi together along a route that would drop us at our station.

Following West Sixty-Third Street we passed through the southern fringe of Chicago's Black Belt. Windows that had

been smashed in the spring still gaped unrepaired. Stores that had been gutted still remained unoccupied.

For Hara it was the first sight of the terror's wake. He said nothing.

For me it was a morbid recurrence of all my sensations of the spring. I'd forgotten. In the renaissance that was Indian Pass I'd forgotten the dark ages.

Our cab had difficulty passing a derailed streetcar. A repair car worked on it. There was a crowd. The streetcar's rear truck had somehow come off. I thought of the mechanic at Big Springs.

At a railroad underpass we had to make a half-mile detour. The underpass was flooded from a broken water-main. I thought of the leaking gas tank.

We detoured through the back streets south of the stockyards. Here lived the mass of the packing-house workers, in Chicago's notorious back-of-the-yards. Block after block of dingy grey little houses each with a stairway from the sidewalk to the second floor. I knew those houses from my boyhood. I'd forgotten them. Five families to every house, two on the second floor, three on the ground floor. The cottage slum extended for miles, house after house, each on a fifteen foot lot.

I doubt that any of us was thinking of the obvious comparison with the new homes of the workers at Trans-Pecos. What I kept doing was a little problem of social addition and subtraction in my mind.

Every squalid little house that we passed represented the combined share of five families in the world's goods. At Indian Pass we'd discovered what that share could be. Subtract one from the other and you found the share that corporate ownership had been taking for generations. Multiply it by the number of houses to the block, the number of blocks to the miles—

"Christ," said Hara, "it's so big."

Karnes was very quiet. We were all thinking of the same thing now. The resources of property allied against a tiny besieged city in West Texas. Against the city, the people and the idea that we so feebly attempted to defend.

We swung back to Sixty-Third Street. Now we were under the elevated structure. A train roared by overhead and we all ducked. We tried to laugh. But again, as we listened to the retreating thunder of the elevated train on its high steel cat-walk of a structure, I think we were all remembering the same pictures. The derailed streetcar. The leaking gas tank. The mechanic flinging a wrench into the face of his supervisor.

Once, when we were at college, Hara in his first burst of engineering inside-information had laughed and pointed at the Chicago elevated structure and said: "That thing got built before engineers knew which way was up. I swear, nothing holds it together but the tensile strength of the rails."

One thing held the elevated structure together, and it wasn't the tensile strength of the rails. It was the same thing that kept streetcars on their track and underpasses unflooded and planes in the air and a whole material civilization in operation.

I don't think I actually gave way to fright till we got out of our cab at the station and Hara stepped out, just for a moment, to say good-by.

"I think I'll be seeing you sooner than we expected," he said as we shook hands. "I've decided. I'm getting out of this town. I'm going back to Indian Pass and I'm taking my family. How long the commonwealth'll last, I don't know. Whether I can get a permanent job with it if it does last, I don't know. How long my money'll hold out if I can't, I don't know. But I'm going back to Indian Pass."

An elevated train roared by over our heads. We all looked up at the lights from its windows, and we could see the jam of passengers in open vestibules. And the sound overwhelmed our speech and our thoughts. Then the roar trailed away. Hara was looking after the train thoughtfully.

And after a moment he said, very quietly, and it was the engineer speaking:

"This joint ain't safe."

He got back in his cab and waved and went off. Karnes and I picked up our bags filled with unpublished manuscripts, and went into the station to wait for our New York train.

Responsibility. Responsibility. I dreaded the subway in New York, and the elevators. I dreaded traffic, and the rush of Seventh Avenue, and the pound of presses, and the whistle of ships in the harbor.

Something had gone wrong with electro-magnets.

Karnes pointed to a copy of a Chicago paper. On the front page was an editorial demanding the dissolution of Congress, the resignation of the President, the temporary suspension of civil liberties, the formation of an emergency government headed by responsible business men, and the nationalization of all industry.

Karnes put the paper aside. They were calling our train.

"I've told you we can't publish this stuff! What do you want, a revolution?"

"Do you want to take the responsibility for turning this country into the hands of the mob? It's what you're asking. It's what this commonwealth thing comes to."

"I know this country's going to hell. My God, every time I turn around something happens. You can't tell me. I know

something's got to be done, but believe me, this isn't it! This isn't it! You give control of not only government but industry itself right into the hands of the common man. Don't you see what's already happened? The common man's gone haywire! Talk to anybody. Taxi drivers, servants, waiters, bus drivers, plumbers, anybody. They haven't got a grain of responsibility left in them. And you say give the country into their hands! Are you plain crazy?

"You can take the responsibility for writing stories like these if you want to. But believe me, I won't publish them. I won't share in a crime like that."

"You writer fellows are all kind of amusing. You're so naive. You don't live in this world, you live in some kind of a never-never land. You're children."

"Just because some kind of a co-operative with all the breaks in its favor manages to struggle along for a few months out in Texas, you think you've found the social panacea for the ills of the world. Nonsense. Do you think you can change human nature? Do you? You're a writer. You should know about human nature, even if you do suffer from the occupational disease of naivete."

"Believe me, friend, people are people. So a few hundred of them make a little more money out in Texas right while times are hard, and they seem to act better for it. That won't last any longer than the first flush of buying a new car and getting the wife a new dress. People are people and human nature doesn't change. It's greedy and possessive and egotistical and blind and prejudiced and eternally selfish. You can change the system but you can't change people."

"I don't care what kind of evidence you've dug up. I don't care what your opinion is. This thing in Texas is just

a phenomenon. It'll be over before you know it. It'll end like every social experiment that's ever been tried. And there've been thousands. You know that, don't you? This commonwealth idea isn't even unique. It's like every other Utopia well-meaning men have ever thought up. And it'll end just like the rest, on the rocks of human nature.

"No, I can't recommend publication. It's a silly, stale idea. Not only that, it's dangerous. Supposing people did go for it. Supposing with all the trouble and grief and distraction in the country people fell for the thing. What then? You'd have on your hands not just the failure of an unimportant little experiment in an unimportant little Texas town. You'd have the failure of the entire United States of America.

"Is that what you want? I don't think so. I think you'll agree, after a few years, that the best thing anybody ever did for you was to advise putting these stories in the bottom of your trunk. You'll come around and thank me.

"This is no time for stale, silly Utopianism, my friend. This is no time for deluding ourselves about human nature. The only thing that can help this country is guts and intelligence and action. Go write about that, and I'll read what you've got."

"You fools. That's all I can say. You fools. You honestly believe in this reactionary crap, don't you?

"Sometimes I swear to God I get depressed. You're experienced men, all of you. You're good newspapermen, you've been around, you aren't kids, you're theoretically dry behind the ears. Then you fall for something like this. Is it any wonder the world's in the shape it's in when men with brains and advantages like yours haven't got any more sense in the showdown?

"And you're liberals, too.

"Listen. I've been publishing a liberal sheet for thirty years. I don't take advertising and I don't take orders from the banks. I've been fighting for labor since before you cut your back teeth. I've been hounding the N.A.M. and the United States Chamber of Commerce, I've been exposing public graft and private corruption, I've been fighting for a decent break for the working man since you were in diapers.

"Now you, you God damned fools, you expect me to publicize the most arrant, knavish, Machiavellian labor steal I've ever come up against!

"Can't you see this is a company front? Can't you see this is the slickest system for smashing union labor the N.A.M. ever dreamed up?

"All the years of sacrifice building up labor unity. Now we've got the government. Now we've got our chance at last to get a decent standard of living, decent working conditions, maybe even a voice in management. And you come in with this dagger in the back.

"I don't blame the companies for dreaming up a scheme like this. That's their business, beating labor, just like it's our business, beating the companies. But you—men like you allowing yourselves to be suckers for the companies!

"Get out of my office."

"I know you're not offering this commonwealth idea to the Party for publication. You couldn't afford to have the Party's name attached to it. But you want the Party's opinion, I take it? Well, I'll give you mine, though you understand, I can't be quoted.

"It's counter-revolutionary. The whole commonwealth

scheme. You bourgeois newspapermen have your minds so cluttered up with democratic jingo, you couldn't be expected to understand but I'll try to explain.

"This participation ownership is a fake. Fake Number One. You've either got private property or you haven't. It either belongs to the individual and that's capitalism or it belongs to the State and that's socialism.

"Fake Number Two. Is this a dictatorship of the proletariat? Not at all. The proletariat's right at the bottom where it always was. All this manure about owning the fruits of your own effort. The proletariat's either at the top and it's the master or at the bottom and it's the slave.

"Fake Number Three. Competition. That's just a sop to American opinion. You've either got a system of so-called competition and actual monopoly, so-called free enterprise and actual economic chains, or you've got a system of State ownership, Party management, citizen acquiescence, the liquidation of all forms of competition, and economic freedom.

"Fake Number Four. Revolution. You've either got revolution or you've got counter-revolution. The commonwealth leaves property in private hands, the proletariat at the bottom of the pile, the Church untouched, the bourgeois management unliquidated, and free enterprise ready to restore capitalist ownership when the time's ripe. It's not revolution, therefore it's counter-revolution.

"When will you weak-kneed liberals get it into your heads that there's no such thing as half-way anything? It's the revolution or it's counter-revolution. Democracy's no more than a splinter in your pants, half-way down a toboggan.

"Get it straight, you amateur economists, you armchair philosophers, you confused intellectuals. Oil and water don't mix. If you want political freedom, you can't have economic justice, and you won't get political freedom either.

If you want economic justice, then you can't have political freedom—but at least you'll get economic justice. Make your choice.

"Take this thing away. No, I don't oppose it. Sure, it's dynamite. Sure, it'd raise hell with the Party. But why should I oppose it? The Big Boys'll stop you. Let them go out on the limb."

"I'd be willing to give you money to have these papers privately printed, but I simply don't believe in them.

"I don't. That's all. There isn't a woman in New York with a deeper humanitarian spirit than mine. There isn't a woman in New York who's given as much money to causes as I have. I can't tell you how many causes I've given my money to. But I've never given money to a cause I didn't believe in, and I don't believe in this one. You can't ask me to compromise my conscience.

"I don't pretend to understand your cause completely, and I haven't said I did. I never heard of a cause with so many complications and technicalities. But I'm a very sensitive person and I grasp the essence of things very easily. Something inside me just responds, yes or no.

"And right now, it tells me no. The whole thing sounds perfectly horrible. You admit, for all this fine talk, men still have to work over terrible smelly tubs of acid. They even have to wear gas-masks, some of them. You admit they still have to punch those dreadful time clocks, and spend all their lives inside a dreary factory. You admit, for all this wonderful system, their only concern in the world is money, money, more money.

"If you could come to me with an idea—a real idea—so that men would never have to think about money again; or

never have to go into a dreadful factory, never again in all their lives;—if you could come to me and say, We want to make the kind of a world where men and women can spend all their lives reading, and going to museums, and playing with their children, and making love and painting water-colors and listening to good music, and there won't be any more drudgery, or drabness, or ugliness, or dirt;—if you told me that, why, then I'd say I'll help with every cent I've got even if my husband divorces me.

"No. I've read these papers and something in me says no. There's no beauty in it, no love, no grandeur. Just ugliness. Just work.

"There's no woman in New York who's a greater humanitarian than I am. There isn't a woman you can name who's given so much money to so many causes as I have. But I have to tell you. Something in me says no. And I can't compromise my conscience."

"Grant that the idea works in this new small patent-protected synthetics plant. How could it work in a heavy industry?

"Your Trans-Pecos Commonwealth has light fixed charges as compared with operating costs. The plant was simple, the machinery not too complex. It was possible to retire the capital investment rapidly because there wasn't much capital investment.

"What about a steel industry? What about a rolling mill where the plant's everything and the labor almost nothing? What about a gasoline refinery?

"Trans-Pecos deals in cheap materials with a rapid turnover. What about an industry that requires big working

capital? What about a department store? A mail-order house?

"Trans-Pecos does an even year-round business. It can make a fair calculation of earnings on a quarterly basis. What about an industry that does a seasonal business? A furrier? A seed company? What are the commonwealth members going to live off in the off-quarters? Hay?

"You talk about the increase in labor productivity. Trans-Pecos is small and every worker has an immediate sense of the end-product and the participation he's got in it. What about a big industry where the worker's far from the end-product? Where he's just one in a hundred thousand other employees? Where any increase in his own effort will hardly affect the total output? What about automobiles? Aircraft? Railroad operation?

"Supposing all industry went under the commonwealth scheme and everything worked out the way you say and industrial earnings skyrocketed. What happens to farm labor? We've had the problem of disparity of earnings between farm and industry for two generations. How are you going to keep anybody down on the farm?

"Above all, above all, above all, above all. How are you going to make the switch? Like it or not, we have a certain status quo. Industry has stockholders, bondowners, landowners. Why should they give up their equities and claims? Banks and insurance companies have their funds invested in corporate securities. Ordinary men have their savings in banks and insurance policies. What happens to them?

"How are you going to make the switch?"

Karnes was facing a crowd of over two thousand men and women in the union hall. It was a New York garment

worker's union, and a good one. It had stayed aloof—like the union whose legal counsel I had talked to in Los Angeles—from the labor government. Karnes and I had talked to its president for hours the previous day, explaining the commonwealth. He had listened. We wanted stories of the commonwealth printed in the union's journal. At the end of our session he made no comment. At last he said that this union was entirely democratic. That he could not and would not make a decision without the story's being presented to a representative body of the union. He would call a meeting for the following night.

We had expected to face some council of a dozen or so. Instead, we faced two thousand rank-and-file members in a hot jammed hall. Without fanfare, without indication of either sympathy or antagonism, the union president had introduced Karnes.

Now Karnes had been talking for over two hours. He had outlined the origin of the commonwealth and its history as a working unit. He had talked of the managerial setup, the earnings, the response of the workers. He'd spoken of the absolute censorship of the press, and the campaign now in progress to bankrupt the commonwealth and send it to a pauper's grave.

The crowd had listened in absolute silence. Now Karnes was finishing:

"I've presented the story of the commonwealth to you as truthfully as I know how. I can't say I've told it without prejudice. But at least the facts that I've told you are facts; and your local president has seen the documents confirming them.

"What we ask is this: That we be permitted to publish the story of Trans-Pecos in your journal. I've already told you about the problems we've met in trying to lay the story of the commonwealth before the American public. You're the

first group of citizens who've been allowed, as a body, even to hear about it. And we who believe in the commonwealth believe that others than ourselves should be allowed at least the freedom to know what the commonwealth is.

"Now, what actually can be gained by such publication?"

"I must say, I don't know. Perhaps our nation is so far sunk in the crisis of our times that it's too late for rescue. Perhaps, even if it's not too late, the commonwealth idea is not enough.

"I know that I don't pretend that the commonwealth, as activated at Trans-Pecos, can be an absolute model for industrial reorganization. Certainly in the last few weeks I've run up against questions by the dozens that I can't answer.

"I don't pretend, either, that if we could replace capital ownership with participation ownership, generally throughout the nation, we'd find all of our problems automatically solved. We wouldn't. No complete cure for our social ills can possibly be found in economic reform alone.

"And last, I don't pretend to understand how we can make the change. Even though the commonwealth offered complete and immediate salvation for Americans, I still wouldn't know what to do.

"All I truly know is this:

"We Americans, for decades, have consistently refused to inspect the economic foundations of our society. With what result? With the result that we find ourselves now, in crisis, totally unprepared.

"Why didn't we examine, with honesty and integrity, the condition of our economic order at some date in the past when change might have forestalled the horrors of our times?"

"It's my belief that we lacked, not courage, not intelligence, not integrity, but simply imagination.

"We loved our liberty. We loved the political freedom

that has been our heritage and our hope. And we could not conceive of a change in our capitalistic order that would not entail the loss of our liberty.

"We suspected, many of us, that capitalism was dying. That it lay like a rotting corpse in every American home, spoiling our lives, frustrating our most valiant dreams. But we dared not look the dead man in the face. We were convinced that the only alternative to capital ownership lay in state ownership.

"Why were we so convinced?

"I have no quarrel with our estimate of state ownership in its relation to liberty. Statism, whatever its pretensions or honest purposes, whether it be called communism or socialism or fascism, holds within itself no force for political freedom. When the state owns all, the liberties of the individual exist only by dispensation.

"But why were we so convinced that we faced an inescapable choice between the injustice of corporate capitalism and the tyranny of statism? Why did it never occur to us that a form of ownership might be invented—*invented*—that would guarantee both the liberty we loved and the justice our lives demanded?

"Have our minds been so gripped by the terrifying logic of the class struggle that we have lost all human faculties of vision? Has that been our trouble? Is it still our trouble?

"Speak of the commonwealth to a Marxist. Because, in the name of political freedom, it perpetuates free enterprise, he damns it as a capitalist fraud.

"Speak of the commonwealth to a capitalist. Because, in the name of economic justice, the commonwealth opposes property ownership, he damns it as a communist fraud.

"Speak of the commonwealth to a supposedly detached economist. What does he say? He dismisses the commonwealth as just another co-operative.

"Do any of these critics consider the commonwealth on its own terms? A tool fashioned from an utterly new concept of ownership?"

"It's as if we lived in a world that admitted only the existence of dogs and mice. And we brought a man into this world, and we showed him to a dog, and we said to the dog, What is this being? And the dog said, He is not a dog, therefore he is a mouse. And so we took the man to a mouse, and we said to the mouse, What is this being? And the mouse said, He is not a mouse, therefore he is a dog.

"It is my belief that this either-or manner of thinking has been a fraud, conscious or unconscious, perpetrated by the forces of Left and Right alike. The Marxist has played on our horror of present injustice to assure us that the only road is state monopoly. The proprietors and fellow-travelers of corporate capitalism have played on our dread of political tyranny to assure us that our only way is the retention of capitalism. And the result has been the bankruptcy of liberalism, precisely what both Left and Right desired.

"Let me say it now as I would say it a dozen times: At no time, through all these years of struggle, have you and I as Americans faced an inescapable choice between statism and capitalism. Participation ownership, that we must now judge, lies beyond the logic of Marxism and capitalism alike. Unless you and I, out of our passion for liberty and our demand for justice, can gain the vision to consider the commonwealth on its own terms, then we shall greet disaster even as we have brought disaster upon ourselves, blind, eyeless, slaves to the logic of dogs and mice."

Karnes stopped for a minute. He looked at the little table before him, and his notes. The crowd didn't stir. Then he went on, quietly:

"I wish that I might tell you, with fanatic zeal, that the commonwealth structure as realized at Trans-Pecos can

prove, without modification or the slightest strain on our national intelligence, to be a blueprint for the salvation of our free society.

"I can't. I don't believe it. My faith is of another order.

"Was the concept of political freedom ever a blueprint? Was the idea of constitutional democracy ever an iron-bound plan that relieved humanity from further thought or social effort?

"Participation ownership is the idea of economic democracy. It is an idea, like political freedom, that bears reality only when put to use. So far it has been put to use only once, at Indian Pass, Texas. Now the idea waits. Participation waits, like humanity itself, for the touch of hands more remarkable than any that have touched it thus far.

"And this is its strength. That it is a policy, not a plan; a point of departure, not a destination; an inspiration, not a command.

"And this is the order of my faith: That participation ownership can be the meeting point for the minds and the hands and the hearts of a nation now paralyzed and bankrupted by hatred and suspicion. That this meeting point established, we can resume our march forward with an energy and union and faith never known in all history.

"Then and only then will the greatness of economic democracy become apparent. For that greatness, in my belief, lies in human overtones never made audible before: In the enhancement of the dignity of the individual. In the arrival at group interest through self-interest. In the freeing of human talent and skill and imagination from the frustration of the class struggle on the one hand and from the repression of authority on the other. And perhaps greatest of all, the mobilization of the untapped resources of an entire people, rather than the constrained resources of a

few, in the endless struggle of humanity towards a better and ever more resplendent life.

"I've said more than I should. I came here tonight merely to tell you the story of how a group of men and women have solved for themselves the problem of living and working and attaining human decency in a lifeless, workless, indecent world. In spite of the allied forces of government and property, they still survive.

"I ask that the story give you hope. And that you, in exchange, grant us publication."

Karnes sat down.

The deathly stillness of the hall continued. No one moved. None applauded. There was no sound at all.

The president of the union rose, thanked us, and suggested that further discussion had best be conducted by the union members alone. We picked up our hats and our briefcases. We left through the auditorium.

I realized, as we passed down the aisle and the crowd turned slowly to stare at Karnes, that the men had been sitting like little statues, and that women had been crying. The incredible stillness was broken only as we reached the door at the rear of the auditorium. Then a man in the audience rose and pointed a shaking arm at Karnes and cried in a high voice:

"Hey! You!"

That was all.

The two thousand men and women rose and there was a strange sort of cry and Karnes was being deluged with hats.

I shall remember those hats for a very long time. They floated at us from all directions. Hats. Hats. Old crumpled fedoras. Battered imitation panamas. Tan hats. Grey hats. Hats with torn bands and stained crowns. Large hats, small hats.

Outside, in the quiet empty street, we sat down on the curb with our feet in the gutter. We had somehow no strength for standing. And we said nothing because there was nothing to say. And we got out our handkerchiefs and blew our noses because at certain glorious moments that is all one can fall back on.

Then Karnes had a chill and we went back to the hotel and Karnes went to bed. I sat up. Neither of us slept. We waited for a call from the union president.

That was just past midnight. We expected a call within an hour. It was six o'clock and beginning to get light before he appeared.

He was pale. He carried himself like a man so exhausted he no longer has the strength to wonder even where his remaining strength comes from. We shook hands, and his hand was cold.

He sat down and very carefully put his hat underneath his chair. Then he spoke.

"Our meeting has lasted all night. I can assure you of one thing. If the commonwealth can be set before the American people as you set it before us tonight, we shall have interesting times ahead.

"Our debate, as you may judge, did not concern the merits of the commonwealth. It concerned only the wisdom of printing your story in our journal.

"It's with considerable difficulty that I must tell you our decision. We cannot print it.

"Bear with us. Understand us. We think so highly of the commonwealth, we wish so desperately to see it succeed, that we have no alternative. We must have nothing to do with it.

"Ours is a union of garment workers. Many of our members are of Jewish descent and we are known as a Jewish

union. We have no intention of allowing the commonwealth to be tagged as a Jew idea."

Karnes had been sitting up on the bed. Now he lay back very slowly and turned over with his face towards the wall.

The union president stared at the green carpet on the floor. He raised his cold hands to his mouth and breathed on them.

I turned to the window and looked out at the grey sleeping city. I could see down empty Thirty-Fifth Street to East River, and the river was turning a pale tarnished silver under the leaden dawn.

I heard the union president stop breathing on his hands.

"I know how you likely feel," he said, very softly. "All I ask is bear with us. Believe us."

He fumbled under his chair and got out his hat.

He left. I looked at Karnes but he was still lying with his face towards the wall.

I had to do something. I had to go some place. There was no place else to go. So I went downstairs and out in the street and it was a humid September New York morning and I walked around until people began coming up out of the subways on their way to work and to looking for work.

Karnes and I were licked.

We were licked on the inside. Our guts were gone. It's the worst way to be licked. You're not only beaten. You're ashamed.

You're so ashamed that you can't even admit that you're licked. You tell yourself stories.

Karnes and I told ourselves stories.

We said that we'd done the best we could.

We said maybe publication wouldn't help Trans-Pecos anyway.

We were very realistic. We said maybe our enemies were right. Maybe the commonwealth was no solution. Maybe it was too late. Maybe the country had sunk too far.

We were very intelligent. We said what could you do with an enemy that was nothing but words and honest beliefs and patterns of thought. It was fighting haystacks. The more you threw yourself at them the more you sank in.

We looked at the calendar. The first of October was close. Redemption day would be tough at Trans-Pecos. Maybe we should go back.

We told ourselves stories. And the only story we didn't tell was the true one. That in fighting an enemy whose color was defeatism, we had come to share his color. That our desire to return to Trans-Pecos was no more than a frightened, animal longing to be with our friends within the lines of siege.

I remember our last days in New York with no pleasure. Because while we failed, others succeeded.

On the day that we packed our bags with our manuscripts, our dirty shirts, our rumpled ties and our blemished hopes, and in our cynicism went not to the railroad station but to the airport, contemptuous even of memories of leaking gas tanks and disinterested mechanics, we got the news.

The news was brief and enigmatic.

On the front page of a New York evening paper was a press association dispatch exposing the immorality and criminality of a town called Indian Pass, in West Texas.

That was all.

Karnes and I settled back in our seats on the plane and stared at each other. Then we read the story over again.

We seized papers from our fellow-passengers. Every paper carried the same story. No more, no less.

No mention of the commonwealth. No mention of Trans-Pecos.

Just a totally uncalled-for, unnewsworthy story about conditions in a town of no recognized importance that few readers could ever have heard of.

But we knew what must lie behind it.

The siege had been broken.

For reasons that we couldn't guess it was no longer possible to keep the commonwealth out of the national eye.

In preparation for news to follow, Indian Pass was being built up as a place beyond the bounds of American morals. It was a community of whores, murderers, sex maniacs, and common thieves.

The conspiracy of silence was ended. The master policy of breaking Trans-Pecos and telling about it afterwards had failed.

What had happened?

Karnes and I forgot our New York despair. We forgot our heroic career as crusaders. In glee we read to each other the story of rape and perversion and murder and white slavery and we yearned so loudly for this questionable community that our nearest fellow passengers exchanged panicky glances and moved to the front of the plane.

What had happened to break the siege? We speculated, we argued.

We had no reason to notice, in our New York evening paper, a similar story concerning the morals of Youngstown, Ohio.

Redemption day at Trans-Pecos was tough, all right. It was tougher than George Davis or anybody else had expected.

The commonwealth dollar was quoted at thirty-four cents U. S. The twenty-a-week office boy had earned exactly six dollars and eighty cents a week for his summer's efforts.

Not only cars were going back to the dealers. Furniture was going back, and baby carriages and lawn mowers.

Dentists and doctors and grocery stores and filling stations could look forward to unpaid bills and a session with the red ink.

The commonwealth was strapped. The members were strapped. The community was strapped.

Yet on the morning of October first, when Karnes and I got to town, Indian Pass was embarking on a redemption-day celebration more delirious than any that had come before. Crockett Street writhed. Traffic was detoured around the main part of town. The schools were closed for the day and the kids were parading and beating drums. Store-keepers up to their necks in debt locked their shops and joined the jam on Crockett Street.

Men shouted, shook hands, swatted shoulders. The sidewalk canopies roofed a stream of bobbing, waving Stetsons. By eleven o'clock in the morning you had to fight your way into the San Jacinto Bar and Grill. It was the dizziest, happiest, giddiest day that a giddy town had ever known.

Why?

Because the Youngstown Wire and Metals Corporation, two thousand miles away in the far-off state of Ohio, had gone over to the commonwealth scheme.

It was as if a tiny nation, fighting for survival on one side of the world, had received the intelligence that another tiny nation on the other side of the world had declared war and become her ally.

Was the war won? Not by a damned sight.

Were the odds less? Only slightly.

Had the tide turned? Maybe yes, maybe no.

Then what had happened that was worth all the cheering?

Plenty. We had friends. Somewhere on the face of this earth we had friends. Friends that we'd never met, never laid eyes on, wouldn't know from Adam. But friends who believed as we did and who'd fight till the last dog died.

Somebody raised the Lone Star flag of Texas on the courthouse flagpole and you could hear men yelling as far away as the railroad station.

Somebody in the Pecos Tavern started singing *The Banks of the Wabash* under the misapprehension that the Wabash flowed through Ohio, and in half a minute the whole house was singing it and grown men were crying like children.

Out at the dust-colored plant beside the Southern Pacific tracks, George Davis locked up his office and went to the laboratory and found his brother, Ben, and somebody saw the two of them together, later on, walking along U.S. 90 kicking up dust and throwing pebbles at the desert sotol like a couple of boys.

The story of Youngstown is a very simple story. It contains a quality of heroism that Karnes and I, in New York, so conspicuously failed to supply. It's an ironic story, too, from the standpoint of all the correspondents on the roof of the Hotel El Paso del Indio.

Youngstown Wire and Metal was an old and solid corporation with twelve thousand employees, in good times, and a plant just outside of town, on the road to Sheffield, with a book value of perhaps forty million dollars. And the product of Youngstown was fabricated copper.

Copper. Youngstown Wire and Metal was a part of the copper alliance that fought Trans-Pecos so bitterly. And the bulk of Youngstown's trade was copper wire, doomed to join the mustache cup by Ben Davis' synthetic.

Now, while Youngstown was part of the copper alliance, one salient factor differentiated it from the other companies in the copper industry. It was independently owned. It was not only the largest copper fabricator outside of the Connecticut Valley, but the only one of any size not owned by the central mining and smelting interests.

Not that Youngstown's independent ownership was a point in its favor. Its independence had made possible a sort of ruthlessness that the great copper interests couldn't touch. Youngstown was a burr in the pants of the industry. Its labor policies brought unrest to all copper workers, and its competitive ethics brought headaches to all copper managements.

So it was that for years copper had looked on Youngstown with little pleasure, and had crowded her, slowly, bit by bit, out of the domestic market. Through the internationalist period this had been quite all right with Youngstown. She had thrived on the foreign market. But with the end of world trade she slumped.

This had been the first blow. The second had come with the arrival of the labor administration in Washington. Because Youngstown's labor standards were below the general level of the industry, security legislation had hit her hardest. Youngstown reeled. Finally there came the ruinous competition with Trans-Pecos. And Youngstown went broke.

Copper had made a typical corporate error. The industry should have lent support to Youngstown through the synthetics competition. But copper wanted to break Youngstown and here was an opportunity that couldn't be passed

up. Two birds could be killed with one stone. Synthetics competition could be smashed, and independent copper competition too. Well, Youngstown went broke all right, but most unpleasantly so.

The huge plant closed down. The gates were locked. The Youngstown banks tottered about like drunks. Those workers that hadn't yet been laid off joined the rest of the twelve thousand in unemployment. Bids were asked for the forty-million-dollar property. No bids were received. America was becoming a graveyard of shuttered factories, and Youngstown was just another valuable plant as valueless as a hill of clay. Nobody wanted it because there was nothing to do with it.

All this occurred by the time I first arrived in Indian Pass.

Now it so happens that in a certain church in the city of Youngstown—not a fashionable church, I can assure you—there was a minister whose congregation consisted entirely of the jobless effluent of Youngstown Wire and Metal. And every Sunday the minister prayed for the miracle of work. And no work came.

Every Sunday his congregation became smaller. And more restless. And more sullen. And the minister's prayers became more grim.

Until one Sunday he appeared before his dozen faithful and announced that there would be no prayer. And there would be no further services, not for a while. He was going away on a little trip.

He was quite a man, this preacher. He was the dank individual who stayed at the Hotel El Paso del Indio and circulated continually among the townspeople and the commonwealth members—the man we didn't trust because he wore his collar backwards. I could wish that I'd known him

better, but I never had a second chance. He was murdered, later in the fall, on a backstreet in Youngstown.

It was natural, I suppose, that the minister should have heard about Trans-Pecos despite the secrecy of the press. Trans-Pecos was the instrument that had wrecked Youngstown Wire and Metal and thrown his congregation out of work. A lesser man, however, would have joined the Youngstown bankers and executives in damning the commonwealth as not only godless but very bad for business. The minister just wasn't that way. He wondered, and he wondered, and he wondered, and at last he had to close up his church, borrow some money, and go down to Texas to see for himself.

When he returned he had in his possession a complete set of notes on the operation of Trans-Pecos and a determination that Youngstown must go commonwealth. But more important, he had found the utterly simple answer to the eternal question, How are you going to make the switch?

His answer was so obvious that it shook America. There is no problem, said the minister, none at all. Not when bankruptcy comes first.

It was startling, it was dumbfounding, and it was true.

All up and down the Ohio valley stood plants with locked gates and cold stacks and dead lathes and silent forges. And the minister had seen them.

Throughout all the nation, for every wheel that turned, two stood motionless.

What was the value of the dead wheels in dollars and cents? What would a commonwealth have to pay private ownership to obtain them?

Almost nothing.

Almost nothing. Corporate ownership could neither give value to its wheels by turning them, nor maintain the paper

value of dead wheels by putting up credit. Corporate ownership was broke.

Only a commonwealth could bid for a property. Because only a commonwealth could operate it. The commonwealth was in a monopoly position. The commonwealth could have any bankrupt property at whatever price it deemed fair.

It was startling, but it was true. Bankruptcy had cleared the nation of the only real obstacle to the coming of the commonwealth, capital investment. Our recurrent American paradox of possessing a complete industrial plant that we couldn't run was not beyond resolution.

Well, to say that bankruptcy left no problem is to oversimplify the situation. And the minister knew it. The nominal owners of Youngstown must be made to see that selling out to the commonwealth was to their interest. A commonwealth might pay them a tenth of the book value of their property, in secure but powerless purchase warrants. A tenth was better than nothing at all. But the owners must be made to see it, and it would be no easy job.

And to say that the commonwealth was in a monopoly position is likewise an oversimplification. An alternative existed. Political revolution and state ownership.

But the minister saw that in the particular case of Youngstown the one might solve the other.

What a collection of frozen intellects and property-baked emotions he had to face. The two Youngstown families that clung to their empty equities and their memories of another era. The gloomy bankers who divided their hatred like pie between the labor government in Washington, the Trans-Pecos commonwealth that had ruined them, and the copper interests that had refused to save them.

And the man with his collar on backwards said nothing about God, or patriotism, or ideals.

He appealed only to self-interest.

He showed them that while unemployment stalked the Youngstown streets, revolution lurked in every alley. And they knew it to be true.

He showed them that revolution was inevitable. That it could come from the Left, by force, or from the Right, by force, or from the commonwealth, by consent.

What was their pleasure?

A revolution of the Left? What kind of treatment might they expect from a revolution of the Left? Need he tell them? He need not.

Then perhaps a revolution of the Right? This was more to their fancy. But what would a revolution of the Right consist of? It would mean that the great copper interests that had so delighted in their bankruptcy would be in political as well as economic control of their industry.

What kind of treatment might they expect from a revolution of the Right? Need he tell them? He need not.

The commonwealth was their only out. It was more than that. It was their salvation.

The deal was made.

And the pattern for an economic revolution by consent was thereby laid.

I didn't get up to Youngstown myself for quite some time. By then the commonwealth was firmly established and the great grey mill was no longer idle. By then, unable to obtain its copper raw material from the outraged copper interests, Youngstown Wire and Metal had converted its processes to steel and was busily engaged in wrecking the steel industry. By then a curiously American enthusiasm for new things had swept through not only the huddled cottages of the workers, but the offices of the bankers, and the mansions of the former owners back in the hills. Was it because the Tories, holding the obligations of the new in-

stitution, found it to their interest to cheer the commonwealth on? Basically, yes. But there was something more. Already the economic democracy of the commonwealth was doing its work on men.

By the time I arrived in Youngstown, of course, the minister was dead. He had died shortly after the commonwealth decision to shift their fabrication to steel. He had died at the hands of thugs hired by steel. And the town still mourned.

What was it the minister had that we on the roof of the Hotel El Paso del Indio so remarkably lacked?

I don't know.

I think of him now, a disagreeable-seeming man with a long narrow face and stooped shoulders, as he prowled around the bars and the sandwich shops and the chili parlors of Indian Pass.

I think of myself and my righteous colleagues on the roof of the hotel, swigging our beer, preaching to one another, while we distrusted the man with his collar on backwards.

I think of Karnes and myself, two realistic newspapermen, leaving New York in the tingling melancholy of failure.

I think of the narrow-faced minister slumped in the bloody shadow of a Youngstown doorway.

However one can tell about the difference between us, it must be a very simple story.

## REVOLUTION BY CONSENT

**I** HAVE A BAD TRICK, ON OCCASION, OF DREAMING THAT I HAVE just waked up. It can lead to the most unpleasant experiences.

Let me put it this way: I have, as a rule, a fixed attitude towards dreams. Something in me never forgets that I'm asleep. I always know that what I'm watching is a dream. I shouldn't call the attitude cynical. It's not. It more resembles the point of view of one who watches a motion picture. You laugh at the jokes. You're moved by tragedy. Horror curdles your blood into a pleasant sort of cottage cheese. But you never quite forget that you're in a theater. You never quite take your sensations seriously.

And so it is with me when I'm asleep. I enjoy dreams, I'm moved by them, I'm frightened by them. But I don't as a rule forget that I'm dreaming. And this has proved, every once in a while, to be a valuable attitude.

I can remember once, for instance, dreaming that I was driving down into the Panamint Valley, in California. It's a road that descends perhaps five thousand feet in just five miles. You come out of a pass through the Panamints, see the blue-grey salt flats of the valley far beneath you, turn the nose of your car down the sharply winding road, and away you go. In my dream something happened to my brakes. I jammed them on and nothing happened. The car just gathered speed. I reached for the emergency brake and

it was stuck. I tried to throw the car in a lower gear. I couldn't; I was already going too fast. I could see the blue salt flats still half a mile straight beneath me. I looked for a ditch that I could roll the car into. There was no ditch, only a hard rock wall. That wall rushed past me, faster and faster. The curves in the road came at me, quicker and quicker. I jammed at the brakes, over and over. The blue of the salt flats came closer and closer. And all the time I was shouting to myself, "I'm God damned glad this is just a dream."

As I say, it can be a valuable attitude. It has only one weakness. If by any chance I dream that I wake up, then I take all that follows with excessive seriousness. I am still dreaming, but for once I don't know it.

I have dreamed that I was awake not more than half a dozen times in all my life. The very infrequency has contributed to the horror; I have had no opportunity to build up a defense against it. The last time I subjected myself to the experience was during the commonwealth revolution. I remember the dream itself, and the circumstance surrounding it, with appalling vividness.

When Karnes and I returned to Indian Pass from New York, none of us in Texas knew the details of the Youngstown swing. We knew only that a commonwealth had been formed to inherit the properties of a bankrupt corporation. And that in this action a pattern for a revolution by consent had been established. Things looked good.

On the night of the redemption-day celebration in Indian Pass we all of us drank our beer on the roof of the Hotel El Paso del Indio for what we knew must be the last time. Karnes and I and the other correspondents; Hara, who'd just brought his family down from Chicago; George and Ben Davis, who came in about midnight. It was hail and farewell.

We knew that our time had come. The siege of secrecy had been broken. Corporate ownership, that had been able for a time to isolate the news of what went on among a few hundred workers in the wrong end of Texas, could never suppress the news about twelve thousand workers in the heart of industrial Ohio. Word of mouth would travel, and travel fast. It was our job, as correspondents, to get the hell out of Indian Pass, to scatter ourselves around the country, to talk, to whisper, to pass on rumors, to promote that word of mouth until American public opinion demanded free and public consideration of the commonwealth idea.

Trans-Pecos was no longer the stake. The time had come when American democracy was itself the stake, because from now on the only defense of property ownership was a revolution of the Right and suspension of civil liberties.

I treasure the recollection of that last night on the hotel roof. The star-set Texas sky hung over our heads like some gaudy collection of rhinestones, too bright to believe in. The chill October breeze crept down from the mountains and rattled the drying locust leaves. We shivered, and drank our cold and inappropriate and magnificent beer to the summer that had gone and the winter that lay ahead. We told stories and made jokes and sang about Auld Lang Syne. We did all the things that men do when the heart is solemn and the occasion gay.

And at last we went to bed.

I remember standing for one last moment, before I went downstairs to my room, and looking out at the impenetrable darkness of the desert. Hara was hanging back too, fussing with the empty beer bottles and the overturned chairs. We said nothing. What Hara was thinking, I don't know. But I was remembering a late afternoon when we sat before a pot-bellied stove in a construction shanty in Indiana. And I could see again the smoky red isinglass

window in the stove, and I could hear Hara saying that some day the pay-off would come; the showdown, the Pearl Harbor; the moment when Americans would be bad enough off.

Had I ever truly believed that when that moment would come, men would possess a tool for freedom? That when a voice in the sky cried, Choose! there would be a choice?

I was tired. Karnes and I had had very little sleep the night before. I said good night to Hara and left him alone on the roof. I glanced back as I went downstairs, and he was pulling a chair to the railing at the edge of the roof and getting out another cigarette.

I don't remember even turning on the lights in my room. I just threw off my clothes and in a matter of seconds I was asleep.

I slept soundly.

Just when the dream started I don't know. You can't tell about dreams. I'd suspect that I slept for some hours—perhaps almost all of the night—as near to dreamlessly as one can sleep. If that's true then the dream itself may have lasted only a few minutes. It's endlessness, in that case, was a matter of seeming.

However it was, I know that the dream started with a face.

It was my own face. There was something wrong with the face, but I could recognize it as my own. It was lighted from one side and a little below, the way an arty photographer might light a subject in a studio. There were deep shadows, and the light was deep red.

"Bring up the light," I said, studying the face carefully.

An intense blue light came on. I could see immediately what was wrong with the face. It had no eyes.

"Take it away," I said. "It's a bad likeness."

The face disappeared. I chuckled to myself. "The things you think up when you're asleep," I said to myself.

After the face had gone away, there was quite a period when again I seemed to dream nothing at all. Then a Coca Cola sign came on, flashing on and off, on and off, on and off, on and off.

"Turn that damned thing off," I said.

"I can't," said a voice. "The switch is stuck."

"It's shining in my window," I said.

"But the switch is stuck."

I was watching the Coca Cola sign with considerable irritation, trying to remember when I had seen it before, when a band began to play. It was a tune that had been popular when I was a boy, called *Pretty Baby*. My dream shifted to the song with a certain nostalgia. Bands had played it as they swung along Sixty-Third Street in Chicago, under the elevated structure, during the First World War. I could see the banners again, and the flags, and the men marching. Red, white, and blue bunting covered the posts of the elevated structure. The band played gaily. A group of very pretty girls in Red Cross uniforms passed by, carrying a long banner that said something about democracy. The trombone section in the band up ahead blared *Pretty Baby* with pleasant abandon.

"This is getting to be a first-class dream," I said to myself, and I hummed the tune with the band while I inspected the crowd along the sidewalk. I wondered if I could find myself.

And there I was. I found my father first, and I was standing beside him. I was a hungry-looking kid and I was holding a cheap cotton flag. I seemed to be having a wonderful time, goggling this way and that. Then, just as I was beginning to enjoy this picture of myself, something went wrong with the band.

The band was stuck. It kept playing the last phrase of the melody over and over and over again. "Pretty Baby, Pretty Baby, Pretty Baby, Pretty Baby—"

I got a little bit angry. It wasn't just the band that was stuck. The whole parade was stuck. The men marching with their guns on their shoulders kept moving their legs and getting nowhere. The pretty Red Cross girls kept swaying and smiling but they stayed in one place.

"Pretty Baby, Pretty Baby, Pretty Baby, Pretty Baby—"

"Hey," I said, annoyed. "What happened?"

"The switch is stuck," said a voice.

The Coca Cola sign started flashing in my face again, in perfect time with the stuck phonograph record.

"Look here," I said, trying to keep my temper. "I have to get up in the morning. This dream was going along fine. I could relax. But how can I get any rest with that damned sign flashing in my face and that damned record stuck in a groove—"

"Wake up," said my mother, bending over me.

"I don't want to wake up," I said. "I have to get my sleep."

"But it's time to get up and go to school," said my mother.

"I don't like school," I said, "and I don't want to wake up and I don't have to because I'm grown up now and I don't go to school any more. I've got to get out of town in the morning to go work on this commonwealth thing so please leave me alone and let me get my sleep."

"There's no such thing as the commonwealth," said my mother, firmly.

"Oh, please," I said, "I don't want to yell at you."

"There's no such thing as the commonwealth," said my mother. "You dreamed the whole thing. There's nothing but hard work and sacrifice and the will of God. To them

that hath shall be given. Men must work and women must weep. The meek shall inherit the earth. Now, get up and wash your face and I'll have breakfast ready. And hurry or you'll be late to school."

I had been listening to her in a mild panic. Now I lay back on my pillow and took a deep breath.

"I'm God damned glad this is just a dream," I said.

"This is not a dream," said my mother. "And stop using bad language. In front of me, anyway. You can use bad language when you're with those little ruffians down at school, I suppose. I can't stop you. But don't use it in front of me."

I could see her face appearing and disappearing in the light of the Coca Cola sign. The light came all from one side and a little below. The light was red. I could see that she had no eyes.

"Mother," I said, "if you're not part of my dream, and I'm not asleep this minute, then why is that Coca Cola sign shining on you? That Coca Cola sign is part of my dream."

I could see that it wasn't her face looking down at me, eyeless. It was my own.

I laughed out loud. The face sneered at me and disappeared. I laughed and laughed. What was funny I didn't know. Perhaps only that I'd outwitted my mother.

The light snapped on in my room. I sat up with a jerk. The light hurt my eyes.

Hara was standing in the door.

"Jesus," said Hara. "I was just going down the hall on my way to my room and I could hear you in here laughing like a son of a bitch."

"What a dream," I said, trying to clear my head. "I'm just as glad you came in and woke me up."

I got up and fumbled around for a cigarette. Hara grinned at me tolerantly.

"You and your dreams," he said.

"Oh, it wasn't that bad," I said. It was chilly, so I put on my coat and sat down by the pot-bellied stove. "You remember that trick I used to pull," I said. "I think I told you once. Dreaming that I'd waked up? Taking everything on the level because I thought I was awake? Well, I tried to pull it on myself a few minutes ago. I didn't get away with it."

"I have always maintained," said Hara, chuckling, sitting down on the other side of the pot-bellied stove, "that you're even daffier when you're asleep than when you're awake. A man who can't even dream normal."

"It's not so abnormal," I said. "At least, I mean there isn't anything so strange about it. I go to sleep and I don't quite let go, that's all. But when I do let go—wow. Am I a sucker for a first-class nightmare."

Hara grinned and shook his head tolerantly. I suddenly felt a little silly.

"Well, at any rate," I said, "it doesn't happen very often." I looked down at the smoky isinglass window in the stove and the flickering red glow that came through.

"I don't mean to pry into your private life," said Hara. "But whatever you were dreaming about, it must have been good. You were yelling your head off."

"It wasn't anything," I said. "Just—oh, somebody tried to tell me there was no such thing as the commonwealth."

"The what?" said Hara.

I looked up at him from the stove. He was leaning back on his chair, teetering. He chuckled again.

"You and your dreams," he said.

An uneasiness crept through me. I had difficulty, for a moment, in focusing my mind. Then I noticed that the red light from the stove caught his face all from one side and below. Hara seemed to have no eyes.

The sight gave me a curious, silly little shock. I knew Hara had eyes. I knew that it was just the light from the stove and the odd shadows. But something was wrong. I couldn't grasp what was wrong, but something in the room was wrong.

I looked about sharply. The room was dark.

"Who turned out the lights?" I said.

"I did," said Hara.

I felt a chilly little wind. I clutched at the front of my coat.

"What's the matter with you?" said Hara. "I was going to leave the lights on but you said, Turn them off. You said you'd rather sit in the dark. You said you were tired of seeing things."

"I said that?" I was badly confused. Again my brain didn't seem to work quite right. I had a dim recollection of having said such a thing, but there was something wrong with it.

Hara peered at me closely in the dim red light from the stove.

"What's the matter with you?" he said.

"Nothing," I said.

I tried to control myself. I tried to get my brain in focus. I felt embarrassed. I was not acting quite right and I knew it.

"You act funny," said Hara.

"Nothing's the matter with me!" I said. "For Christ's sake."

Hara sat back slowly. Still he looked at me.

Suddenly I couldn't stand it any longer. Something was wrong here. Something was wrong with my geography. I didn't quite know where I was. I jumped to my feet and went to the window.

On the other side of the bumpy, unfinished airfield I

could see the edge of the uncleared Indiana oak scrub, lying like a foggy, unlighted shore.

That was right. That was how it should be. Or was it how it should be?

I looked around for the clock. I couldn't quite make it out. It was six-thirty or twenty after four.

"What time is it?" I said.

"Six-thirty," said Hara. "Or twenty after four."

"Where am I?" I said. I couldn't help it. The words just came out of their own volition.

Hara looked at me fixedly for a moment. Then he rose and came towards me and took me by the shoulders.

"You'd better sit down," he said.

"I'm all right!" I said. "Leave me alone, will you? I just asked—" I hesitated. I groped. "What was it I asked?"

Hara frowned at me, puzzled.

"God damn it!" I said. "I can't think! I can't think! I—"

"Sit down," said Hara, quietly.

I sat down again by the stove. He resumed his seat across from me. Again he seemed eyeless in the light from below.

"Coca Cola!" I said.

"Coca Cola," said Hara.

"That was it," I said, "Coca Cola. My dream. What I was dreaming about when you woke me."

"You ought to take it easier," said Hara, gently. "You're cracking up."

"Oh, for God's sake!" I said. "No. It's just I woke up so fast and I got confused. Then that light from the stove. I remembered the Coca Cola sign in my dream—"

Hara was watching me intently. I was speaking very rapidly, and I tried to slow down and I couldn't. I even tried to stop speaking. I couldn't. I went right on.

"The Coca Cola sign," I said. "How the light came from just the same direction. Not only that, but how the light

was red, too, just like from the stove. And it was the light on somebody's face in my dream when they said there was no such thing as the commonwealth that made me remember I was only dreaming and how it was all right—"

"What is this commonwealth?" said Hara.

I found myself sitting rigid.

He leaned forward. He spoke persuasively, as to a drunk.

"That's the second time you've used that word," he said, smiling. "Now, come on. Tell me about it. You seem to be bothered."

He was obviously joking. I knew it in an instant. I tried to settle myself.

"Don't kid around," I said. I found my hands shaking. "I'm sorry. I don't know what's the matter with me. I seem to be on edge. Go easy on me. Don't joke."

"I wasn't joking," said Hara, soberly. "I want to know. What is this commonwealth?"

"Hara!" I said. "Cut it out!"

"I'm only asking," said Hara. "If you don't want to talk about it, don't."

I jumped to my feet.

"For the love of God, you were the one told me about the commonwealth! Quit sitting there—"

He was shaking his head very slowly. A cold, horrid little wind blew around my ankles.

"Hara," I said, softly.

"You really have been dreaming," said Hara.

"Hara," I said, "if you're joking, I'll kill you."

"I'm not joking," said Hara. And he seemed irritated.

Something wrenched inside me and almost threw me off my feet. I tried to shout at Hara. Nothing came out. I tried to reach for him. I couldn't move.

"Now, sit down," Hara was saying. "Sit down and take it easy. If this commonwealth thing is something you

dreamed about, all right. But tell me about it and get it out of your system."

"How can I tell you about it?" I managed to say. "You were the one told me!"

He shook his head back and forth in a regular tempo.

"Trans-Pecos!" I said. "George Davis! Trans-Pecos. Indian Pass. Hara, for God's sake, think! Participation—"

"You've been dreaming," he said, very softly. "Brother, have you been dreaming—"

"Work-ownership," I said, and I couldn't stop, and I'd lost entirely the control over my voice. "Work-ownership and the commonwealth. The right of a man to own as he works—"

My voice got fainter and fainter in my own ears.

I had been dreaming. I had been dreaming. The whole commonwealth story. I had dreamed the whole commonwealth story.

Hara was looking at me sadly.

I covered my face.

I heard Hara light a cigarette.

I looked up.

Hara had turned in his chair. His head was bent towards the red isinglass window in the stove. The light came on his face, full front. And I saw that it had been no illusion. Hara had no eyes.

I backed away. Something crumbled in my brain.

"Where am I?" I managed to say.

I turned, fell towards the window, looked out. It was black dark.

I turned back towards Hara and the stove. He had disappeared. The red isinglass window had disappeared. There was only darkness, like a bag around my head.

"Hara!" I yelled.

A wind flapped my coat around my legs. I could smell the smell of hollowness. A hollow cave, a hollow log, a hollow tomb. I took a wavering step and I could feel the grind of earth under my feet.

"Hara! Hara!"

I was yelling again and my voice carried no echo. I had been here before. Where I was I didn't know, but I had been here before.

The white cone of a flashlight beam came on. It was far away, perhaps three yards, perhaps a hundred. I tried to run towards it and I stumbled on something.

"Keep away from the wall," came Hara's voice. "There's junk lying around. Keep away from the wall."

The flashlight beam went out.

I tried to cry out again. I couldn't. I tried to remember where the light had been. I couldn't remember. I flailed around in the darkness. I had the overpowering sense of objects close to me. I tried to back away. I tried to turn and run. I could feel myself losing my balance. I staggered, leaned on the empty air. I fell.

I picked myself up and I fell down again.

"Fool! Fool!" I heard a voice cry. "Why do you try to stand up? Stay on all fours!"

I tried to stand again, and again the earth struck me. I tried again and again. The earth hammered me, jolted me.

Voices in the darkness were laughing.

"Stay on all fours, you fool! That's where you belong!"

I tried to stay down. I tried but I couldn't. I struggled to my feet again, and again the earth smashed against me.

"Get up!" said my mother. "Stand up! Stop sniveling! It's God's will! We all have our cross to bear!"

I couldn't get farther than my knees. I was groggy, dizzy, sick at my stomach. The unseen earth reeled like the sea.

"We find dead birds in here," I could hear Hara saying. "They fly around for a while bumping into things. Then they starve to death. We find them all the time."

"Get me out of here," I could hear myself whimpering. "Get me out of here. Get me out of here."

There was a howl of laughter in the darkness.

I tried to stand once more.

"There are two forms of ownership," said my mother. "Property ownership and state ownership. That's all. Stop sniveling. It's God's will. Two forms of ownership."

The earth rose up and struck me in the chest.

"Storms and high winds at this end," said Hara. "Fair and warmer at the other. We'll supply the whole East Central market."

I was trying, trying, trying to get up. I could still hear the laughing.

"If you want political freedom," said my mother, "then you can't have economic justice. And if you want economic justice, then you can't have political freedom."

"No, no, no," I said, and somehow I reached my feet. "The commonwealth, the commonwealth—"

"Dreaming, dreaming, dreaming, dreaming!" shouted the voices, close to my face.

And I fell. I fell one last time, and I lay on my face and wept into the dirt.

"Rabbits, too," said Hara. "They get built in." His voice drew farther and farther away. "Rabbits. Everything gets built in. They fly around for a while bumping into things—"

His voice kept on murmuring but it was too far away and I couldn't hear the words any more.

How long I lay on my face I don't know. I recall a murmuring sound, that may have been Hara's voice or may

have been surf on a Pacific beach. I recall a sense of sinking, sinking, sinking, like that of a heavy body seeking the ocean floor.

And then an odd thing happened.

I woke up.

I woke up. The sun, half a diameter above the eastern horizon, flooded my room with golden light.

I lay face down on my bed. I didn't move for a very long time. I had not the least notion as to whether I was sleeping or waking.

Then slowly I sat up. I distrusted my senses as one might a kissing Judas.

I felt my face carefully. I closed my eyes and touched the lids. I opened my eyes again.

My room. My hotel room, glowing with yellow sunlight. My old-fashioned rocking chair beside the window. The clean, faded lace curtains. The ceiling fan. The bureau, battered at the corners, with my tie hanging over the edge of the mirror.

Was it possible? Had I only now waked up? Had I dreamed that the commonwealth was itself a dream? Or was I tricking myself now? Was I dreaming now that I was awake?

By the head of my bed was a telephone table. On the table stood an empty beer bottle. I stared at the beer bottle. Last night. The party on the hotel roof. I closed my eyes again and touched the lids.

And when I opened my eyes I saw that under the bottle was a sheet of writing paper. I snatched up the bottle and grasped the paper.

It was a note, in pencil.

*Won't see you in the morning. Stayed up too late. Dropped by but you were sleeping, didn't want to wake you.*

*Nothing to say anyway except the commonwealth can win.  
Good luck. See you sometime.*

*Hara*

I crumpled the paper in my hand, slid off the bed, and staggered giddily to the window.

Outside were the tops of the locust trees, the yellow brush-spotted Texas plain, the round red ramparts of the Davis Mountains, the clear green Texas morning sky.

The commonwealth was no dream.

Men could possess their own lives.

No dream. No illusion.

Men could own their own lives. By one means, by another means, men could and would come to possess their own lives and be free.

I was awake.

I blew on the beer bottle and it whistled like a ship at sea.

It was two months after Youngstown.

At Wheeling, West Virginia, the Ohio valley was an empty place. It was empty like a silent midnight street, a planeless airport, a trainless freightyard. Here was a plant closed by bankruptcy, there one closed because no one came to work. Strikes were but the dandruff in a dying man's scalp.

In a walnut-paneled office in a red stone bank, a man with silvery hair looked quietly through a pile of papers. He was quite alone in his office and quite alone in the whole red prison-like structure with its barred windows and its bronze door with the sign that said, Closed. He looked through the papers for quite a while, not as a man searches with the desire to find something, but as a man

looks about who has given up all hope of discovery. After perhaps an hour the man with the silvery hair opened a drawer in his walnut desk and took out a heavy service pistol, a relic of the first World War. He then placed it in a position aimed somewhat above his right ear and blew his brains into a convenient waste basket where they might less literally and less messily have been deposited some years before.

In a side street below the commercial part of town, farmers were trading apples, corn, and smoked hams for flat-irons, parlor curtains, and miscellaneous kitchen utensils.

In a barren office with yellow oak desks at one of the mills, a middle-aged man with puffy cheeks who had been the general manager was writing his resignation to the main office in Pittsburgh. But since the corporation was in bankruptcy, and the main office was temporarily closed, and no interests had yet arisen to bid for the corporation's physical properties, the middle-aged man with the puffy cheeks was addressing his somewhat unnecessary resignation to a somewhat unknown god. And he seemed depressingly aware of the overall futility of his self-appointed task. Still he pressed on, driven by forces he could not reckon, and he wiped his eyes that suffered from the bad afternoon light, and he flexed his heavy wrist that suffered from writer's cramp, and he recalled a lifetime's devotion to the company's interests.

In a garish motion picture theater, closed by the involuntary bankruptcy of the theater chain that owned it, a union meeting was in progress. Except for a few empty rows at the back of the long balcony, all seats were filled by the millworkers. An assortment of golden cherubs, plaster-of-Paris elephant heads, and flat-eyed Oriental goddesses looked down on the union meeting even as they had looked down on a generation of film-goers.

The ventilating system wasn't working. The air, due to the water shortage in Wheeling and the resultant lack of bathing facilities, was all but unbreathable. But there was something in the air besides stench.

On the stage three men faced the crowd. One was the local president. He was seated. The second, also seated, was a stocky man from Youngstown, Ohio, with a powerful neck that encouraged the points of his collar to stick out like the tail of an airplane, and powerful arms that decreed a six-inch no man's land between his wrist and his coat sleeve. The Youngstown man kept moving his weight restlessly on his chair as he listened to the speaker.

The speaker, the third man, was the representative from international headquarters in Washington. There was something tired about him that you could sense in the back row. The way he held his shoulders and revolved the right one now and again as if it had a cramp. The way his eyes avoided the lights. The way his voice came, husky and worn, as if he'd been speaking for a thousand hours, from a thousand different platforms.

"What more can I tell you?" he was saying. "You fellows know what's at stake. Your union. You know that a vote for the commonwealth means the end of your union.

"Believe me, men, I know this country's in a hell of a shape. I know something's got to be done and done fast. And when I say, stick with your leaders in Washington, I don't claim I know what they're going to do. I just say—" He hesitated. He knew he wasn't making a very good speech. Somehow the old fire, the old spell-binding touch wasn't there. He went on, lamely. "I just say, they've stuck by you before. Stick by them now.

"And they have stuck by you!" he said, his tired voice rising. "Think back, will you? How many of you can remember the twelve-hour day? The seven-day week? There

must be plenty of you out there can remember. It was your union—your union that you made yourselves with your sacrifice and your bloody heads—it was your union alone that made you a decent life. Are you going to walk out on it now?”

His moment of fire passed. It was one thing to talk about what the union had been and what it had done; it was another to say what it would do now. Not that he wasn't loyal, himself. He believed in the union; he'd served it for thirty-five years, ever since the First World War. But things used to be so clear, and now they weren't clear any more. Doubts were like blasphemy; he wouldn't phrase them, even to himself. Still—he had doubts. And that was why the old fire didn't come any more; or when it did come, it burned only for the good old days. Still he had to speak. He had to go on. He was union. He was loyal.

“All I can tell you is, this isn't any time for experiments. The commonwealth'll dissolve your union. Then what if the commonwealth doesn't work?

“I'm telling you, your only hope's the hope you've always had. Your union. This is a time for political action. And you'll get it. Your leaders are with you. I swear to you, they're with you. Stick with them.”

He sat down. There was mild applause. And then the stocky man from Youngstown with the collar like the tail of a plane bounced to his feet and the mild applause turned into a roaring ovation. He waved his hands impatiently.

“You guys,” he said. “You guys!” The racket died down. But the man from Washington, sitting with his chin in his hands, had heard the ovation and he knew how things stood in Wheeling, and he didn't listen to the man from Youngstown but tried to remember where he was scheduled to speak the next day. And he couldn't quite remember.

“I'm no speaker,” the Youngstown man was saying. “I

just came over because some of you fellows knew me and you asked me to come over because I worked in a commonwealth. All right. And now I'm here I'm glad I came.

"I listened to your fellow from Washington and I'm not going to pass any insults. He's a good guy. My old man and him was friends."

The old haggard man heard the words and looked up.

"Patsy Gorman," said the man from Youngstown.

The man from Washington nodded and looked down at his shoes. Patsy Gorman. He'd forgotten Patsy. They went through the Pittsburgh strike together, in 1919.

"My old man and him was friends," the Youngstown man went on, to the crowd again, "and I hope we can all stay friends. But, for Christ's sake, you guys, when he says political action, you know what he means!

"Political action! And he says that's how to save your union. You guys, you and me, we were the guys fought in the last war. We were the guys fought our way into places where they'd took a try at political action. Did we find any unions in Italy? Did we find any in Germany? Did we?"

There was a mutter in the crowd, but the haggard man from Washington just looked at his shoes and thought about the old days.

"Don't let him tell you Washington's going to save your union. Washington won't! I'm telling you! You got your choice between no union and the commonwealth and being your own boss—and no union and Washington and work like they tell you and take what they give you!"

There was a boo from the crowd. A hot excitement began to rise, and the air got worse.

"I said I'm glad I came. And I am. I'm not trying to do you guys any favor. I'm worrying about myself. If that guy gets his way with you, he gets his way with me!

"Jesus Christ! I work in a commonwealth. And I'm tell-

ing you I got something to lose! The first time in my life, I feel like a frigging man! The first time in my life. . ."

The Youngstown man went on speaking, and the hot excitement kept on rising from the audience like waves from a hot pavement on a summer's day.

But the weary international representative from Washington wasn't listening. He was smiling to himself, just a little, and his mind was far away. He was thinking about Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in 1922. The joy and the triumph, and the woman he'd never seen before who ran out of a meat market and kissed him, and the backroom of Kilpatrick's saloon, and the old gang. What had happened to Joe Stevenson, Petey Briggs, Dago Marsala, John Sweeney? What a time they'd had. Were they all gone by now?

The man from Washington leaned over and picked up his hat from the floor. And while the Youngstown man went on speaking, the man from Washington rose, very quietly, and left the stage. No one paid any attention.

On the street, he got out his notebook and found that he was due next in Fairmount, West Virginia. And he got in his car and drove away.

At the mill, the puffy-cheeked general manager went on struggling with his letter of resignation. On a side street a farmer traded half a bushel of potatoes for a five-gallon tin of gasoline. In the red sandstone bank building the remains of a leading citizen still dripped into a waste basket. And all up and down the empty Ohio valley, from Pittsburgh to Portsmouth, was the stale sweet smell of bankruptcy, and the mist rising from the river.

The Chamber of Commerce sang no glad songs at luncheon. It adjourned after a show of hands, and the executive

committee retired to an inner room to await the mayor's friend.

The mayor's friend was the political boss not only of Kansas City but of the whole state of Missouri. He was corrupt, cynical, ruthless, shrewd.

When he arrived he was wearing a large light-colored Stetson, a blue suit, and tan shoes. He looked about at the inhabitants of the inner room and took out a stick of gum and sat down and started chewing. The executive committee presented its demands: immediate suppression of freedom of assembly, a nine o'clock curfew, confiscation of all printing presses not in the hands of the major newspapers, postponement of the November elections, and the instant dismissal of those public officials and police officers whose names appeared on a rather lengthy list in the hands of the chairman.

The friend of the mayor took the list and looked at it for a while and there was a silence and then he put it to one side and said:

"Gentlemen. Maybe you know what you're doing. Maybe you don't. I think I know what I'm doing. The answer is no.

"Why? Why even ask. You're broke. That's why," he added.

The chairman of the executive committee turned a color somewhat darker than a parsnip, somewhat lighter than a turnip.

"We made you, Foley, and we can break you," said the chairman after a while.

"You couldn't break a gingersnap," said Foley, and he chewed his gum.

"You rotten dog," said a lean man with protruding yellow teeth, "after all we've done for you."

"What, for instance?" said Foley. "You've done me favors, I've done you favors. Services rendered. That's all. We've done business. Now you're broke. We can't do any more business."

"You rotten dog," said the lean man.

"You don't seem like a very good business man," said Foley amiably to the lean man. "How many times did you ever deliver those combines to farmers that couldn't pay for them? I'm delivering no votes to people that can't pay for them."

"There's such a thing as credit," said a red-faced miller.

"Not with you guys," said Foley. "Your credit is no good. Your credit is sour. Your credit is Z-minus."

There was quite a silence. Then the chairman said quietly:

"Nobody's asking you to deliver the vote, Foley. We're asking you to look after your own interests. We're asking you to see that there isn't any vote. A vote these days isn't going to do us any good, and it won't do you any good. You don't have to do us a favor. You might do yourself a favor and use your head."

"I'm doing myself a favor," said Foley. "I'm using my head."

"What is it you want?" said the man with yellow teeth. "Go ahead! Name your price."

There was another of those long silences and Foley chewed his gum and looked at the floor. Then he sighed.

"You guys are so naive," he said. And he grinned. "When will you get it through your heads you're broke?"

He looked around at all of them and now the chairman's face was definitely the color of a parsnip. Foley rose, very slowly, and he took out his gum and put it in an ashtray. He smiled almost wonderingly.

"You guys," he said, "you're not only broke, you're out-

numbered. Or isn't that something you ever thought about, being outnumbered? Maybe I got the advantage on you. Maybe I got more experience. I spent a lifetime in politics seeing how I don't get outnumbered." He glanced at the chairman. "That's my interest. That's what I'm looking out for now."

"Frankie!" said the mayor, guessing what his friend was about to say. The mayor sounded a little bit sick.

"That's right," said the mayor's friend insolently, "I'm for the commonwealth."

"Are you insane?" said the chairman, coming up out of his chair like a cloud of grey smoke.

Foley shook his head and chuckled.

"It's suicidal!" said the mayor.

"I know more about suicide than you do," said Foley. "I been in politics longer. I seen more cases."

The mayor sagged. The chairman sank back into his chair. The red-faced miller stared at his knees. The man with yellow teeth played with his mouth. Foley looked out the window thoughtfully at the hills, and the office buildings perched about like herons, and the Missouri River down below town. And after a while he said:

"You see, it's like I said, you guys don't understand about being outnumbered. I got to, on account of with me it's living or dying. It's walking around on my own two feet, or it's flushing down the toilet. Politics is my business, like running a bank's your business, or milling flour.

"Let me say it like this: You can't run Kansas City, or the state of Missouri, or the U.S.A., unless you got the numbers.

"I don't care you got them in the ballot box or in the street yelling for you or you buy them or you steal them or how you got them. But you got to have the numbers.

"You think all you got to do to suspend the right of

habeas corpus is suspend it. All you got to do to break up a crowd is break it up. All you got to do to pass up an election is pass it up.

"It ain't so. I'm telling you. This is my business. I know my business.

"When you got a country that's been filing into the election booths for a hundred and fifty years regular— When you got people with the right to bear arms that've been shooting ducks every fall down the Missouri bottom lands since they was kids— When you got folks that'll knock you clean out into the gutter if you come into their houses and you ain't asked, and that hates cops— You guys. I'm telling you. You got to have the numbers.

"That's all. I don't know about other countries, I never was there. It don't matter. This is the U. S. A. And I know you can have one-party government or send Congress home or fix all the newspapers or do what you want—if you got the numbers. But if you haven't, you can't. And you guys haven't. You're not only broke, you're outnumbered. Which is why your credit is no good."

Foley picked up his light buff-colored Stetson hat and thoughtfully twirled it on his hand for a moment. Then he put his hat on and grinned cheerfully.

"I'm for the commonwealth, fellas. Red, white and blue. Maybe there's something in it for me, maybe there ain't; I've took chances before, I can take 'em again. But I know suicide when I see it, and I was never one for cutting my own throat.

"So long, you guys. I'll see you get a Christian burial."

The canary-yellow plane settled down from the sky over the neat chessboard that was Chicago. The plane slid into

the airport, and before it had come to a stop attendants at the airport, who recognized the plane, were on their way to it with a rolling exit ramp.

The door of the plane was flung open and an elderly man stood screaming and cursing at the attendants because the ramp wasn't ready sooner. The attendants didn't even mutter among themselves. They just hurried.

The elderly man came down the ramp. The sole owner of one of the richest newspapers in America, he was an odd and fascinating figure. Under his open coat he wore a canary-yellow sports shirt that exactly matched his plane. His eyes seemed congenitally bloodshot, his teeth congenitally bared. He moved, not in the steady fashion that is considered human, but in a curious succession of lunges. The most striking feature about him, however, was his complexion. Chicagoans could remember when his face had been a normal and continual red. Then, as he grew older, his skin took on a waxy finish. Now he spent most of his time on the beach at Hawaii, and the Islands' sun had tanned his red face deeper and deeper, and had hardened the waxy finish until it could all but reflect light.

The elderly man resembled, like no other man in America, a high-grade, highly-polished wooden Indian. He lacked only its dignity.

Leaving the ramp now, he lunged into a waiting car. The car had no rear windows, just solid bullet-proof steel plate all around. The wooden Indian settled back in his armored nest and closed his bloodshot eyes with an effort. The car pulled out of the airport. The attendants relaxed, but didn't look at each other. They were always a little ashamed of their dog-like servility in the presence of the great man, but never could they do anything about it.

The car, ignoring all traffic lights, cut across Chicago's slum-pinched Southwest Side. The wooden Indian moved

only once, and then to lean forward and spit out a window. Even when the car entered the Loop and emerged on La Salle Street, the great man refused to look out; even though the street was largely his, and he'd been away for long.

The instant, however, that the car stopped beside the river before the great squat castle that had been his fortress, the wooden Indian lunged to the sidewalk. Here he hesitated only long enough for his chauffeur and bodyguard to range themselves on his either side, and then cursing them for their slowness, he plunged into his fortress.

On the main floor a private policeman saw him enter, and snatched up a telephone.

A messenger from the city room saw the varnished mask of a face and likewise ducked for a telephone.

A young reporter, just entering the building, saw who was preceding him, felt a sinking sensation in his bowels, turned, and went to a saloon.

The elevator operator recognized his passenger, trembled, and almost forgot the first rule of elevator operation in the newspaper building: that when the wooden Indian entered, all other passengers must be disregarded and the elevator be taken directly to the twenty-first floor. He remembered in time, however, and paying no attention to those passengers who complained as their floors were passed, he deposited his master at the proper floor.

The wooden Indian, emerging from the elevator, left his escort in an outer office and lunged without knocking through a heavy oak door and slammed it behind him.

The inner office was that of his editor.

It was a rich room, long and wide, hung with tapestries. There was a deep wine-colored rug. Leaded windows looked out on the river, and the city's towers, and the flat blue lake. Before the windows was a broad, hand-carved

oaken desk with telephones standing about on it like little black men.

Behind the telephones sat a neat, unsmiling man about fifty-five years old. He wore a very high stiff collar and pince-nez, and he had a very long distinguished nose. He was the editor of the paper, and he was very pale.

The wooden Indian, who owned the editor as well as the newspaper, did not take off his coat or his hat or his gloves. He went straight to the desk and bent over it and looked down with his bloodshot eyes at the pale unsmiling man in the white collar.

"You son of a bitch," said the wooden Indian.

The pale man said nothing. He didn't move. He just looked up steadily at the red eyes that bulged from the stiff mahogany face. If the pale man was thinking something, he didn't show it.

The wooden Indian picked up one of the telephones and shouted into it:

"Stop all presses!"

Then he slammed down the phone and he turned again on his editor and he said:

"Get out of here, you frigging bastard, before I kill you."

The pale, unsmiling man rose very quietly and went to a closet and got out his old-fashioned velvet-collared overcoat and his derby hat. He put them on. He got out his cane and hung it on his arm. His publisher, watching him, opened his own coat and you could see the canary-yellow sports shirt underneath. The veins in his neck bulged over the yellow collar.

"You son of a bitch," he said. And he said it again, over and over.

The pale man, ready to leave, still for a moment said nothing. But he looked at his publisher steadily, and he adjusted his pince-nez, and he touched his neat black tie with

the dignified little white figures. And at last he cleared his throat and said:

"It's been a pleasure, sir. I hate you. I hate your paper. All the years I've edited your paper and I regret every moment of it. All but the last moments. Now I've wrecked your paper and I think I've wrecked you. And it's been a pleasure."

The wooden Indian stiffened and you could hear his wheezy breath, and blood seemed to rush to his already bloodshot eyes. And the unsmiling man began to smile, as if the sight of agony was his dearest treasure. He touched his high white collar and his voice came low and grateful.

"I know," he said, "you paid me fifty thousand dollars a year to run your paper. It was very good money. And in the end, I was the traitor within the gates. I was Benedict Arnold. I can only repeat, it's been a pleasure."

"You son of a bitch," said the wooden Indian. "You frigging son of a bitch."

The pale, unsmiling man was again unsmiling. He seemed to meditate for a moment, then he moved to the heavy oak door and locked it and put the key in his pocket. The wooden Indian watched him closely. The editor turned from the door, shifted his cane from his arm to his hand, and adjusted his pince-nez.

"How long have I allowed you to call me whatever obscene names you chose?" he said, very quietly. "How long have I allowed you to enter my office without knocking? How long has my wife had to tolerate the insults of your wife? Not only of your wife, but of your whores? While my wife got old and bitter and hating, and could answer no word, because you paid me fifty thousand dollars a year. How long has it been?"

The pale man's hand closed on his cane. The wooden Indian stared at the cane and lifted his arm just a little. But

his editor made no move and went on speaking, evenly, low.

"A lifetime of association with you and your newspaper," he said, "has reduced me to the status of a horse turd. I repeat, sir, a horse turd. I have told your lies. I have assassinated the characters of Presidents and Kings, decent women, glorious men. I have turned our nation against its friends, promoted war, and hatred, and distrust among men. If ever there was decency upon this earth, then I am one who has helped destroy it. Because you paid me fifty thousand dollars a year."

The owner's hand lunged across the desk towards a push-button. The cane flashed in the light from the windows and there was a sharp cracking sound as it struck down on the gloved fingers. The publisher gasped and his face turned a strange bleached purple and he sank into the chair behind the desk, doubled over his hand.

The unsmiling editor in the high white collar kept right on talking.

"I have been your property, just as this newspaper and this community have been your property. I've seen myself degraded, as I've seen five million souls degraded. By you. By you. By you and your evil and your wealth and your inheritance of power and hate and lust and stupidity—"

The publisher's good hand groped for a telephone. The editor's cane flashed again and struck the publisher full in the face just below the bloodshot eyes. The wooden Indian made a choking sound and clutched at his nose, and blood flooded his chin and his canary-yellow sports shirt.

"My wife is dead," said the unsmiling man and now his voice crept higher and thinner. "She died last week, of the natural cause of being married to a horse turd. To the horse turd, sir, that you made of me."

He struck the publisher again, on the side of the head,

and the publisher slipped out of his chair to the floor and moaning and bleeding tried to crawl away beyond the desk. The white unsmiling man followed him, and now he was shaking so violently that when the cane touched the oaken desk it rattled.

"I stood in the rain at Graceland Cemetery and I saw my wife buried. I saw the earth swallow her thin bitter body, then up from her grave came a face. A face. Your face!"

He slashed at the mahogany face like the conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra beating time at Orchestra Hall. The publisher moaned and moaned and tried to turn his face into the carpet.

"Your face, in the rain, shouting into my face! I came back to the office and here were your cables from Hawaii, threatening me, reviling me—"

The editor's voice had risen till it sang as shrill as a lake wind in the leaded casements. His pince-nez dropped off his long nose and he stepped on them without noticing.

"I had to destroy you and I did! I printed the commonwealth stories!"

He flung the cane at the publisher's shaking body. Tears streamed down the editor's slim white cheeks. He raised his arms in exaltation.

"I broke this town wide open! I put out a paper that'll live forever as a landmark in journalism! The commonwealth! Once in my life I could write with love, and passion, and hope! Once in my life I could do a noble thing, and I did that thing!"

The editor's voice broke in a frenzied sob, and there were no words left in him. Only a phrase, over and over, all that was left:

"I broke this town wide open. I broke this town wide open."

He cried into his hands. On the floor the publisher lay

moaning softly like a broken wooden image in a mess of blood and teeth. After a while the editor stopped sobbing and his hands drifted about empty and his eyes without their glasses were myopic and groping. And he took a very deep breath.

"I'm lying," he said. "I didn't do it for hope or anything. I didn't do any noble thing. I did it to destroy you. And I've destroyed you. Like you destroyed me long ago."

Slowly he stooped down and picked up his derby hat and put it on. He glanced at his publisher again, but there was no pleasure now and no passion; only a weary shame. Then he found that his glasses were gone and he crouched down and felt about in the deep carpet and touched the fragments.

He rose. He went slowly to the windows and looked out at the flat blue lake, and the formal pattern of the lake-front park, and the Art Institute in the distance. Without his glasses it was all a blue and pale-brown haze. He was sorry. He had sat in this office so long and looked out through these leaded panes, and for all his hatred he had, in a curious, mystic way, loved Chicago. He was sorry he could not see it now.

His slim white hands moved gently across the old-fashioned velvet collar on his old-fashioned coat. He touched his neat black tie with the dignified little white figures. Then he opened a casement and holding his derby hat tight to his head he stepped out into windy flailing unbreathable space.

The wooden Indian moaned on the floor. One of the telephones that stood on the broad oaken desk like little black men came to life and rang. And rang.

There was nothing inevitable about the commonwealth revolution.

I remember one of the things Karnes said, when he spoke to the New York garment workers' union:

"We Americans, for decades, have consistently refused to inspect the economic foundations of our society. With what result?"

With the result that we find ourselves now, in crisis, totally unprepared."

It's true that once started the commonwealth revolution spread with a kind of slow, irresistible urge, like a barrel of spilled molasses. Ownership was bankrupt and essentially helpless. Ownership's traditional defenders chose, one by one and for varying human reasons, no longer to defend it. Men like the Youngstown minister found new and higher faith outside the walls. Men like the labor leader at Wheeling found their old faith gone, and with it their powers. Men like the political boss of Kansas City found one side of their bread somewhat lacking in butter and so quite logically took a chance on the other side. Men like the Chicago editor found themselves in the grip of old passions unleashed.

Through a thousand thousand channels, like rainwater seeking the sea, the commonwealth revolution once begun moved methodically to its vast conclusion.

But there was nothing in the books that said it had to begin.

We entered a crisis. It was a crisis long in the making and easily foretold. Yet we entered it unprepared. In the midst of the crisis we found a solution, waiting and demonstrated. But had our crisis of national bankruptcy occurred just a year or two earlier, or had the Davis brothers gone to work on their commonwealth just a year or two later, there would have existed on the world horizon no alternative to capital ownership but statism, government monop-

oly, political dictatorship, and an end to the freedom experiment.

This was the extent of the commonwealth revolution's inevitability.

And this was the extent of the risk that we undertook when we refused to inspect our nation's order: That two brothers, down on the Texas coast, should preferably not die in infancy. And that they must never be late to work.

Well, we accepted the risk. And in the nick of time, like the U. S. Cavalry in an oldtime western film, the commonwealth idea swept out of the nowhere of the American West to storm the national scene and amid scattered shots and bugling and shouts of glory to rescue a civilization from the running clutch of death.

There is a theory that God takes care of sleepwalkers, drunks, and Americans. While the coming of the commonwealth did nothing to discredit this social philosophy, still I wonder how many of us, at the close of the Second World War, would knowingly have entrusted the lives of our children to a future dependent on such a specialized salvation.

And even granting that such salvation did come, and that Americans, along with the drunks and the sleepwalkers, contained something within them that inhibited the last step over the precipice's edge; granting that in the eleventh hour social vision would be born on this continent from an approximately immaculate conception—did we have to do it the hard way?

I remember the palmetto thickets along the Gulf Coast and the ruddy nights on Central Avenue. I remember an oil storage tank blossoming like a flower in West Kansas and the dead hogs that littered the road. I remember a mechanic at an airport in Texas flinging a heavy Stilson wrench into the face of his supervisor, and I watch again the drip of gasoline from an airplane wing.

I hear, once again, Karnes speaking on that hot and humid September night in New York:

"Why didn't we examine, with honesty and integrity, the conditions of our economic order at some date in the past when change might have forestalled the horrors of our times?"

Why didn't we?

I've heard men argue, "Yes. But that's like deploring the horrors of surgery before the discovery of anesthetics. The commonwealth hadn't been invented yet."

It is easy to defend one's own mediocrity by acclaiming distinction as the reward for genius.

The commonwealth was a distinguished product of common sense and mine-run American ingenuity. But there was more creative genius packed away in a fifteen-hundred-dollar Buick car than in all of George Davis' social invention. And even as there was nothing extraordinary about the commonwealth, similarly there was nothing unique. It was a better mousetrap. But dozens upon dozens of still better mousetraps have appeared since the commonwealth revolution. And any of them might have appeared earlier.

It is very possible that the miracle of the commonwealth revolution lay not in its appearance at the last possible moment. Perhaps the miracle was that it had not appeared before.

Well, for all our ingenuity it had not appeared before. And we accepted our risk and the horrors of our times, and we were lucky. The revolution by consent progressed. The American imagination caught fire. We plunged into social invention with the unholy zeal that we once reserved for the internal combustion engine. What a people. New hopes, new heroes; new dreams beyond reckoning, new follies, new songs of glory, new skulls on the desert, new adventures in the foothills of a better world.

I hope the God that looks after the drunks and the sleep-walkers sticks around. We may need Him again some day.

City folks were making their annual pilgrimage into New England to see the woods in autumnal bloom, and it was worth it. In russet fields the sumac stood like deep-piled blood-red carpets. In the woods stone fences, boundaries of forgotten fields, lay twined with woodbine and poison ivy. And the long low heaps looked like fruit in a store: cranberries and oranges.

Yellow were the birches and the hickory trees; golden the beeches. Purple were the ashes, deep maroon the oak trees, scarlet and chartreuse the maples.

And over the boulders and the naked granite and the mighty debris of forgotten glaciers lay the deepening mantle of summer's sweet brown rubbish.

The Connecticut River milltowns were busy again. Chimneys belched, trucks thundered, traffic snarled. Women and children packed the sidewalks and the crossings of the neon-brightened shopping streets. Smoke lay in the valley, and the smoke smelled of work and good times.

Just beyond the town I swung away from the concrete highway and followed a macadam road that wound like a black-snake up out of the valley into the gay New England jungle.

It was late afternoon. There was mist in the air. The black road glistened.

On the high ridge, the great iron gates stood open. The sign that spoke of private property and fittingly warned all trespassers had come loose at one end and hung askew. No gatekeeper appeared from the lodge. I drove onto the grounds, following the crunching gravel road past the

ghost-grey beech groves, past the gardens and the dead wet weeds.

The Tudor mansion was silent. The lawn was ragged. A single car stood by the garage. Grass poked up between the flagstones on the terrace and leaves lay all about. I thumped at the brass knocker and my heart genuflected. The gods may be somewhat the worse for wear, but the heart out of habit still dips.

I was expected. An antique butler ushered me into an antique shadowy study.

And here I waited for the abdicated king of copper.

There was a single soft-shaded lamp burning over a chessboard and scattered chessmen and a single chair. The fallen king had been playing chess with himself.

There were books all about on the open shelves. Dickens and Thackeray, Emerson and Flaubert, Tolstoy, Kipling. There were light-colored rectangles on the walls where paintings had once hung. One painting remained, at the end of the room, and it was a portrait by Gainsborough of a beautiful woman in a long satin gown.

The mist outside was turning to rain and I could see a few splashes on the narrow windows, and the afternoon and the room were sinking into deeper shadows. There was an odor about the study that I could not identify. It was part pipe-smoke, perhaps, part mothballs, part the fragrance of closed and ancient places. It made me remember my grandfather's den, and the house down in southern Illinois where I used to visit when I was a boy. I remembered the full-rigged ship in the bottle on the mantel, and the deep leather chair with its stuffing that was always sifting out, and the sword on the wall, and the rain on the roof, and the trumpet-vine outside the window, and my grandfather smoking his pipe. I listened now, to the rain in a gutter and I waited for the abdicated king of copper; and I wondered

what my grandfather would have thought of the commonwealth.

The king entered. He came in so softly I didn't hear his steps and when I started to rise he touched my shoulder and sat down without a word on the other side of the fire.

He was about seventy-five. His hair was thin and white and his mustache was only a shade darker. He held his head a little to one side, tilted as if in only one position could he find a degree of comfort. When he spoke, he spoke so gently that I had to lean forward to hear him. His hands were long and thin and there were deep smooth valleys between the tendons. He moved his fingers and his hands as he moved his body, very little and then very slowly and consciously. It was not as if motion came only with effort; it was as if, with continual effort, he denied motion.

I sat silent for quite a moment, just looking at him in the firelight. This quiet, gentle figure had been the commanding general in the battle against Trans-Pecos. His had been the strategy of suffocation. The brain that lay within this grey and tilted head had conceived a tactical plan that sent a counterfeiter and saboteurs to Indian Pass; that barred Trans-Pecos advertising from the mails as subversive; that subtly denied Trans-Pecos all but expensive materials and sought through apparent intrinsic failure to enforce bankruptcy on the one American hope. I remembered the broken pipe-lines, the lime in the acid, the wrecked trucks.

He took his eyes from the fire and looked at me very slowly and smiled just a little and said:

"I presume you have questions."

"Yes," I said. "I've prepared them as carefully as I can. The first is very simple: Why did you consent to see me?"

A humorous little glint crossed his eyes. Then he reached for a book on the table beside him. He held it up. I could

read the title from where I sat. It was Cardinal Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita Sua*.

"I doubt very much," I said, "that you feel the necessity of justifying your life. To me, anyway."

"Then you understand very little," he said. And he put the book back on the table. "When a man wins, he has nothing to explain. When he loses, he will make speeches to stray dogs, or the wind."

I blushed. He smiled briefly and looked back at the fire. The rain spattered on the windows. The birch logs crackled.

"I apologize," I said.

He nodded. "Go on with your questions."

"If you feel as you do," I said, "perhaps the first is enough."

He nodded, but he said nothing. I waited. After a while he leaned back very slowly.

"You were at Indian Pass," he said.

"Yes."

"I read some of your stories. They were quite undistinguished. You have no style."

"I'm a reporter."

"It's a poor excuse. Dickens had style. Gissing had style. Zola had style. They were reporters. You're like Upton Sinclair and Dos Passos and all the others, you have no style. Would you like some brandy?"

"Maybe I need some," I said, shaken.

He looked past me towards the door and I heard a creaking of joints behind me and the antique butler appeared and there was brandy. The fallen king nursed his brandy glass and inhaled its fragrance for a long while and then he said:

"I realize that my judgments and opinions in this new world have about them the authority and significance of a

Ming vase in the back room of some musty museum. They're collector's items."

I suddenly recognized the odor that I'd tried to define when I first entered this room. It was that of a museum. He went on, speaking quietly to the fire and the brandy:

"Some energetic people down in the valley, as you know, have assumed responsibility for my possessions and paid me a fraction of their value. It was rather a good deal, at that. I still have my house. Worse fates have befallen men.

"I mention this to assure you that I have no particular bitterness. I'm alone, but I enjoy loneliness. I have always enjoyed loneliness. And if I have about me any sorrow, it's not for myself or the past. I'm old. My sadness is for the future. My sadness is for others than myself.

"Let me say what I want to say: You and your kind have created a world that holds within itself no room for style. It may be a better world. I wouldn't know. It may be a wiser world, a safer world, a saner and perhaps more lasting world. But something's gone. And whatever it was, it was what I stood for.

"I fought for it. I defended it. If you were in Indian Pass then you know I fought a good fight. Not once did I descend to the boorish, unthinking levels that Washington and my managers demanded. And I think you'll agree that I lost only because I had to lose. None could have won. I have nothing to be ashamed of.

"What was it precisely that I defended? You say the rights of private property, the privileges of ownership. These are empty phrases. They have no human meaning.

"I say I defended style, and if this passes your comprehension so that I must explain further, it is only because you have no style yourself, or perhaps your vision is superficial.

"Style is the essence of greatness. It is the human expres-

sion of a superiority so real, so secure, so true, so poised, that it need struggle no further to prove itself.

"I, Darius, King of Kings . . ."

He spoke the phrase with such soft clarity, such simple grandeur, that I felt a tingling in my scalp. An echoing song of heroes gone seemed to rise from the shadows of the silent room. He smiled.

"That was style. No mortal man could have spoken those words had his heart been torn by struggle. . . . Insolence, arrogance, none at all. Only greatness and composure.

"Style is the calm of a beautiful woman. It is the leisure of a poet who knows his greatness. Where civilization flowers there you will find what I call style.

"And I can only say that I believe it to be the greatest human good. Without it, humanity returns to the muck and the rabble. Man becomes a weed without blossoms.

"And you cannot have style without tranquil power. And you cannot have such power without wealth and the security of position."

He fell silent. His eyes dwelt on the birch logs. He meditated, and it was true that in his meditation there seemed neither bitterness nor reproach, only a slow sad sorrow.

When he spoke again he didn't look at me. He was speaking to himself.

"I am an old man. I have lived through a time that has seen a rising and enveloping struggle for obscure values, and the decline of wealth and greatness. I have known through most of my life that a time would come that would mark the end of all I believed in. I have fought against that day. I have fought, not for myself, or my position, or what I myself possessed, but rather for the kind of a world wherein greatness and the mystery of greatness are possible.

"I fought to the end. A man could do no less. I fought for style, and I fought with style.

"I lost. And when I lost, a world was lost."

The fire hissed low. Rain splattered at the window and tumbled down the gutters. I could hear myself breathing. He shook his head slowly.

"Your world may be a better world. I wouldn't know. It isn't mine.

"Mine was the world of Washington, of Churchill, of Lee. Mine was a place of flashing swords, and distant drums, and couples waltzing. Its voice was the voice of Shakespeare, and Milton, and Molière. There were jewels in my world, and fine tobacco, and treasured women. There was darkness in my world. There was night as well as day. And the darkness existed, like the black of velvet, to display the jewels the better.

"The waltz is gone. If you and your kind can play a better music, then play. But I shall not listen."

He fell into silence and seemed to forget me. After a while he raised his eyes, and smiled just a little, and said:

"That is all."

I rose, thanked him. He proceeded to forget me again.

I glanced for one last time around the antique study. The books, the silver. The oblong patterns on the walls where paintings once had been. The Gainsborough of the beautiful woman in the long satin gown. The lonely chessboard with the single chair.

I left.

Deposited on the terrace by the antique butler, I turned up my collar against the rain. It was almost dark. Down in the valley the lights of the town glowed softly through the rain and the mist. The red of the neon-lighted shopping streets. The orange glare of the stacks above the mills.

"There was darkness in my world, and it existed, like the black of velvet, to display the jewels the better. . . ."

I looked up at the wet grey sky. I could hear the whisper of the rain in the leaves and the weeds.

A world was gone. Not style; not truly. But something. A magnificent intolerance, a cruel and torturing mystery. Paradoxes superb and restless, clashes by night, brilliant and unjust beauty.

Something was gone. Something that rested on terror and injustice and insanity and frustration. Something, like the goblins of a fairy tale, that we should never see again. We were growing up, we human beings. And we were paying our price. There are things of beauty in the world of a child that cannot be carried on into man's estate.

I stirred. This world had not been his alone; it had been mine.

I got into my car. I drove away past the beech groves and the birches. My tires hissed on the wet black road. Worlds lost and worlds beginning.









