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STANFORD SHORT STORIES

Nineteen Fifty

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CLAY PUTMAN	HARRY MUHEIM
DONALD JUSTICE	C. W. PARKER
N. V. M. GONZALEZ	JEAN POWELL
MAXWELL ARNOLD	LESLIE SMITH
THOMAS DOYLE	ELIZABETH THOMPSON
ROBERT G. KELLY	MILTON WHITE
P. H. LOWREY	ELIZABETH WOLFE
JOHN A. LYNCH	PATRICIA ZELVER

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PREFACE

The eighteen stories which compose this volume have little in common except the fact that they were all written in classes at Stanford University. They are of every length up almost to the novelette, of every tone and approach and method except the slick, of many settings from California to the Philippines, Italy, and occupied Germany. The thirteen which have seen previous magazine publication have reached print in everything from little magazines and university quarterlies to *Harper's*, *New Republic*, *Tomorrow*, *Common Ground*, and *Seventeen*. Their authors are men and women, veterans and nonveterans, the young and the not-so-young, those in the normal stream of their schooling and those somewhat gingerly returning after a stretch outside.

Among the writers now congregated at Stanford, the war has obviously diminished in importance, both as a subject matter and as a common bond of experience and feeling. Though ten of the sixteen authors represented here are veterans, only four of the stories concern either the war or its aftermath. And the bond that before the war united three-quarters of the young men and women learning to write is not here either: only two of these stories deal with childhood, and one of those is a study so objective and cool, and of so strange a child, that it is certainly not to be taken as autobiographical revelation.

I think it a distinction among these stories that they do, predominantly, deal with adult themes and that when they deal with childhood they deal with it in adult ways. I think it a distinction that these sixteen writers have been able to maintain their individual points of view and their individual methods and that though they make up a group they make up a group with a lively variety. And I think it a final distinction that in spite of their intent and serious pursuit of excellence in an art they are so little tendentious, so little self-conscious, so little inclined to make their writing serve a pose. It is a considerable triumph in 1950 for a young writer to be himself without affectation, to follow his own

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way without trying to be an “original.” There is very little affectation in this book, but there is much sharp observation, much very real and cleanly communicated feeling, some humor, some bitterness, and a persistent honesty.

Those are enough to justify both admiration for the present accomplishment of these writers on the brink of their careers, and optimism about those careers in future.

WALLACE STEGNER

STANFORD UNIVERSITY
STANFORD, CALIFORNIA

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CLAY PUTMAN was born in Quapaw, Oklahoma, in 1924. He is a graduate of Stanford University and plans a career of writing and teaching. He is at present holder of a Stanford Creative Writing Fellowship. The story, "The Wounded," received first prize in the Edith Mirrielees Short Story Contest of 1949 and was first published in *Tomorrow*. Mr. Putman's stories have appeared in *Western Review*, *Tomorrow*, and *Stanford Short Stories*, 1948 and 1949.

. THE WOUNDED*

CLAY PUTMAN

It was morning and Lieutenant Colum awoke feeling something as impertinent as an elbow digging into his side, and he hoped that this was not going to be another of *those* mornings. He wanted to turn over to an expanse of clean sheet and to rise leisurely and dress himself in a familiar room. In a moment he would have to go out and stand before a rectangle of men still staggering with sleep and proclaim in a brusque voice (but with a nice tone of camaraderie) that all were either present or accounted for. A rhythm fixed itself in his mind, metallic and compelling, and above the rhythm there rose a fearful, sleep-reviling sound, and he found that this was quite a different morning after all. The sound was the shriek of a train whistle, and the rudeness against his side was the girl, and the girl was speaking to him. "I am almost recovered. I am almost well. Only my stomach, and not inside but the way it looks, you know. Put your hand there and see: that is always the first thing and the most difficult to lose, no matter how well one eats afterward—look at the children's little bellies, how swollen they are. There, that is so much better!

"Once I had a lovely little stomach, that was a long time ago when I had a contract with the UFA people and Herr Kolb made

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a film about Fraulein Elsbeth and her broom—"The Heroine of the Broom" it was called—you know she was the Mannheimer who kept her virtue during a war with the French; I really cannot say which war, but a very important one I assure you, and Herr Kolb gave me always the tightest dresses to wear. I played a convent girl who stabbed a French colonel of artillery during an orgy; I wore a hideous yellow thing, but it was only a very little part and the film was never finished, because the Italians capitulated and I was sent to work at an officers' laundry in Frankfurt. You are very strong and you have such nice wrists; I hate big wrists on a man, and big ankles. Yours are very nice; Herr Kolb had short legs which were pink and quite fat, like the balustrade around the opera house in Trenta. Pink marble, and there was a wonderful view of the river. He would come behind the girls and pinch our bottoms and throw back his head and laugh and his head jerked. And at the officers' laundry there were only bad things to eat and I pulled the wild onions that grew in the ditches, because I was hungry. Oh, my breath! It was like a goat's, you know. And my stomach began to stick out. So good. So nice. Put your arms around me. The belly grows as the flesh shrinks—does that not sound like a proverb? We Italians are said to be fond of proverbs, but I personally do not regard them.

"I think that we are an afflicted race. Proverbs and God; they are too much together, and all my life I have never been able to tell one from the other. Have you ever heard the tale of the man who carried his head between his legs? In my town they tell this. It is most tragic, having happened a long time ago: the man was born with his head between his legs, and he wore trousers, of course, to cover his nakedness. Everywhere he went he could not see, because his head was covered with his trousers, and there were a great many other complications which I cannot remember. But one day the priest stopped the man in his village—there was a festival, and jugglers, I believe—and the priest asked the man why he concealed his head. The man replied that it was for the sake of modesty. And the priest blessed the man and granted him

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permission to remove his trousers on holy days and on every third Sunday, for the things he concealed belonged to God

"I think that I would like to contain you wholly. We are like a poultice for each other and I can drain you as if you were a wound until I feel you motionless. You know when I sleep and dream we are doing this I am in a kind of rhythm which I can't explain, and I awake and try with my hands to find the same rhythm and it's like trying to remember a song you have heard a long time ago, in your youth. Is it strange to talk? There was an air raid once in Frankfurt and it lasted for four days, almost continually, and the people took their bedding down into the shelters—only there weren't enough for all, and they slept in the underground and in wine cellars, and I went and slept with an old woman in an eider-down comforter which smelled of her. There were babies there and old ones, and I began to think how curious it is that they smell so much alike, the old and the young: as if of a place which one has just left and the other is getting ready to enter. And the old woman would move her body close to me for the warmth, and she would lie there in the dark and talk. 'Only let me speak,' she said. 'You do not need to listen,' and she would press her old chin against my back and mumble and chatter.

"I am glad that things like that are done in the dark. I am glad that I am going home. I am glad for you, and for so many things. Oh, now! Now!"

"I love you."

"You don't have to say that."

"I love you now."

"Oh, yes! Yes, please!"

II

Lieutenant Colum heard the door of the compartment slide open, and he identified the Satyr's complicated voice, saw the little Italian's wattled face imposed against a flickering slice of scrubbed sky and sprawling clouds. He yawned, and it was pain-

ful, with an inrush of cold oxygenless air. The open door of the compartment framed a shifting landscape of barren hills under a glistening coat of hoarfrost.

"Good morning," said the Satyr. "The Captain is preparing coffee in his compartment."

And then the Captain's voice from the corridor: "Evander, my dress trousers are gone—my best pinks! And this guinea whoremaster says they can't have been stolen." The Captain stood in the doorway, his face screwed up like a petulant child's, and as he spoke he emitted one of his morning noises.

The Satyr blinked his lashless little eyes in the direction of the Captain, crossed himself elaborately, and said, "Ah, the matins have commenced: our day is begun. But what the Captain says is impossible, excuse me. No one has entered."

"I packed them myself, Evander," the Captain said, forlornly.

Lieutenant Colum dressed rapidly and brought the girl a cup of coffee which the Captain had prepared upon his spirit stove. The train had begun to climb during the night, he realized, and by late that evening they would have topped the pass that led down into Italy.

"What *am* I to do?"

"About what, Captain?"

"My trousers, Evander. I had so looked forward to appearing, this once, really well turned out. God damn them to hell, my boy—they go too far!"

Evander Colum breathed deeply of the raw air. The scene from the windows of the train was as pure and serene as one of those old lithographs which had used to hang in his father's room; everything too perfect, as if suspended against a luminous sky behind thick glass, pressed inward by gilt and heavy wood. Across the glazed fields and bending trees ran gleaming hills, clusters of roofs, and frozen outcropping shadows, and beyond these ran sky and clouds, clean and cold. The whistle shrieked as if it were already weary of the ascent, and the engine blew back cottony balls of pungent smoke.

He felt as if his night's passage over the mountains had erased

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something, as if in his sleep he had been carried far away and set in a new place. It was as if he had gathered some of the cleanness from the things around him. This was the third day of the journey of repatriation for the two hundred Italian "Co-operators" (and for the girl also, whom Evander had met, pitied, fed, made love to, perhaps loved, and at any rate was now taking home). It had not been necessary for the Captain to make the journey at all, he reflected, but the old gentleman had declared himself in need of a slight change of scene; his sciatica had lately begun to take a fresh course, and he looked forward as much as Evander to seeing—as he preferred to call it—"The Source." In Rome the Captain planned to engage himself upon some very exacting research for the completion of his study of the Carlogenezzi family, a tribe of warriors, bankers, cretins, and high-placed martyrs of the sixteenth century. Evander tolerated the old Captain because he was gentle and undemanding and generous to a fault, although somewhat given to an unfortunate vulgarity in moments of strain. The Captain had been, for twenty-seven years before his call to active duty (which had come rather late in the course of the war), an instructor of tactics and Romanic languages at a small military academy in Duluth. And it was there, he supposed, that the Captain had perfected that studied wantonness of speech, so prepubertal in its inflection, so roguishly infantile, as to cause Evander to blush with an almost parental horror whenever the Captain was distressed.

When the train stopped at Patsch to take on a supply of water, Evander climbed down to the station platform in order to stretch his legs. The station stood at one end of the village square, midway on the route that climbed to the Brenner Pass. One hundred yards or so from the station the tracks were swallowed by a tunnel and emerged again directly opposite from the village across a wide gorge.

The Satyr was directed to tell the Italian troops that they might walk the distance of the platform as long as the train remained in the station.

It had begun to snow, and cats and dogs and children wan-

dered up and down in the same aimless fashion, peering into the open boxcars; and the Italian soldiers were sending the village urchins scurrying to the wine shops, and some of the little soldiers in their hand-me-down uniforms stood beating their arms in an agony of cold and strangeness.

"Are you happy?" Evander asked the girl.

"No, not happy," she said. "But I am going to be. Soon, and then I shall be happy. When I see my sister, and when you come and let me tell her about you."

The Satyr approached, touched his ebony walking stick to his forehead, and engaged Lieutenant Colum in conversation. "Sir, I have taken the liberty of forbidding the *soldati* to trade their rations for wine. I regret that they have already disposed of a number of cases. Observe, sir, the remarkable stature of those young women. Have you a cigarette? Excuse me, in my joyous youth I came many times to these mountain villages, and nowhere—" He paused, and his pale little eyes swam in their sallow pouches of flesh—"and nowhere have I found their equal for producing such *fermezza*!"

What liberties he takes, Evander thought, smiling as he watched the Satyr delicately balancing on his heels, his tortured face thrust upwards, splotched and cracked like the face on some wooden saint in a German cathedral.

"Where is your home, Satyr? You've never spoken of it."

"In Verona. A city of lovers, Tenente."

"I believe you. What will you do?"

"I think I shall retire to the mountains and wait for the good times to come back—the prodigal times. To sit in the Dolomites and drink good wine and wait is what I want. I am an old man. It seemed that the wine in all the other places was of an inferior vintage, or else my palate had come to lack a certain fine appreciation. With age, with age. I grew bored with the war and arranged with a firm in Rome to send me each month a number of books. I was a sergeant-major in Africa, but Tunis, in addition to its excessive smell of goats, had beds which stood five feet above the floor and made everything utterly ridiculous. Ah, it is the

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saddest time of a man's life, I think: to look around him and see nothing but the years, and so few. I was with an Arab woman in my tent one day when a man came up and screamed that the Americans had landed. The times, sir, we are poisoned with the times. But what will you do, now that the war is over? I can believe it now"

"I don't know, Satyr."

"I suppose you are still too well blooded to sit in the mountains—which is an old man's pastime. You have a life, and I am an old man."

The train gave a lurch preparatory to starting, and the Italians began to clamber back into the cars, exchanging farewells with the villagers. Evander stood on the iron bar below the door opening in order to see that everyone had boarded the train; and the Captain, flushed with wine, climbed heavily into the car and clumped the Satyr on his back. They had begun to move when Evander saw a man running across the cobbled square, swinging in each hand a green bottle. The man dashed alongside the train, now gathering speed, and threw the bottles into the hands of his friends. Evander realized that the train was already rolling too rapidly for the man to climb aboard, and the Satyr, standing above him in the doorway, began to shout in rapid Italian. "Tell the sonovabitch to wait for the last car," the Captain roared to the Satyr. Evander felt himself overcome with laughter; it was like some absurd nightmare; he saw the man's face uplifted guiltily, apologetically, and he had a momentary vision of a debauched and hideously angry little boy in rompers scolding a playmate. His throat ached with the hard laughter, and he thought that something very silly was going to happen. Tears stung his eyes as he watched the man leap and grapple for a moment with the hands of his companions; he heard the man's scream and saw him jerked under the wheels; and the Captain still swore, and Evander found that he could not breathe. Everything was very black, and he saw patterns of light and darkness flick past his eyes. He could get no air into his lungs, his mouth tasted acrid and foul, and then he realized that they had entered the tunnel and were burrowing

under the mountain. The sound of the whistle was all around him, in his ears and in his throat; then steam and vapor brushed his face, and the train rushed into the light.

They did not succeed in signaling the brakeman to halt the train until several miles had been traveled, and the engineer was very surly about the whole thing, saying that he could not answer for the consequences in reversing the train on such a grade. But finally they inched back to the station, the wheels complaining upon the tracks, and found that all the village had turned out. The chaplain, a swarthy little Sicilian with ludicrously bowed legs (he walked *that* way, according to the Satyr, from a groinal necessity), placed the body in a sleeping bag, zipped it up tightly, and told two men to polish their boots and go to sit with poor Ghiobbe in the rear car. He asked permission to purchase candles and said that everything would be all right on account of the cold, don't worry, and at Verona, or perhaps in Milano, the body could be handed over to the authorities who were in these cases very understanding. It was the times, of course, and did the Tenente not realize that it was actually a very stupid, regrettable thing to have happened?

To Evander the man's death seemed, like the Captain's swearing, needlessly vulgar. The man had died prankishly, and with a kind of undergraduate violence. The Captain swore steadily for most of the morning and refused to eat anything at midday, and he complained of his sciatica, which he was now sure had grown much worse with the change in altitude. In the afternoon he took to his bed, saying he feared that he had received a chill; and when Evander brought him a cup of broth the old man's teeth rattled and he said, "I can't understand it, my boy. I honestly cannot fathom it. Surely . . . surely one of us might have done something!"

"It wasn't our fault, Captain."

"One has to use care in handling these things," said the Satyr. "Sometimes, very often, what you touch makes you dirty."

The girl shivered, and Evander brought his jacket from their compartment and put it about her shoulders, and when he asked

her what she was thinking about and if it was good to be going home, she said that she thought of the old woman in the eider-down comforter and it was good to be going home. That night it snowed for quite a while.

III

On the morning following the incident at Patsch, Evander discovered that the Italians, having disposed of the bulk of their rations in exchange for wine, were now hungry. At their morning halt the chaplain ventured into his compartment, bleary-eyed, suffering from an immense hangover, and announced that his *soldati* were without bread, without oil, and what could the Tenente do? The Captain, from whom nothing was expected, commiserated with the chaplain, saying that it was indeed very sad, but they—clearly, you understand—had brought the thing upon themselves. What, really, could they expect of a sick man?—and finally he ordered the Satyr to divide their own rations with the two hundred Italians, and the Satyr waxed sarcastic, saying that perhaps the chaplain might arrange a small miracle of the loaves and fishes. “But I felt I had to make at least a gesture,” said the Captain to Evander. “You don’t understand these people as I do, my boy.”

They had arrived at the pass during the preceding evening, had crossed the valleys of the Schmirn and the Vals, had now begun to descend the mountains through looping, spiderlike bridges. As they entered into a great gorge split by a river and surrounded by gray and startlingly white cliffs, the Captain began to expound upon its many connections with medieval warfare. His metier, of course, was the Macedonian phalanx, but he had always, since his earliest youth, contemplated a revision of Ferrara which would embrace the peasant wars of the early sixteenth century, giving at least a portion of long-overdue attention to the family of the Carlogenezzi.

He became quite carried away at finding himself in this storied region. He rearranged the bunks in the car to represent the three strategic villages concerned in the battle of Guido and

Legendre. This was Domegliara, this Pescantina, and that one, do leave the blanket rumpled in just that fashion, my boy, Parona.

So the hours passed. Evander gave up trying to read, the girl had retired to their compartment, and the Satyr sat menaced by the advancing tides of Church and State. The Crusade of the Innocents had been laid out, Padua demolished, and Dante pursued to Luzanna, when the Satyr at last requested the Captain to withdraw his forces for he wished to go to the door in order to relieve himself.

Everything was very sad. The day slowly contracted to twilight, and it became cold. Evander sat muffled in his overcoat by the open door, staring out into the advancing night, thinking. He thought about the Captain, about the girl, and about poor Ghiobbe. He felt himself more than ever estranged from the others; a fear of all familiar places moved in him. There was the matter of Ghiobbe's death—senseless and vulgar—how could you lament the death of a pastry cook who died with a green bottle of bad wine in each hand? It was a kind of miniature calamity: a tiny war in itself and a silly little aftermath which you could only regret with any sincerity as a lapse in taste. He found himself trying to reconstruct Ghiobbe's life, and he could only summon up a picture of a swarthy, pock-marked little man rolling strips of dough in a desert bivouac and singing an air from *Aida*.

He lay that night a long time without sleeping, and the girl turned over and over in her sleep, and once she pressed her chin against his spine and groaned. He woke her and drew her to him, but her body remained slack and she did not answer his whispers. There was no warmth beneath the blankets. He felt as if the cold had penetrated his body and was clotted there in a fortress of ice beneath his skin. He awoke from a sleep with the dream images clinging to his eyelids and found himself shivering; and he rose and lit a match to identify the place in which he found himself. He went to the door and slid it a little open, listening to the relentless click of the wheels, coming muffled and dense. The stars looked hammered and polished and immensely near: gleaming as he had seen ice gleam on cold, oiled armor.

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He was the first to rise in the morning and he found that the train now moved through fertile valleys and that there were vineyards and chestnut trees on low, scalloping hills. The Captain and the Satyr were sitting on their bunks sipping coffee and gnawing on the dry biscuits which were the remains of their rations, when the train began to slide to a halt. Evander looked at the Captain. Shouts came from the other cars, excited and distressed; and Evander saw, down the incline of the tracks, rapidly walking down a graveled road between two rows of poplars, the four members of the train crew. The Bavarian engineer walked angrily, whipping up a flurry of dust, and he seemed to be nodding his head righteously. He turned once and shook his fist.

This was the last that they saw of the train crew, and in the Satyr's opinion the mutiny was owing to the engineer's vile Bavarian temper. One had to accept these things uncomplainingly: *non è mia colpa*, clearly. He was an old man.

And the Captain was a sick man, and plainly distressed. He had never heard of such an outrage, the whole thing was unpardonable, and the only course to be taken was for Evander, or somebody, to go on foot to Ala and contact the authorities. As for himself, he intended to remain in his bed, for he had known ever since the regrettable incident at Patsch that he was quite, quite ill

Evander and the girl, who would interpret for him, set out along the road in the opposite direction from that taken by the mutinous Bavarians. They passed through a small village, found that there was no telephone but that they were welcome to ride with Ciriaco as far as Ala, thirty miles distant. Yes, there were Americans in Ala. Where, indeed, were they not?

Ciriaco, it appeared, was a journeyman embalmer, and they would ride in his master's coach. They drove behind an aged white horse hideously caparisoned, in a black landau hooded in the rear with heavy velvet draperies and topped with a red canopy from which fell black tassels. There were plumes on the horse's bridle, and bells which jingled like the bells of a mass, and the peasants along the road uncovered their heads and stood silent

with averted eyes as the coach passed. On the door of the vehicle was a brightly painted mourning madonna who wept pearls down her pink cheeks; and Evander sat grossly uncomfortable and Ciriaco regarded them smirkingly as he flicked the whip over the old horse.

Once they passed a woman on the road who cried out with alarm upon seeing the coach.

"What did she say?" Evander asked the girl.

"She asked who has died, and she says that we do not need to fear dead serpents—it is a proverb. This fool of a driver has drawn the curtains on purpose because he wants to look important."

The woman on the road had a sad, gothic face and blotched skin, and she shook her head and made a motion in the air with her hands.

"No one has died!" the girl shouted. She half raised herself on the seat and shouted again. "No one has died!"

And then she was crying. Evander put his arm around her, and she said: "I was thinking about what the Satyr said. Excuse me. I was thinking about what he said about Ghiobbe . . . you get dirty."

They found an American transportation battalion in the town, and Evander was permitted to sign a tally-out for an engineer, two brakemen, and a fireman, all natives of Ala who assured him that they excelled in the matter of locomotion. The American colonel further assigned them a car and a driver to carry them back to their train.

Evander was thankful for the noise as they drove back along the rutted road, and because of the noise he did not have to listen to the talk of the others. He wished that this ride did not have to end, fearing the moment when they should come upon the stricken train. At last he fell asleep, with his head jolting against the forked bars at the side of the jeep, and in his shallow sleep he could feel his fingers doubling and unfolding; and he remembered what the girl had said about the rhythm she had tried to find with her hands. When he awoke sharply at intervals, as his

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head fell from the space between the bars, he was startled to see the other crouching figures around him. The girl sat between him and the driver, her head bent forward, and he saw that she was not asleep but he could find no words to speak to her. He felt constricted, pressed down, as in the tunnel at Patsch; but he slept again and his head sought the comfort between the forked bars. . . . Poor Ghiobbe. Ghiobbe the anticlimax. The war is over and you don't have to be afraid of dead serpents. The dirt rubs off, but some day they'll invent a new kind of war in which you don't have to die, get dirty, or have remorseful thoughts next morning. Let's have a *nice* war next time . . . and his fingers clutched and expanded, performing silent, meaningless gestures.

IV

It was dark again and the train shone with fires that had been kindled up and down its curving length as it lay coiled around a hillside. There was the sound of music, of guitars and accordions, and much laughter. Evander rubbed his eyes as he climbed out of the jeep and stood staring for a long time before he moved. Hoarse shouts rose from the direction of the fires, and someone was shrilly singing.

They were dancing in the light of the fires, men and women forming grotesque patterns of swaying bodies and tightly laced arms, and a ring of children circled insanely, like trolls on some midnight orgy, around a bed of coals. The chaplain thrust himself through the dancers and came staggering toward Evander with a bottle of wine held above his head. "Drink, Tenente—everyone is very gay. They have come to say a *requiescat* for poor Ghiobbe."

Evander made his way through the dancers in search of the Captain; the women turned to stare at him, first coldly and then calmly and finally with warmth; and Evander, beneath his anger, felt numbly afraid and he could not yet find his voice. They were in the cars and out of the cars and under them; they had brought wine and music and love, and he was met everywhere with offers

of these things. The men whooped and threw their arms about his shoulders, and he struggled for a while with a woman who embraced him and bit him ferociously on the neck. It was the woman they had passed on the road.

He found the Satyr, and the Satyr, solemnly awed, walked at his heels through the jubilants. "There is the Captain," the girl said.

The Captain was quite drunk and standing in the doorway of the hearse-car. "Evander, my boy," he said, "you have been gone so long—we had all begun to be extremely concerned. Come here and try this delicious brandy. You look so troubled, my boy! Surely you don't object to our little celebration"

"Ah, true!" said the chaplain. "For poor Ghiobbe."

"Yes, my boy," said the Captain.

"The war is over, Tenente," said the Satyr.

Evander found his words coming thick and blurred. "Get these people out of here," he ordered the Satyr, who continued to stare dumbly at him.

But their emotions having been by now well primed, the jubilants began to protest and to weep violently.

"We have relatives among these people," the *soldati* wailed.

"We were hungry, sir."

"Poor Ghiobbe," intoned the chaplain.

"Ask the boy, *Capitano*, if he does not care for a drink," said an imperious voice, and the woman who had bitten Evander was back—the sad-faced gothic woman, and she took Evander by the arm and began to plead with him, nipping tentatively at his neck and ears. "I am Ghiobbe's sister," she whispered. "Drink to my brother who is dead."

He shoved the woman away, and then she began to curse him, hissing through her teeth. The Captain roared with his mincing, childish laughter. "Oh, Evander! That was extremely funny!"

The tears, the sobs, there was a frenzy of weeping. As quickly as Evander managed to clear one car and load it with the staggering, wailing soldiers and had moved on to the next, the first car was invaded by the women, weeping in the finest operatic

tradition, turning their dissolving faces to him like lumps of marzipan, pleading for a reversal of his order. His legs shook in a chill of anger.

He at last succeeded in propping up the Captain between the two cars, and the old man stood there swaying and tittering, making a great show of fending off the insistent women. "The war is over, my boy, and we had a little celebration. It's only right . . . out of respect for the dead. I don't like the way you're acting . . ."

"What the Captain says is true," said the Satyr.

"The war is over!" the women shouted.

Finally the whistle shrieked and the train moved along the band of villagers, now silent, pressing together about the dying fires. Evander saw their eyes following the cars, unblinking, lifted blankly, suddenly becalmed like water in an old well.

"Ah, my boy, I hope you aren't angry," said the Captain. "I confess I found it a most refreshing entertainment. We have all gone through a very grievous experience . . ."

"Poor Ghiobbe," said the chaplain.

His anger had subsided, but Evander could find no words to answer the Captain. As the train passed the last group of villagers he saw the gothic woman standing alone, her eyes glittering in her bony face, and he saw also, unmistakably, that she wore the Captain's trousers beneath her greasy skirts. She looked very fierce there in the cold moonlight—Ghiobbe's sister—and then she began to run along the embankment. She ran beside Evander's car, lifting her skirts, making obscene gestures with her hands; and as the train gathered speed she halted and dropped her body in a grotesque little bow, spreading her skirts in the manner of an actress before a curtain, her long face slit with a harpy's smile. Evander shuddered and in the gloom of the car he saw the faces of his companions lifted blankly and expectantly; he slid the door shut and their faces were canceled, and the train rolled across the floor of the valley, like a great harried snake seeking darkness.

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. *THE LADY**
DONALD JUSTICE

It was while young Dr. Will and his Yankee bride were honeymooning that the old Macready place burned down.

Only the two Negroes were there at the time. Boards had been nailed every which way across the windows, but the Negroes were not the kind to notice that, or mind it much if they did. They had, adjunct to the kitchen, a room of their own—more a cell than a room, really—that had been theirs while they cooked and waited on Will's father. Will, coming home to bury his father the winter before and finding them there, in that room, had made his first mistake. It was no doubt pity to begin with, because they had absolutely nothing. Even the clothes he found them in he recognized as his father's, though not the old castoff pants and patched shirts that might have been expected, but broadcloth and serge that, given a good scrubbing, might have passed well enough for even the old man lying dead upstairs to be buried in. And where could they go anyway?—the old man that had been a slave too feeble at eighty to be hired anywhere else, the runt of a boy too tongue-tied and foolish and lazy to be wanted anywhere no matter how cheap his feed was. Will left them there, in the cramped eight-by-eight kitchen room, and explained to the last living aunt that had cared enough to drive the twenty miles from Paris for

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THE LADY

the funeral how somebody had to be there to take care of the place. He sold the land the afternoon of the funeral, but not the house or the field around it, and that night got on the train northbound again for the degree he was going to take one week in June and the wife he was going to take the next. But Will did not let pity—or whatever it was—keep him from locking the doors before he left, taking it for granted that the Negroes who had not known enough to stay out of the clothes trunk would not know enough to stay out of the big poster bed upstairs either, or the eighty- or ninety-year-old silver and plate, or anything else they would appreciate only enough to use. Still, if they ever got tired of the sun outside, there was room enough left them to wander about in: up and down the stairs, for example, with the sun cracking through the boards across the oval staircase window. And even if they stayed in the kitchen, there was more than enough room to get the fire started.

They probably did not mean to. Capus, the old one, swore that he was driving the cows toward the barn, and the boy with him, when he glanced up and saw the smoke, and one wall already sagging about to go. Whether or not Will let pity make him believe that, he never laid any of the blame on them.

The afternoon he got the telegram from his aunt, he and his bride simply set out from the hotel in Washington, D.C. By the next afternoon they had covered the nearly three hundred miles to Wassahoochee in their new A-model. So before dark, the second day after the fire, Will and Amy Macready were out surveying the ruins.

The chimneys remained. Slender stone chimneys they were, tall, and blackened a little with the smoke, looking like gateposts. Behind these was the barn, for some reason not destroyed, though its paint had curled up from the heat. Amy took one deep glance and shut her eyes. Later, no longer frail in appearance, no longer even dainty, she thought: Had it not been for that fire! But then she was a frail woman still, with spots of rouge for color on her cheeks, one of those women so convinced by thirty that no

man would ever marry her that she could not understand Will when he did. She had neither a handsome face, nor any money of her own, nor any family name to speak of, and he had all these. There was only the one thing about him she could not really admire: his large freckled hands, with light reddish hair across the back of them, which he did not mind because these were the "family" freckles and the "family" color, but she thought them ugly. Large and awkward as he was, he had always been gentle and considerate and soft-spoken with her, as with everybody, and if she could have understood him she might have loved him. But she was having to look at those chimneys. And when she saw her husband begin to poke about in the rubble, lovingly almost, with a stick he had picked up, and a little smoke or dust rise out of it, she felt that she would never understand that about him.

She could not say it was his fault exactly. But certainly, during that faraway winter of their courtship, he had led her to expect somehow a fitter welcome. "Good God," she said later, "at first I thought he was about to propose that we set up house-keeping in that barn. And then I saw that somebody else was already living out there. If you could call it living." Amy meant the Negroes. Capus she saw first, hobbling out of the barn to greet them. She saw the boy too, following him out. What she never got over was the way Dr. Will gathered the boy's neck into the crook of his arm and dragged him near, with a show of familiarity, and the way the kinky head rubbed against the doctor's dark traveling suit. For the doctor it was nothing but the joy of homecoming, even to a heap of rubble and two Negroes he had seen once before in his life. But for her it was something else. "I thought we had all gone mad and back a hundred years in time," she would say, when she had learned to laugh about it.

There was nothing to do but accept the aunt's invitation, and so they went to share her house in Paris while theirs was being raised again. Macready's aunt was elderly and slept much in the afternoons. The family albums and mementos could not have lasted long, nor the shop windows, of which even in Paris there

were not many. Amy was soon bored, and when Dr. Will, tired of driving to Wassahoochee every day to supervise the reconstruction, suggested that they take rooms at Mrs. Billy Kyle's boarding-house, there wasn't any quarrel. There, while the doctor drove out to the house in the country, she sat on the front porch and read magazines in the mornings, and in the afternoons paid her first calls on the ladies, in a silk dress the first day, and in a new cotton print thereafter, mastering quickly one of the small details of life in Wassahoochee though already she despaired of ever comprehending the larger. She did not talk much those afternoons (that came later); she sat dreamily on the front porches and in the shady parlors, her hands clasped in her lap as though she were in a schoolroom, listening to lessons. And all this while, no one—the doctor included—had got one hint of what was on her mind.

The house, on the doctor's insistence, was to be a replica of the old Macready place. She might have favored something more up-to-date and maybe fancy, but she said nothing. When they moved at last from Mrs. Billy Kyle's to the completed house, which smelled within and without of fresh white paint that gave Amy one of her headaches, no one could have told that it was new, except for the paint. It was the same as ever: a squarish two-storied box, without style or ornament, with matched chimneys on either end like sticks holding a woodpile in. Except that the doctor had wires strung and pipes laid, at considerable cost, so that his wife should at least not suffer the want of electricity and plumbing. For he was always a considerate man.

"So it was like that?" Amy must have thought, but she said nothing, and stepped in through the door the doctor held open for her.

By a mistake, the furniture had not arrived. Amy had to stand, after marching through the bare rooms. Then she sat in the car with the door open to what breeze there was—this with a patience he was too busy to see. And with the same patience she allowed her husband to conduct her over the grounds (in high heels) which she had already seen once too often that first day.

For the Negroes were there. She saw them along with the stock in the barn on the tour, and saw them talking with the doctor in the back yard, and saw them, closing her eyes back in the car again, pressing her fingertips into her forehead. By then she knew it could not be postponed any longer. Through the weeks at the boardinghouse she had not quit hoping that they would be gone when she had to return, that they would have drifted on, God knows where, just as the doctor told her they had drifted up; and she had not questioned him about it, for fear of having to know once and for all that they were there. And that he meant them to stay. So she had not accompanied the doctor on his daily inspections, no doubt inventing some woman's reason—"No, I would rather wait and see it all at once, finished. You understand that, don't you, dear?"

About noon the furniture arrived and was all afternoon being moved in. Old Capus and the boy helped as best they could, carrying in this or that—the kitchen chairs, struggling with the trunks. But because she would not let them touch one precious thing, not one thing that could be broken, it was dark before the last piece was in place. Under such circumstances, on the electric stove that had never been used, with the aluminum ware and china and silver that had been wedding gifts, Amy managed to prepare her first meal for her husband of nearly three months.

The linen tablecloth, a wedding gift too, had not yet been unpacked. So she bore supper into the dining room (it had to come from cans) and set it on the long, shiny, bare table. She had heard the back screen door open, and she did not have to glance into the darkness of the back porch to know they were there. Yet still she did not let on.

The doctor had to speak first. "Amy, aren't you forgetting something? Or is that just one more thing I forgot to tell you?" And he inclined his head toward the back porch.

"Oh, dear, and must we feed them too?" She sank into the chair.

"Amy! Stop and think if they heard you!"

"May I ask where they've been eating up to now? Or haven't they been?"

"Why won't you understand! I wouldn't think of making that poor old Negro man walk all the way over to colored town when we can—"

"Then tell me this, Will, just this. What do they eat?"

"The same as us," the doctor replied and, as Amy reported later, he began to laugh. ("I thought he was laughing at me," she would say, shaking her head with affected bitterness, "and so I thought I had him then. But little did I comprehend the depths of that man I had tied myself to.")

So she got up from the chair, saying, "Then they might as well have mine!" And before the doctor could cross to stop her, she had taken up her plate and started for the back porch.

Evidently she had been meaning, if it came to that, to force the doctor to one of those dramatic and unnecessary choices women are always posing—a choice between herself and the others. But the doctor had reached the door before her and, standing there in her path, he—very gently—seized the plate in both his freckled hands and peered down with no expression whatever into her set face. Whatever it was that happened to her then—maybe courage, like the heart, skipping a beat—it was enough for her grip on the plate to relax. And if it was not courage, it was a kind of instinct that told her once he had stepped through the door with the plate in his hands he would never again be willing to stand between her and any door. No matter what, she said nothing, and had to stand there, and had to watch the doctor carry her own supper out to the man and boy on the stoop, and had to hear them eat in darkness, and had to see the doctor return to his place at the other end of the long table and finish the meal she had got out of cans for him. She did not even cry.

The doctor said one thing more that evening. They had not had time to unpack the new linen napkins either, but he waited

till he had arranged the silver on the empty plate, and touched his lips with his fist once or twice. "We will get you a cook first thing tomorrow, love," he said. "Yes, we will."

Amy had not understood then, and so she had not smiled. But remembering it, she could smile. "I swear," she would say, "he had kept silence through that whole horrible dinner out of nothing worse than pure and simple consideration for my feelings. And, believe me, sometimes there isn't anything worse. He said that, on our first night in the house and when he had just polished off the first meal I had a chance to fix him—he said that, mind you, out of the same consideration. Oh, yes. Hah!"

In a way Dr. Will was unlucky. She might not have planned to sleep late the next morning, but she did, and the doctor learned to make breakfast alone without complaint. It was the first act of a prolonged contrition Amy and his own obliging nature contrived to exact from him. Perhaps it was with no more conscious purpose that she did not rouge her cheeks that morning, or paint her lips, or comb her hair, or put on the pretty cotton frock. What woke her finally was the sound of wood being sawed, and she went straight to the window. Leaning on the sill, she looked out beyond the barn, across the pasture where the two cows stood. What looked like a path ran through the high ragged grass and at the end lay a pile of lumber. Three men were there. One, in overalls, was moving the saw, his bent knee holding the wood in place on a sawhorse. Another stranger, also in overalls, sat on the pile of lumber beside the other man. The third man wore a gray felt hat. That was her husband. At that moment she felt she had begun to understand what he was. He was a man who would pay carpenters to build a cabin for a pair of utterly helpless Negroes he felt some queer responsibility for, and for not one visible reason but their very helplessness. Yet at the same time he would have it built in the very farthest corner of the property. That was, no doubt, for her sake.

She came downstairs after seeing that, and in the kitchen found the ugliest colored woman she had ever seen. That would

be the cook. Amy did not speak to her, and though by then she had not eaten for more than twenty-four hours, she did not enter the kitchen. When the doctor came in for lunch Amy was still in the housecoat, the honeymoon housecoat. He explained what he had done, evidently expecting her to be pleased that he was having the cabin built so far from the house.

But Capus and the boy, she knew, could still walk up the path at mealtime.

That first cook stayed only a month or so and was followed by a succession of others that Amy could scarcely tell apart. But it was the duty of every one of them to leave the ham and sweet potatoes and grits and cornbread out on the back porch table for the old man and the boy. After a while Amy sometimes brought herself to say good evening to them from the dining room. But she did not go out on the back porch, even when they were nowhere near.

The first present Dr. Will did not surprise Amy with was an organ, a little one that fitted in a corner of the parlor. He must have known that would not be enough. He bought her a new A-model to go visiting in, and used the old one for his own calls. It was about that time, sitting in one parlor after another in the new frock she would have driven to Paris for, that she began telling it by bits and snatches, what would never be much of a story till she would begin, and sometimes was not much then. ("Well, Will did not get home last night again, sitting up all night with a sick ducky—that is what you call them down here, isn't it?—or maybe it was a sick cow. I never ask, you know. Now, another man I would not trust, but Will So there I am in that big house all by myself, scared half to death, and you know what I did? I got up and turned on every light in the house, and he won't complain about the light bill, either. After that I slept like a baby and didn't think of them once. You know who I mean, whachamacallem and that idiot boy.") Other times she told it with such breathless ardor that no one stopped to think till after she was through talking and had commenced with her way

of laughing that here was Amy Macready violating her own privacy—and this their right, not hers. It was always the one story, and it had something to do with the Negroes which she could never quite make clear. But in the end she must have realized what it was: that she had only been waiting for the old man to die.

But they were still in the cabin and nothing changed. Amy saw so little of them that once in a while she would almost forget. And then she would catch a glimpse through one of the upstairs windows, where they would be hoeing the garden perhaps (which she admitted they kept up very well, so that there were always the fresh peas, beans, collard greens). But she could not stay at the window long—there was something about the boy. He traipsed everywhere at the old man's heels, and he had not grown one inch since the day she arrived, and never would. If she saw his mouth working, she could not help imagining the sounds. They were like words, but what did they mean? The tongue-tie caused it, or part of it. Only Capus pretended to understand, was—as the doctor put it—the boy's *interpreter*. The work the boy helped with he must have done more by instinct than anything else, knowing how to squeeze a cow's teat and all the rest without having to be told how, just as the right kind of dog knows without training how to follow a scent. No doubt there would have been a hard time telling him, anyway. All that could be done was to point out whatever it was—a cow, a pile of wood—and the boy did whatever was to be done. His yellow eyes looked straight at whoever was talking, or pointing. But probably not even the old man could guess how much or how little the boy understood of what went on around him.

She watched this way and remembered, waiting for the old man to die, knowing the boy would have to be sent away then. She waited four years, then five, and the old man did not even get sick. He took to using a stick to hop around with, but he did not get sick. He was there at the house, on the back porch, and the boy with him, every morning and every evening, although in the

mornings she did not have to see them because she would not be up yet.

That was why when they were not there one morning it was noon before she heard of it. The cook told her. The present cook was a small surly black woman who padded about the kitchen making no more noise than if she went barefoot, and Amy was always turning around to find the woman standing just behind her, waiting to be discovered before she would open her mouth. But that morning the cook began telling her before Amy even felt the dining room cloud with her presence. Somebody, it turned out, had come looking for the doctor at breakfast, and the doctor had driven off with him.

"Then you're sure the doctor didn't see them before he left?"

"No, ma'am, but he say tell you not to worry, it don't mean a thing."

Amy did not want to believe that it did. Or she did not want to believe too soon, in the absence of proof. Nor did she want to put it to the proof too soon, just as she had sat on the porch of the boardinghouse with her ladies' magazines, preferring not to know rather than go all the way out with her husband to the half-finished house where she would have to know, and know finally. And just as she had not asked her husband then, she did not put any more questions to the cook. It was something not even to think about, but to be breathed in and out like a change in the air, till she was ready to be used to it.

But in the middle of the afternoon, when she sat down at the vanity to comb her hair finally, she discovered a note. It was not signed, but it was from the doctor. "Love," it said, "a poor colored boy came for me this morning. His mama was in pain, so I had to go. I assume it is another *youngun* (they won't listen to me!) and it is way out in the country, so I don't know when I can get back. I have to hurry, but I knew you'd worry if I didn't explain. Love."

She had started downstairs before she saw a purpose to the

note: he hadn't mentioned the missing Negroes. It was like him not to want her to think anything was wrong, with them especially. Which was the beginning of proof that something was. All at once a picture bobbed before her eyes, and she had to touch the stairpost at the landing to steady herself. The picture was like a dream: the boy, babbling away, razor in hand, crouched over the sleeping old man. For just that moment she was certain he was capable of it, of anything, of worse even.

Downstairs by then, she found the cook on the back porch shelling peas. The cook got to her feet, gathering the hulls into her apron, but when Amy had told her what she wanted done, the woman shook her head. Amy asked her twice more—once politely, the second time with calm, insistent rage—and each time the woman said, "No, ma'am," and looked at the floor. "You will either go down there this minute and find out, or else you will get out of my house for good." The cook stopped saying "No, ma'am" then and shook the hulls out of the apron into the dishpan on the floor. Then she took the apron off.

By the time Dr. Will arrived home, just at dark, the cook was gone. He did not need to ask for an explanation. Amy let him sit down to supper before she commenced.

"Will, I think you had better run down to the cabin before it gets good and dark."

"It's already dark."

"Not outside it isn't."

"They'll be along for supper any minute, if that's what you're driving at."

"Why? Did you already see them?"

"No."

"Then you know they won't."

"Now, Amy, if you could have seen that poor suffering creature where I was today, and the trouble she was having, then you'd understand how a man can be tired out though he doesn't have anything to do but stand around and look at it happening, and maybe one or two other little things after it's all over. I told her

way last year she couldn't have any more, even if they could afford it, which they can't. And I told her how, I even gave her—"

"Will! That's just it. You're always so ready to help, and here you won't even go out and see what you can do to help them, and them living right on your own property so long. It looks like he could slit the old man's throat and you wouldn't even—"

"What? What's that?"

"I said he could slit—"

"All right. Only let me finish this. I haven't had a bite since breakfast and not more than one or two then."

"It will be dark by then and you know it."

He had already begun rising before she could say it, and was wiping his hand across his mouth.

"Then if you promise not to worry about it, all right."

Amy followed him to the door and told him to be careful. He laughed, a short laugh.

It was just that time between light and dark when what light there was seemed to come welling up all around, coming from nowhere. The dog that had taken up with the Negroes had been lying on the steps, waiting to be fed. Now she raised her head from her paws and ran at the doctor's heels. Amy watched them take the turn into the path through the field. By that time they were nothing but shadows.

She went into the parlor, turned on the light, and sat down at the organ so that she would not have to think about it. But she had not begun to play when (as she told it) she felt the presence of another person in the room. For a minute she sat there, her foot resting weightlessly on the pedal, her fingers tight on the keys. She supposed the doctor would be just about reaching the cabin, but when the voice came, she recognized it as his. "I recognized the voice," she said, "though I don't think anybody had ever heard anything like that in it before—call it harshness. And when I recognized that, then it came to me what a daze I had gone through, not just then but the whole day, and how quick it was all gone. And not that one day alone."

She spun around on the stool and recognized him too, where he stood in the door, though he was not the same. It was something about the face, and this time there was an expression around his mouth, but she could not recognize that. She did not understand what he had said till he repeated it.

“God Amighty, Amy, I hit him!

“Yes, I dragged him out of bed and hit him. A boy like that. Why, he didn’t know any better. He didn’t even know any better than to let me drag him out of that bed and hit him. And the whole time he didn’t shed one little drop. You’d think he could cry when I hit him, anyway, even if he didn’t know enough to before.”

Amy knew what she had to say, though she had not yet begun to guess what he was talking about. “And you did right, too, Will; I know you did.”

“I didn’t have to hit him, did I! I could have pulled him off the old man and let him go, couldn’t I!”

Still she did not see, but that did not stop her from talking till she had got him to sit down on the davenport. She sat down close beside him and waited till he was quiet enough to answer the questions.

He found them on the bed. The cabin had the bed in it, and a cane-bottom rocking chair, and old newspapers for the dog to sleep on if she wanted to, and not much else. It wasn’t clean and it wasn’t dirty. But since it was summertime, there was one other thing about it—almost an odor, a little like musk, that the doctor had not realized he was smelling as he stood outside the door, knocking on it, the dog getting mixed up with his feet and beginning to whimper. For Dr. Will was the kind who would knock even on that door—but he got no answer.

He opened it, anyway, and though it was not quite good dark outside, it was so dark inside that the doctor thought they were asleep. As the darkness took shape he saw they were fully dressed, not only in their overalls but with their workshoes still on. By that time the doctor was standing by the bed, reaching

across the boy to lay his hand on Capus' shoulder, meaning to wake him. There was not time to notice that with the whimpering stopped, not one sound in the room was coming louder than his own breath.

Just as his hand was poised there in mid-air, the boy gave a sudden lurch, his arms going around the old man, fiercely, possessing him, shielding him. So Dr. Will did not have to touch the old man's shoulder to realize that it would be cold. He only seized the boy with his two hands and started the struggle to pry him from the dead body.

The old man had apparently died not long after coming back from supper the night before. The doctor explained to his wife why that must be: because otherwise Capus would have had his shoes off. Or even if he had collapsed that morning—sitting on the edge of the bed, knotting his shoes, to come to breakfast—it would have amounted to the same thing. For what mattered was that the boy had been lying there in the one room, in the one bed, at least through one whole day if not the night, not knowing enough to come up to the house alone for his meals and to say, or try to say, what had happened. Or not choosing to come, since no matter what instinct would never have been able to tell him, it could tell him at least that they would want to take the old man away. The doctor could explain all that to his wife, but he could not explain why, as soon as he had managed to drag the boy upright, he had begun slapping him. He had slapped him into the chair and then he had stopped.

Amy said that she could understand it very well, that it was nothing but indignation, and no one could blame him. But the doctor said no, that was not quite the word. He said it calmly, and she knew it was safe to ask what steps he meant to take.

"I told him not to get back in that bed. That's all. I told him I'd get out the horsewhip if I caught him back there when I came down in the morning with the gravediggers."

"And do you think that boy could understand a word you said?"

"Yes. He is not all that dumb. You don't understand this kind of thing, that's all, nor can I blame you."

"And do you think that even if he understood the words, that that means he is going to do what you told him?"

The doctor was about to say something when he stopped. "By God, Amy! God Amighty! That little yellow-eyed—" He was on his feet. "Where's my flashlight?"

Amy ran after him as far as the back porch door. "There's nothing you can do about it, anyway. Will, listen to me" He had taken the flashlight down from the porch shelf without breaking stride. "Will, come back in here; are you gone out of your head?"

It was a night without a moon. Amy had to try to follow the flashlight with her eyes. It did not look as though he meant to take the turn into the field path. She saw the flashlight disappear into the barn, and still she did not know what he had in mind. In that mood, according to her, he would have been capable, too, of anything, and for a minute she had the wild notion that he might keep a gun out there.

She watched in a kind of spell for the flashlight to reappear. By the time it did, she could see a little better. She was able to make out that he was carrying something and that he had struck out through the path toward the cabin.

It was only a shovel.

Amy saw that finally—but not till she had run up the stairs and taken her post by the window through which she had so often watched the Negroes at their work. Once there, she saw the flashlight again. It was set on the ground at the far end of the pasture, next to the cabin, and it was casting its beam on the doctor's pants legs. Already he had bent over and commenced digging; so there could not have been time for him to go back in the cabin and make certain that the boy was really in the bed again. Amy knew by that that the doctor had not needed to, that he knew by then the nature of the thing he was dealing with.

"That," she said later, "was the second time I thought I had

won. I didn't even stay at the window long enough to realize what a fool picture it was—Will digging a grave for a dead nigger in the middle of the night. Well, maybe not the middle, but it must have been before he was done. So if I didn't stay there long enough to realize that, I don't guess I stayed there any time at all. And of course poor Will didn't take the time either to see what a fool thing it all was. Though I doubt that a little thing like that would have stopped him."

After she left the window she made ready for bed directly, though it could not have been more than a little past eight o'clock. She read a magazine in bed for a while and went to sleep with the light burning. Whatever time the doctor came in, he was careful not to disturb her.

The next day the doctor did not leave the place, and every day he did not leave the place after that, it seemed easier. If the telephone rang he would not let Amy answer it. When one of his old patients, a Mrs. Wilbur, was driven out to the doctor's by her son, Amy met the boy at the door. "The doctor says you had better take her over to Dr. Herbert in Paris. Yes, that's right, he isn't feeling very well."

Amy did not try to find another cook. She rose early and was glad to get her husband's breakfast. Though he had not milked a cow since he was a boy, somebody had to, and he did not seem to mind. One day he picked a mess of peas, too, and another time swept the back yard. And every morning and every evening he fried a little something on the stove, placed it in a dish, covered that over with another, and carried it through the pasture to the cabin. He would be gone perhaps half an hour.

"He just sits there," the doctor said.

"Don't you think you'd better put a lock on the door?"

"No, he won't run away."

"I mean—"

"Oh, no, that boy, he wouldn't harm a soul, if that's what you mean. Don't you worry, love."

That lasted nearly a week before Amy drove in to visit any-

body. Then, sitting on one of the front porches, clasping and unclasping her hands, she explained.

"I didn't know if I should let him out of my sight, but I had to see another human being—I mean besides Will—before I began to question my own sanity a little. You see, he won't let me touch that food he prepares for the boy. Says it is not my place to. I keep telling him he did right, and he says yes, he knows it's the only thing he could have done, but that's no comfort. I am beginning to think he ought to be put away someplace."

"The boy, you mean?" she was asked.

"Yes, the boy, too. But I was thinking more about Will. I'd have him put away in one of those nice rest homes for a while—we could afford it—only I don't think I could get old Dr. Herbert or any of the others to sign whatever it is they sign, and nothing short of law would budge that man I married."

The story would be over then, and she would be smiling as she rose to go. "I had better be getting back or else he'll worry his fool head off about me. He may not need me, but I like to think he does, a little. If only so he'll not have to stop worrying over me. It's such a habit with him by now, you know."

It was nearly twilight when she got into her A-model and turned back toward the farm and the man she probably did not even then understand wholly, though she had stopped not loving him. It was nearly twilight and soon it would be dark. It was about the time, she knew, that Dr. Will would be hurrying, as he always hurried in anything, through the field and toward the cabin, the dog running at his heels, and he would be holding the covered plate as preciously as he could between those large freckled hands of his.

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A WARM HAND*

N. V. M. GONZALEZ

Holding on to the rigging, Elay leaned over. The dinghy was being readied. The wind tore her hair into wiry strands that fell across her face, heightening her awareness of the dipping and rising of the deck. But for the bite of the *noreste*, she would have begun to feel faint and empty in her belly. Now she clutched at the rigging with more courage.

At last the dinghy shoved away, with its first load of passengers—seven boys from Bongabon, Mindoro, on their way to Manila to study. The deck seemed less hostile than before, for the boys had made a boisterous group then; now that they were gone, her mistress Ana could leave the crowded deckhouse for once.

“Oh, Elay! My powder puff!”

It was Ana, indeed. Elay was familiar with that excitement which her mistress wore about her person like a silk kerchief—now on her head to keep her hair in place, now like a scarf round her neck. How eager Ana had been to go ashore when the old skipper of the *batel* said that the *Ligaya* was too small a boat to brave the coming storm. She must return to the deckhouse, Elay thought, if she must fetch her mistress' handbag.

With both hands upon the edge of the deckhouse roof, then

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holding on to the wooden water barrel to the left of the main mast, she staggered back to the deckhouse entrance. As she bent her head low lest with the lurching of the boat her brow should hit the door, she saw her mistress on all fours clambering out of the deckhouse. She let her have the right-of-way, entering only after Ana was safe upon the open deck.

Elay found the handbag—she was certain that the powder puff would be there—though not without difficulty, inside the canvas satchel that she meant to take ashore. She came dragging the heavy satchel, and in a flurry Ana dug into it for the bag. The deck continued to sway, yet presently Ana was powdering her face; and this done, she applied lipstick to that full round mouth of hers.

The wind began to press Elay's blouse against her breasts while she waited on her mistress patiently. She laced Ana's shoes and also bestirred herself to see that Ana's earrings were not askew. For Ana must appear every inch the dressmaker that she was. Let everyone know that she was traveling to Manila—not just to the provincial capital; and, of course, there was the old spinster aunt, too, for company—to set up a shop in the big city. It occurred to Elay that, judging from the care her mistress was taking to look well, it might well be that they were not on board a one-masted Tingloy batel with a cargo of lumber, copra, pigs, and chickens, but were still at home in the dress shop that they were leaving behind in the lumber town of Sumagui.

"How miserable I'd be without you, Elay," Ana giggled, as though somewhere she was meeting a secret lover who for certain would hold her in his arms in one wild passionate caress.

And thinking so of her mistress made Elay more proud of her. She did not mind the dark world into which they were going. Five miles to the south was Pinamalayan town; its lights blinked faintly at her. Then along the rim of the Bay, dense groves of coconuts and underbush stood, occasional fires marking where the few sharecroppers of the district lived. The batel had anchored at the northernmost end of the cove and apparently five hundred

yards from the boat was the palm-leaf-covered hut the old skipper of the *Ligaya* had spoken about.

"Do you see it? That's Obregano's hut." And Obregano, the old skipper explained, was a fisherman. The men who sailed up and down the eastern coast of Mindoro knew him well. There was not a seaman who lived in these parts but had gone to Obregano for food or shelter and to this anchorage behind the northern tip of Pinamalayan Bay for the protection it offered sailing vessels against the unpredictable *noreste*.

The old skipper had explained all this to Ana, and Elay had listened, little knowing that in a short while it would all be there before her. Now in the dark she saw the fisherman's hut readily. A broad shoulder of a hill rose beyond, and farther yet the black sky looked like a silent wall.

Other women joined them on the deck to see the view for themselves. A discussion started; some members of the party did not think that it would be proper for them to spend the night in Obregano's hut. Besides the students, there were four middle-aged merchants on this voyage; since Bongabon they had plagued the women with their coarse talk and their yet coarser laughter. Although the deckhouse was the unchallenged domain of the women, the four middle-aged merchants had often slipped in, and once inside had exchanged lewd jokes among themselves, to the embarrassment of their audience. Small wonder, Elay thought, that the prospect of spending the night in a small fisherman's hut and with these men for company did not appear attractive to the other women passengers. Her mistress Ana had made up her mind, however. She had a sense of independence that Elay admired.

Already the old aunt had joined them on deck; and Elay said to herself, "Of course, it's for this old auntie's sake, too. She has been terribly seasick."

In the dark she saw the dinghy and silently watched it being sculled back to the batel. It drew nearer and nearer, a dark mass moving eagerly, the bow pointing in her direction. Elay heard

Ana's little shrill cries of excitement. Soon two members of the crew were vying for the honor of helping her mistress safely into the dinghy.

Oh, that Ana should allow herself to be thus honored, with the seamen taking such pleasure from it all, and the old aunt, watching, pouting her lips in disapproval! "What shall I do?" Elay asked herself, anticipating that soon she herself would be the object of this chivalrous byplay. And what could the old aunt be saying now to herself? "Ah, women these days are no longer decorous. In no time they will make a virtue of being unchaste."

Elay pouted, too. And then it was her turn. She must get into that dinghy, and it so pitched and rocked. If only she could manage to have no one help her at all. But she'd fall into the water. Santa Maria. I'm safe

They were off. The waves broke against the sides of the dinghy, threatening to capsize it, and continually the black depths glared at her. Her hands trembling, Elay clung tenaciously to the gunwale. Spray bathed her cheeks. A boy began to bail, for after clearing each wave the dinghy took in more water. So earnest was the boy at this chore that Elay thought the tiny boat had sprung a leak and would sink any moment.

The sailors, one at the prow and the other busy with the oar at the stern, engaged themselves in senseless banter. Were they trying to make light of the danger? She said her prayers as the boat swung from side to side, to a rhythm set by the sailor with the oar.

Fortunately, panic did not seize her. It was the old aunt who cried "Susmariosep!" For with each crash of waves, the dinghy lurched precipitously. "God spare us all!" the old aunt prayed frantically.

And Ana was laughing. "Auntie! Why, Auntie, it's nothing! It's nothing at all!" For, really, they were safe. The dinghy had struck sand.

Elay's dread of the water suddenly vanished and she said to herself: "Ah, the old aunt is only making things more difficult

for herself." Why, she wouldn't let the sailor with the oar lift her clear of the dinghy and carry her to the beach!

"Age before beauty," the sailor was saying to his companion. The other fellow, not to be outdone, had jumped waist-deep into the water, saying: "No, beauty above all!" Then there was Ana stepping straight, as it were, into the sailor's arms.

"Where are you?" the old aunt was calling from the shore. "Are you safe? Are you all right?"

Elay wanted to say that in so far as she was concerned she was safe, she was all right. She couldn't speak for her mistress, of course! But the same seaman who had lifted the old aunt and carried her to the shore in his arms had returned. Now he stood before Elay and caught her two legs and let them rest on his forearm and then held her body up, with the other arm. Now she was clear of the dinghy, and she had to hold on to his neck. Then the sailor made three quick steps toward dry sand and then let her slide easily off his arms, and she said: "I am all right. Thank you."

Instead of saying something to her the sailor hurried away, joining the group of students that had gathered up the rise of sand. Ana's cheerful laughter rang in their midst. Then a youth's voice, clear in the wind: "Let's hurry to the fisherman's hut!"

A drizzle began to fall. Elay took a few tentative steps toward the palm-leaf hut, but her knees were unsteady. The world seemed to turn and turn, and the glowing light at the fisherman's door swung as from a boat's mast. Elay hurried as best she could after Ana and her old aunt, both of whom had already reached the hut. It was only on hearing her name that that weak, unsteady feeling in her knees disappeared.

"Elay—" It was her mistress, of course. Ana was standing outside the door, waiting. "My lipstick, Elay!"

An old man stood at the door of the hut. "I am Obregano, at your service," he said in welcome. "This is my home."

He spoke in a sing-song that rather matched his wizened face.

Pointing at a little woman pottering about the stove box at one end of the one-room hut, he said: "And she? Well, the guardian of my home—in other words, my wife!"

The woman got up and welcomed them, beaming a big smile. "Feel at home. Make yourselves comfortable—everyone."

She helped Elay with the canvas bag, choosing a special corner for it. "It will rain harder yet tonight, but here your bag will be safe," the woman said.

The storm had come. The thatched wall shook, producing a weird skittering sound at each gust of wind. The sough of the palms in back of the hut—which was hardly the size of the deck-house of the batel, and had the bare sand for floor—sounded like the moan of a lost child. A palm leaf that served to cover an entrance to the left of the stove box began to dance a mad, rhythmless dance. The fire in the stove leaped intermittently, rising beyond the lid of the kettle that Obregano the old fisherman had placed there.

And yet the hut was homelike. It was warm and clean. There was a cheerful look all over the place. Elay caught the old fisherman's smile as his wife cleared the floor of blankets, nets, and coil after coil of hempen rope so that their guests could have more room. She sensed an affinity with her present surroundings, with the smell of the fish nets, with the dancing fire in the stove box. It was as though she had lived in this hut before. She remembered what Obregano's wife had said to her. The old woman's words were by far the kindest she had heard in a long time.

The students from Bongabon had appropriated a corner for themselves and begun to discuss supper. It appeared that a prankster had relieved one of the chicken coops of a fat pullet and a boy asked the fisherman for permission to prepare a stew.

"I've some ginger tea in the kettle," Obregano said. "Something worth drinking in weather like this." He asked his wife for an old enameled tin cup for their guests to drink from.

As the cup was being passed around, Obregano's wife expressed profuse apologies for her not preparing supper. "We

have no food," she said with uncommon frankness. "We have sons, you know; two of them, both working in town. But they come home only on week ends. It is only then that we have rice."

Elay understood that in lieu of wages the two Obregano boys received rice. Last week end the boys had failed to return home, however. This fact brought a sad note to Elay's new world of warm fire and familiar smells. She got out some food which they had brought along from the boat—adobo and bread that the old aunt had put in a tin container and tucked into the canvas satchel—and offered her mistress these, going through the motions so absent-mindedly that Ana chided her.

"Do offer the old man and his wife some of that, too."

Obregano shook his head. He explained that he would not think of partaking of the food—so hungry his guests must be. They needed all the food themselves, to say nothing about that which his house should offer but which in his naked poverty he could not provide. But at least they would be safe here for the night, Obregano assured them. "The wind is rising, and the rain, too Listen" He pointed at the roof, which seemed to sag.

The drone of the rain set Elay's spirits aright. She began to imagine how sad and worried over her sons the old fisherman's wife must be, and how lonely—but oh how lovely!—it would be to live in this God-forsaken spot. She watched the students devour their supper, and she smiled thanks, sharing their thoughtfulness, when they offered most generously some chicken to Ana and, in sheer politeness, to the old spinster aunt also.

Yet more people from the *batel* arrived, and the four merchants burst into the hut discussing some problem in Bongabon municipal politics. It was as though the foul weather suited their purposes, and Elay listened with genuine interest, with compassion, even, for the small-town politicians who were being reviled and cursed.

It was Obregano who suggested that they all retire. There was hardly room for everyone, and in bringing out a rough-woven

palm-leaf mat for Ana and her companions to use, Obregano picked his way in order not to step on a sprawling leg or an outstretched arm. The offer of the mat touched Elay's heart, so much so that pondering the goodness of the old fisherman and his wife took her mind away from the riddles which the students at this time were exchanging among themselves. They were funny riddles and there was much laughter. Once she caught them throwing glances in Ana's direction.

Even the sailors who were with them on the dinghy had returned to the hut to stay and were laughing heartily at their own stories. Elay watched Obregano produce a bottle of kerosene for the lantern, and then hang the lantern with a string from the center beam of the hut. She felt a new dreamlike joy. Watching the old fisherman's wife extinguish the fire in the stove made Elay's heart throb.

Would the wind and the rain worsen? The walls of the hut shook—like a man in the throes of malaria chills. The sea kept up a wild roar, and the waves, it seemed, continually clawed at the land with strong, greedy fingers.

She wondered whether Obregano and his wife would ever sleep. The couple would be thinking: "Are our guests comfortable enough as they are?" As for herself, Elay resolved, she would stay awake. From the corner where the students slept she could hear the whine of a chronic asthma sufferer. One of the merchants snorted periodically, like a horse being plagued by a fly. A young boy, apparently dreaming, called out in a strange, frightened voice: "No, no! I can't do that! I wouldn't do that!"

She saw Obregano get up and pick his way again among the sleeping bodies to where the lantern hung. The flame was sputtering. Elay watched him adjust the wick of the lantern and give the oil container a gentle shake. Then the figure of the old fisherman began to blur and she could hardly keep her eyes open. A soothing tiredness possessed her. As she yielded easily to sleep, with Ana to her left and the old spinster aunt at the far edge of

the mat to her right, the floor seemed to sink and the walls of the hut to vanish, as though the world were one vast dark valley.

When later she awoke she was trembling with fright. She had only a faint notion that she had screamed. What blur there had been in her consciousness before falling asleep was as nothing compared with that which followed her waking, although she was aware of much to-do and the lantern light was gone.

"Who was it?" It was reassuring to hear Obregano's voice.

"The lantern, please!" That was Ana, her voice shrill and wiry.

Elay heard as if in reply the crash of the sea rising in a crescendo. The blur lifted a little: "Had I fallen asleep after all? Then it must be past midnight by now." Time and place became realities again; and she saw Obregano, with a lighted matchstick in his hand. He was standing in the middle of the hut.

"What happened?"

Elay thought that it was she whom Obregano was speaking to. She was on the point of answering, although she had no idea of what to say, when Ana, sitting up on the mat beside her, blurted out: "Someone was here. Please hold up the light."

"Someone was here," Elay repeated to herself and hid her face behind Ana's shoulder. She must not let the four merchants, nor the students either, stare at her so. Caught by the lantern light, the men hardly seven steps away had turned their gazes upon her in various attitudes of amazement.

Everyone seemed eager to say something all at once. One of the students spoke in a quavering voice, declaring that he had not moved where he lay. Another said he had been so sound asleep—"Didn't you hear me snoring?" he asked a companion, slapping him on the back—he had not even heard the shout. One of the merchants hemmed and suggested that perhaps cool minds should look into the case, carefully and without preconceived ideas. To begin with, one must know exactly what happened. He looked in Ana's direction and said: "Now please tell us."

Elay clutched her mistress' arm. Before Ana could speak, Obregano's wife said: "This thing ought not to have happened. If only our two sons were home, they'd avenge the honor of our house." She spoke with a rare eloquence for an angry woman. "No one would then dare think of so base an act. Now, our good guests," she added, addressing her husband, bitterly, "why, they know you to be an aged, simple-hearted fisherman—nothing more. The good name of your home, of our family, is no concern of theirs."

"Evil was coming, I knew it!" said the old spinster aunt; and piping out like a bird: "Let us return to the boat! Don't be so bitter, old one," she told Obregano's wife. "We are going back to the boat."

"It was like this," Ana said, not minding her aunt. Elay lowered her head more, lest she should see those man-faces before her, loosely trapped now by the lantern's glow. Indeed, she closed her eyes, as though she were a little child afraid of the dark.

"It was like this," her mistress began again. "I was sleeping, and then my maid, Elay—" she put an arm around Elay's shoulder—"she uttered that wild scream. I am surprised you did not hear it."

In a matter-of-fact tone, one of the merchants countered: "Suppose it was a nightmare?"

But Ana did not listen to him. "Then my maid," she continued, "this girl here—she's hardly twenty, mind you, and an innocent and illiterate girl, if you must all know She turned round, trembling, and clung to me"

"Couldn't she possibly have shouted in her sleep?" the merchant insisted.

Obregano had held his peace all this time, but now he spoke: "Let us hear what the girl says."

And so kind were those words! How fatherly of him to have spoken so, in such a gentle and understanding way! Elay's heart went to him. She felt she could almost run to him and, crying over

his shoulder, tell him what no one, not even Ana herself, would ever know.

She turned her head a little to one side and saw that now they were all looking at her. She hugged her mistress tighter, in a childlike embrace, hiding her face as best she could.

"Tell them," Ana said, drawing herself away. "Now, go on—speak!"

But Elay would not leave her side. She clung to her, and began to cry softly.

"Nonsense!" the old aunt chided her.

"Well, she must have had a nightmare, that's all," the merchant said, chuckling. "I'm sure of it!"

At this remark Elay cried even more. "I felt a warm hand caressing my—my—my cheeks," she said, sobbing. "A warm hand, I swear," she said again, remembering how it had reached out for her in the dark, searchingly, burning with a need to find some precious treasure which, she was certain of it now, she alone possessed. For how could it be that they should force her to tell them? "Someone"—the word was like a lamp in her heart—"someone wanted me," she said to herself.

She felt Ana's hand stroking her back ungently and then heard her saying, "I brought this on," then nervously fumbling about the mat. "This is all my fault My compact, please"

But Elay was inconsolable. She was sorry she could be of no help to her mistress now. She hung her head, unable to stop her tears from cleansing those cheeks that a warm hand had loved.

MAXWELL ARNOLD first appeared in Stanford Short Stories when "*Never Hit a Cripple*," published by Harper's, was reprinted in the 1948 edition. "*The Cannibal Pot*" was written in the spring of 1948, just before Mr. Arnold was graduated from Stanford, but was held over from the 1949 volume to permit magazine publication. Since 1948, Mr. Arnold has held a fellowship at the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference and has continued to work on a first novel. He was born in San Francisco in 1919, is a veteran of the U.S. Navy, and now lives in Gloucester, Massachusetts.

THE CANNIBAL POT*

MAXWELL ARNOLD

The awful slouch about those palm trees was exactly what Bobby Drayton couldn't catch in his drawing and, after four hours, he gave it up. Once more he looked down where they stood like two big slatterns below his hotel window, and then went to the telephone in the wall thinking, O what an artist is lost in me, O quantus artifex something.

It took him two secretaries to get through to Leon Striker and then in his fluty, almost babyish voice Bobby said, "Hi, is this Leon?"

"Hey, y'old goat, when did you get in?" There it was, Leon's chronic-cold voice, the same as all the years Bobby had known it since the days at St. Mark's.

"I got in this morning." Bobby felt a diving panic and a bitterness for his own weakness in phoning. He had been in Los Angeles for two weeks, to paint Los Angeles and do nothing else, and this trip he had meant to keep himself away from Leon and his wife. Now he knew he was lost; Leon and Fluffy would engulf him again.

"I bet you got in yesterday and were playing hard to get," Leon said with his chuckle. Leon chuckled often, rarely laugh-

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THE CANNIBAL POT

ing; something like a silly parrot, and he used the chuckle when he thought he was being very keen.

"No, it was this morning. How's Fluffy?"

"Fine, fine, y'old goat. Where are you now?"

"How's the baby?"

"She's wonderful. She's so *cute*. Where are you?"

"In a hotel. Now, look, Leon, I have a nice room and I came to do some work."

"Listen, Bobby, I can't go through all that again. I'm going to call Teefie and have a room ready for you and you're going to be there tonight."

"I can't," Bobby said weakly.

"Well, we just aren't going to talk about it. I'll be by from the office at five and pick you up. How long will you be here?"

"I'm leaving tomorrow."

"Don't be ridiculous. Your letter said a month."

Yes, the letter. "Well, I was going to stay two weeks but it's so hot."

"That's wonderful. We can see each other a lot and talk. And Fluffy will be delighted. You can help her with Joyce."

"Joyce?"

"James Joyce. She's so cute. She's been saying if only Bobby would hurry up and come. All right now, Bobby, what hotel are you at?"

"The Lincoln."

"Where?" There was that note of an aristocratic influenza in the voice, and Bobby wished that Leon would spit good and hard just once.

"It's a little hotel downtown."

"No wonder you want to leave tomorrow. You're coming out to Bel-Air. Get yourself packed and I'll pick you up at five. And be ready."

"Well, this place *is* kind of ratty," Bobby said. It wasn't exactly, but this was a way Bobby had of stalling Leon—amuse him with a snap at your own intestines. Leon enjoyed the hyena.

"Be ready at five now," Leon said after a chuckle.

"I'm always ready."

The conversation faded off behind another chuckle.

When Bobby hung up he lay down on the bed and swore that he absolutely would not go. It would be safe to see Leon and Fluffy now and then, and he would go to dinner tonight, but he wouldn't pack. He couldn't be forced to live there, to crawl into the pet cage. It was absurd. It was rotten, it was mocking and degrading, it was the kind of thing Leon Striker had always done to him.

At five Bobby was dressed for dinner and he was not packed and Leon could go to hell. When Leon phoned from the lobby at five-fifteen Bobby said he would be down as soon as he changed his tie.

He stood and looked sullenly at himself in the mirror for five minutes, enough time to play out the interval needed. Then he decided he did need to change his tie: the bow he was wearing made his big blond moonish face too fat. All of him was getting too fat—he must be 220 now. And while he worried over a color, Leon knocked and had to be let in. Chuck and Oog were with him.

"Hi," Bobby said, plucking a tie; "let's go."

Leon hadn't changed. He was as rosy as ever, and just as expansive in his manner, even though he was small and light. He wasn't much more than half of Bobby's size, and Bobby always dropped into a stoop when he was with him. But Leon liked big gestures and he gave Bobby a heavy slap on the back.

"Y'old goat, how are you? You're getting fat."

"Yes."

"Bobby, you know Chuck and Oog, don't you?"

"Sure. Hi." They were friends Leon had taken from college right into business. Bobby remembered them hazily. They were big faithful men.

"All set?" Leon said. "Where's your baggage?"

"I don't have any."

"Don't be silly."

"Well," Bobby said. "Well, I didn't have time to pack. I took a nap."

"I knew this would happen," Leon said to his men; "all right, let's go;" and while Bobby watched in a kind of horror they plowed through the drawers and the closet and bathroom and threw all of Bobby's clothes into his suitcases.

"I'm not going. I can't."

Leon smiled kindly. "Poor old Bobby. Bobby, there are two kinds of people. Those who act and those who just think. The ones who act have to act for those who don't. Now—you're all packed and you're coming to the house and you'll see how much better you like it there."

"Sure," Oog said. "Come on, Bobby, we're double-parked."

Bobby stalled with a cigarette, looked at Chuck and Oog, who were watching him and Leon with enjoyment, and said, "No, I can't come. I want to stay here and paint. But I can see you a lot."

"Look, Bobby, I haven't time to be picking you up every night to go out with us. It's much easier if you live with us. You can do my portrait if you want. Let's go."

"I don't want to do any portraits."

"O-kay." This was a signal to Chuck and Oog and they flanked Bobby in one move, took his arms firmly and following Leon forced Bobby and his baggage and his paints down the elevator to Leon's new convertible.

The house in Bel-Air was silky inside and Spanish outside, a California mission stuffed with the orient. It floated on a sea-swell of shaved grass as rich and green as creme de menthe. A very successful Los Angeles businessman's home, a dream-boat; perhaps not a luxury liner like other houses in Bel-Air, but a very sweet yacht all the same.

Bobby slept nervously in an opulent room where the sun

intruded early, and he awoke without enough sleep. Lola moved in just about with the sun, and Bobby had to entertain what he was sure was the most coquettish little French doll in toyland—and while he was still in bed and still brooding over his enforced visit.

Lola sat on the bed and stared at him with all the rudeness of five years. Bobby tried to comb his hair with his fingers and pulled the coverlet up to his chin.

“I remember you,” Lola said.

“Hello, Lola.”

“You’re Bobby.”

“That’s right.”

“Are you going to draw my picture?”

“Not now.”

“Play a game with me.”

“Later, dear.”

Lola pouted, fluttering her eyelashes. “But Poppy plays it with me and he said you would.”

“Poppy. Well, Poppy never told me how.”

“I’m going to capture you but you don’t let me.”

“You let me get dressed first.”

“But you’re tied to the bed and you can’t.”

“Oh?”

“With magic ropes.”

“Look, Lola, just leave for a little while and then we’ll play the game.”

A laugh tinkled in the little Valentine face. “We’re playing it now.”

“I don’t like this game.” His teeth felt terrible.

“You have to escape.”

“What?”

“That’s the game. How do you escape?”

“Oh. All right. In an airplane.”

“But you’re tied.”

“I cut the ropes.”

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"They're magic."

"I cut them with a magic knife."

"I shoot your airplane down."

"But I'm not in the airplane."

Lola became petulant and appeared ready to snap at Bobby's logic when Teefie came for her. Teefie took care of Lola and Teefie was how Fluffy had first said Theresa in her own crib twenty-five years ago. The Strikers were sentimental this way, clutching to childhood servants and friends, childhood names. Teefie and Oog and Fluffy.

"How are you, Teefie?"

"Just fine." She smiled shyly and kindly, then dropped her eyes.

"Thanks for fixing the room for me. I'm afraid I'm a lot of trouble."

"Oh, no. I'm glad to do it."

"Are Leon and Fluffy up?"

"Oh my, yes. They went early to play golf."

"It's Saturday," Bobby remembered. It would be easy to escape. "Well, I'll get along and you tell them I'll phone."

Lola said, "Where are you going?"

"Back to my hotel. I have some work."

"Leon will be home soon," Teefie said.

Lola said, "Poppy promised me you were staying. You can't go."

"We'll see."

Teefie said, "Leon expects you to stay. He told me."

"Come on," Lola said, and tugged Teefie from the room. She called back to Bobby, "You can't escape now."

The hell you say, Bobby thought, but his confidence was drooping.

After breakfast Bobby packed, called a cab, and began to feel safe. It would be easy. Teefie and Lola had gone and Fluffy and Leon weren't going to be back for another hour. He

could get back to the hotel, check out, move to another one or leave town. Then write them a letter he could send to a friend in Chicago to be mailed to the Strikers from there. It would say he had suddenly had to go to Chicago.

Bobby heard a motor outside and took his baggage out the front door. Fluffy—he was caught. He felt helpless, wanting to duck back into the house and out another door, but he was certain Fluffy had seen him and he sat down foolishly on a suitcase and returned the wave she now gave him. He glanced over his shoulder wistfully, looking at the open door behind him, and then turned back to resign himself to an idle inspection of her as she came up the long walk.

She was certainly pudgier, more than he had thought last night. Even at her best she had always seemed too pudgy to him, and he had thought sometimes that she should have belonged to that house of Pies at U.C.—that pudgy blond sorority.

Fluffy said Leon would be along later and gave Bobby a sweet hug, turning to look at his baggage. "Where do you think you're going, Mister Drayton?"

"I have to go to Chicago."

Fluffy showed anxiety. "Chicago?"

"There was a telegram about something and I have to go."

"Did you get the telegram here?"

"No, no; yesterday afternoon, at the hotel."

"You didn't tell us then."

"I forgot."

"Oh, Bobby," she said, winking, "now I know you're kidding. You're going back to that awful hotel and I won't let you. Leon told me to watch you carefully."

"But it's so much trouble for you," Bobby said, but he knew instantly how weak a point this was and gave up when Fluffy told him he was being very silly and that she was really hurt. He followed her back to the study where she told him to talk to her about his work.

Bobby said his painting wasn't going too well and he sup-

posed eventually he'd have to go back to Cleveland and go into his father's business. But he would stay in San Francisco a while longer.

"Why don't you stay here?"

"I like San Francisco better."

"Oh, Leon and I *love* Los Angeles and so would you. Bobby, it would be swell to have you here all the time."

He didn't want to go into whipping that old dead L.A. horse again so he said, "Well, as a matter of fact, I have a nice setup these days. Very nice girl."

She widened her pudgy eyes at him and then let the lids drop fatly over them, an old sign of understanding she used. Then she smiled wanly. That was a Pie thing too, the wan smile, and he smiled back and looked at her. She was still good to look at and still had those very good legs, and she caught him looking at them. She looked back at him in a way he never knew how to take. A look of soft reprimand, a friendly warning to dangerous old Bobby. All it needed was a playful slap, but it always stopped him.

"Where's Leon?" he said.

"Oog is bringing him in his car. We're going to take you for a ride."

"But I have to go, really."

"Bobby, you unpack those bags this minute, and if you don't I will."

"I want to paint downtown."

"What do you want to paint that awful downtown district for? It's so much prettier out here. We'll show you some beautiful spots."

"Where are we going?"

"We want to show you Bel-Air and Westwood."

"Okay, but I don't want to paint them, so you can take me downtown later. I want to look around on Main Street for a place to sketch out." Fluffy said they would take him down, but when Leon heard about it he said that Bobby could draw

all the time in San Francisco; they had too many things for Bobby to do to let him poke around in downtown Los Angeles.

II

All the house-guest crimes he had committed, practically every day for the last two weeks with the Strikers, and not one, Bobby thought, had worked. He was lying on his bed in his empty hotel room. He had never checked out and he used the room for afternoon naps whenever he could sneak away from Leon and Fluffy.

He had given up hope for escape after being caught several times by Fluffy, Teefie, and Lola. Lola was always spying. He had tried really hard to paint, during the first three days with them, anyway, but he was never permitted to work for more than an hour at a time. He put away his paints then and began a series of rudenesses. He wouldn't shave for parties, he would drink too much, be late for appointments, shabbily dressed for business lunches. He would leave a dinner party at Mocambo or Ciro's to disappear into the bar, and when he would come back to the table, absolutely in ruins from martinis, he would ignore the girl Fluffy had arranged for him and flirt wildly and uselessly with someone else. Then Fluffy had said she didn't know what she was going to do with him, he was more trouble than Lola. "You're getting to be just as if you were my own son," she'd said, her wan smile broadening to a beam.

Now he thought it was this part of him that had made him so attractive to the Strikers. Leon had his dutiful in Chuck and Oog, in Teefie, and in Fluffy and Lola. These were his angels, but Bobby, Bobby felt now, was his demon, a fallen angel whom Leon had somehow lost from his heaven. Bobby had managed to jump out after he had left Leon at school and Leon had never been able to haul him back in. Bobby was aware of his position now: he must never permit himself to return. This was the best way to be with Leon; he would have the most freedom and, actually, the most pleasure out of the friendship if he

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could continue to stay just out of Leon's reach, just permitting him to touch him once in a while.

And he had to admit he was having a good time. It was the good time that had jailed him for two weeks—he was imprisoned by lavish and expensive entertainment. Leon and Fluffy carried him off to big-time dinners every night on Sunset Strip, then turned him loose with the convertible. He had extraordinary privileges for a captive, like a white man held by the Typee cannibals. He would be honored and feted indefinitely, but if he stayed long enough, sooner or later he would be eaten.

Bobby dozed for an hour, awoke to dream for another, left the bed, looked out the window at the palm trees, and then returned to Bel-Air. Fluffy was waiting to ask him for a review of anything that could have happened after he had fled from them last night at a theater party.

"How did you like Mildred?" she said. This was the girl she had got for him.

"Very nice girl. She bored me." They were in the kitchen and Bobby was banging through the enormous refrigerator. "Baby food. Why don't you ever have anything good to eat here, Fluffy?"

"Because we hardly ever eat at home. Didn't you really like her, Bobby?"

"I guess she was too young, Fluffy. No savvy. Where are we eating tonight?"

"Leon said he'd like to eat home for a change so I'm going to buy a roast. We only eat home once a week, and we haven't since you've been here."

"Oh."

"Would you rather eat out?"

"I don't care." He bit carelessly into a large sloppy peach.

"You look disappointed."

"Well."

"All right, I'll tell Leon and we'll eat at Chanteclair. This is your vacation, you know."

"Hooray!" Bobby said, but at once he thought he might be getting reckless. He covered up quickly by saying, "Now for God's sake, Fluffy, what kind of a girl are you going to get me tonight?"

Bobby whined about this to Leon later and to Bobby's astonishment Leon negotiated a toughly-built blonde who'd been in a cowboy film that was starring a baseball hero. The blonde's name was Joy.

Joy lasted for several nights and the night they cracked a fender on the convertible Leon was just so damned nice about it—wouldn't let Bobby pay a thing. "Well, okay," Bobby'd said, and had used Fluffy's car, but he and Joy played the radio too much and the battery went dead just as the other car was ready again for him.

He was hard to pull away from Joy now, but Leon and Fluffy persuaded him to leave her one night so they could have dinner alone. They ate at a restaurant on La Cienega that seemed all peppermint and candelabra, all a California try at *New York, New York*. Diners were hushed and reverent about some musical comedy piano, although eyes would stray to the French Impressionists on the walls. Behind Bobby and Leon and Fluffy were two small sketches of male nudes by Degas and Bobby asked Fluffy what she thought of them.

"I don't know," she said.

"They're very good," Bobby told her.

"Oh, do you really think so?"

"Isn't she *cute*?" Leon said with a look of baby admiration.

"Who drew them, Bobby?"

"They're Degas."

Fluffy grinned lusciously. There was very much blood in her smile when it opened out of its wanness: bright pink gums and plump red lips. "They're very expensive drawings, aren't they?"

Bobby was touched and felt very affectionate. "They're just reproductions."

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"I thought they were originals." Her smile was getting faint again.

Bobby's heart sank with his affection. Poor Fluffy, trying so hard. "The originals are almost priceless, Fluffy, you couldn't touch them. These are good reproductions, but you wouldn't see Degas originals hanging in a restaurant."

"But they could be originals, couldn't they? This restaurant does very well and I think the owner is quite rich." Her smile was all gone.

Bobby sighed. "Maybe they could, but these just aren't. I'll find out, though, if you want."

"No, don't," Leon said.

"I think they're kind of depressing, don't you, Bobby?"

"That piano is depressing. Let's go."

III

Two days before Bobby was definitely going to go back to San Francisco he gave up Joy. He had been with Leon and Fluffy for four weeks, with Joy for two, and he would let Leon and Fluffy have the last two days. This pleased Leon, because tonight he was having very nice people over for a party of charades and Leon liked having parties at home. He liked his home very much and he wanted the parties to go well. With someone like Joy you never knew.

Bobby began drinking early at the Hollywood Roosevelt, then stopped for a bottle of gin on the way home. It irritated him some to have to buy gin (and the olives, too) because Leon had cases of Scotch and not a drop of anything else. Leon was devoted to Scotch as a fashion if not as a pleasure, but he could have had a little gin.

Bobby pushed in the house a little unsteadily and found Leon dressing for dinner. He told him the battery was going now in the big car. And would Leon like a drink because he was heading for the rumpus room right now and fix some.

"That's funny about the batteries," Leon said. He brought

a shirt and tie into the rumpus room. "Do you leave the lights on?"

"Hell, no. Just aren't good batteries. You should find some better batteries or they're going to be conking out all the time. Say, you like a martini?"

"Just a little Scotch. You're feeling pretty good already, aren't you?"

Bobby stopped mixing and looked at Leon cautiously. "Me? Heck no, I'm just nice, that's all."

"You look pretty stiff, y'old goat. Drinking all day, I bet."

"Well, some of the afternoon. But I'm okay, don't worry about me, kiddo. Scotch, eh?"

"Please. Will you bring it to me?"

"Why not? 'S what I'm here for, isn't it? Take care you. Oog and Chuck and Teafie and Bobby. All take care Leon."

Leon smiled as he took the glass from Bobby but turned his face sour at the strength of the drink.

"You should drink martinis," Bobby said. "Make cigarettes taste wonderful. But you don't smoke."

"No." Leon frowned as Bobby poured himself a neat row of four martinis. "All for you?"

"All for me, Poppy." He raised one of them and said, "Micturate." He dug in a record pile and came up with an old Ellington he had given Fluffy once and which Leon had never liked. "Music," Bobby said.

"I don't *like* that record," Leon said in the whine he sometimes affected to show disapproval. "Fluffy's right. It's just noise."

"Here's to Fluff," Bobby said to the end of the second martini. "Micturate."

"I know you're drunk now, y'old goat. Whenever you start that micturate. You never told me what that is."

"Never?" Bobby was honestly perplexed. "Micturate. I don't know what it is." He didn't; it simply popped out when he was drunk.

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Bobby noticed Leon was getting to look glum. "What's matter, boy? Cheer up. Par-ty."

Leon said, "Bobby, you know I've never liked all this drinking you do," and that made Bobby turn to him with a look of outraged privacy, but Leon went on. "I don't care, that's up to you. But look, tonight I'm having some people over and a couple of friends from the Indianapolis office and I'd appreciate it if you took it easy."

"Hey now. I'm okay. What's the matter with you? You ought to know me by now." But he had to say "oops" as he spilled some martini and this seemed an admission. "All right, whatever you say. I won't louse up the charades. I'm a good friend."

Leon looked almost flattered. He also looked absolutely commanding for the first time since Bobby moved in. "Now you run along, y'old goat, and get dressed. Old Goatsie."

Bobby picked up the fourth glass. "That my name now? Goatsie. My God, you got me."

Leon chuckled. "Old Goatsie. Say, how was Joy?"

Now he's getting intimate, Bobby thought, and on that one Scotch. And sexy. Leon had followed his question with a clumsy wink and an oafish sound, a barnyard cluck-cluck, as if he were a farm boy tickling a city girl.

"Joy? Joy was great. Best thing you ever did for me."

"I told you we'd take good care of you, Bobby. Goatsie. I'll have to tell Oog."

Bobby came over to him and leaned in his face. "Now listen. *Goatsie* goes right now or I'll poop all over your party."

Leon showed signs of resenting an indignity and Bobby said, "You never liked anal humor, did you?"

Leon left his chair and straightened up Bobby. "Come on, Bobby, get dressed." He slapped him on the back and was about to get him through the door when Fluffy came in waving a photograph.

"Look," she said excitedly, "I knew it was somewhere and I just found it. Bobby, look."

Leon looked over Bobby's shoulder and cried delightedly, "His graduation picture. From St. Mark's."

"Jesus Christ," Bobby said. He was embarrassed and almost offended that they should show him this. He had never liked the picture and he sobered long enough to look at it. "That's my nice face," he said.

The portrait showed a tenderness somewhere in the soft eyes and in the creamy shadows under the eyes; they had been dark shadows he'd had since fourteen, but the photographer had tried to touch them up out of the photograph. There was something almost darling—young and good—in the shape of the round head and the careful brush of the short light hair; and in the soft, cautious smile there was unmistakably a sweetness.

Fluffy pressed innocently against Bobby's side, holding his arm, looking at the photograph. "Isn't it cute? Read the inscription, Bobby."

"I'm too fried." But he read it aloud clearly, stopping once to look at Leon with self-mockery, interrupting himself once to say, "Christ." The inscription sprawled all over the inside of the cardboard cover.

MY BEST FRIEND,

We're passing for the last time through these old halls, sometimes hated but really loved, and it is an outrageous fortune that we must part. But this should not be an end to our friendship. The seeds have only been sprinkled, the flowers are yet to flourish. But if it is the end we must remember it as something very dear to our growing.

I warn you. You may some day sit before an important desk and wonder what hole there could be in your life, and I tell you now that it will be my absence. You see, I wonder what you are going to do without me. But I also wonder how I am going to get along without you.

Congratulations.

BOB

"Jesus," Bobby said. He passed the picture to Leon. "It's so florid."

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"Bobby," Fluffy said, and she squeezed his hand, "it's sweet."

"That's just the way you were," Leon said.

"That's what hurts." His head was going fuzzy again. "And what a feeble gag at the end."

Leon came to him and took his hand from Fluffy. "Bobby, this picture means a lot to me. You don't know how much." Then he laid his hand on Bobby's shoulder and Bobby, after a second of amusement, was unable to keep from slipping into a flood of memory and affection and a swelling awareness of all the good in Leon; perhaps there was self-pity too in the thought that Leon and Fluffy probably loved him better than anybody he knew. For the wrong reasons sometimes, for the fun he would make of himself to entertain them, but it was an enduring and—he felt now—an unselfish love.

He looked into Leon's eyes steadily just once. "You're my best friend, Leon. You've been too damned good to me." Then he glided back to drunkenness.

Fluffy said, "Oh, Bobby, darling."

And Leon answered, "Nonsense, Bobby. Anything we can do for you we're glad to. You know we'd do anything."

"I know. Best friend I got. Do anything for me. Anything for Goatsie."

"Never mind the Goatsie, Bobby. How about getting dressed now?"

"Sure. Par-ty." He brightened. "Say, you got a good tie I can use?"

"Go on and take your pick, y'old goat," and Leon and Fluffy followed him to their bedroom.

IV

On the hot brown afternoon that Bobby was going to leave he vanished an hour before Leon was to drive him to the station. He returned with presents.

"Bobby, you didn't have to do this," Fluffy said.

"I wanted to." He arranged the packages on top of the piano and moved two of them aside for Teeffie and Lola.

"Cigarettes for Teeffie," he said. "You didn't know she smoked."

Fluffy laughed. "I always wondered."

"I saw her sneak one once. Well, now, the others are for you. Let's get Leon and go."

"Oh, we have to open the packages first." Fluffy called Leon.

Leon found that he now had a handsome three-volume edition, boxed, of all the poems Whitman ever wrote. He seemed perplexed.

"You thought he was great at St. Mark's," Bobby said.

"Yes, I suppose I did."

Bobby couldn't remember now if he had bought the books as a joke or because he thought Leon would like them. What on earth he'd bought them for, he didn't know. All that Whitman.

He was getting rattled and found himself panicky about Fluffy's present. He had spent most of his time on it, and now: how could he possibly have thought she would like it? She would hate it. Fluffy said she remembered a photograph of Edith Sitwell in *Harper's Bazaar*, and "People" in *Time* had once had a paragraph about her, but when she opened the record album Bobby handed her and found readings of Sitwell poems with music she merely looked puzzled. "They look wonderful, Bobby, but what are they?"

They went to the rumpus room to play one and Bobby sat sweating, watching Fluffy and Léon listen stonily, as if it were a bad joke in church. For Bobby the music had the beauty of delicious foolishness, the wild wisdom of madness, all the secrets of another world being played at once; but when he listened with Fluffy's ears the music was a drunken one-man-band playing on instruments of jade—and when the verses began in a wondrously effete voice, a perishing contralto that spoke all

the meaning of a meaningless world without uttering one comprehensible syllable, he thought, Poor Fluffy. And poor Bobby.

Leon and Fluffy exchanged a laugh when the record ended. "What's it supposed to be?" Fluffy said kindly.

"A poem."

"It's awful pretty," Leon said and gave the parrot chuckle.

"Well, it is kind of nice, dear, in a silly sort of way. But what does it mean?"

Bobby said, "I shouldn't have bought it without getting you the book, too. If you had the poems you could follow them in the book. Don't you think they're kind of good, though, just like this?"

"Oh, yes." She frowned pudgily. "But Bobby, what's the good of them if you can't hear the words? I think the words are the most important. And the music is so *strange*. It hasn't any melody."

Leon chuckled again. "They're awful pretty, Bobby. Bobby, next time bring us something to eat."

Bobby was almost angry, even though he knew it was his own fault. "There was a good-looking girl in the shop and she sold them to me before I knew what happened." This lie delighted them. "I forgot my change, too." Leon and Fluffy laughed harder. "I'll get you the book and maybe you'll like them better. They have a kind of nice air, anyway, don't you think? Charm, kind of."

"Well, Bobby, when I hear music I want music and not charm." Fluffy said this so honestly that Bobby knew it was exactly what she meant, and meant kindly.

Leon said, "They're really swell, Bobby. I'm sorry you went and spent your money because you didn't have to, but thanks an awful lot."

"Bobby, you're a darling," Fluffy said.

"We'd better go now," Leon said. "Do you have everything?"

Bobby remained silent to think carefully. He was certain to leave something, but that always happened. Then he had a frightened look and ran from them to search hastily through the study and his bedroom, shocked to think he had almost forgot, and finally found the school portrait. He slipped it into his inside coat pocket, carefully out of sight, and returned.

"All set. Almost forgot my tickets." Both Strikers shook their heads humorously.

Leon helped Bobby to the car with his baggage and before they had finished Lola came home from play.

"Uncle Bobby's going now," Leon said.

"Gee," she said. "Good-bye, Bobby." Bobby picked her up and she felt like a little starched pink cloud in her fresh white shirt. She gave him a large damp kiss and put her arms about his neck, and Bobby felt big and massive and warm, and as he kissed her peach-like cheek he felt remorse that he had secretly mocked her extravagant beauty.

"All right, dear," Leon signaled, and Lola allowed Bobby to uncurl her from himself. He went back with her to say good-bye to Fluffy.

"Bobby, it was swell to have you. Did you have a good time?"

"Fine, Fluffy. I can't thank you enough."

"Now you know where to come next time."

"Yes. You win. Me and my privacy, you know. I was afraid about that, that was all."

"Now, you see? We didn't bother you at all." She offered him her hand but he was overcome by a sudden warmth and kissed her.

"So long."

"Bye bye," she said, her face puffed with pudgy sadness. When Bobby got to the car she called out, "Thank you for the pretty records!"

Leon drove down the Strip on the way to Union Station,

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passing Mocambo, Ciro's, Chanteclair, all dead in the sun, and Bobby remembered a fragment of the Sitwell poem:

. . . . Daisy and Lilly,
 Lazy and silly,
 Walk by the shore of the wan grassy sea. . . .

The Strip ended and Sunset made its bend toward Los Angeles and ran down from glamour to squalor.

Bobby didn't want Leon to come into Union Station with him. He said he couldn't stand good-byes in train stations.

"The war did it, I guess," he said. They sat together in the car while a redcap tagged the luggage.

"Don't be silly. I'll come to your track and see you off."

"No, please don't. I don't know. Because I'm neurotic, I guess."

Leon chuckled. "Look, Bobby, you're not famous yet. When you're famous you can be neurotic."

Bobby smiled weakly. That one had hurt. Leon could hurt very often, any time, at the last minute or the first minute, whenever you left yourself open. "Okay. When I'm famous."

But then Leon looked at him with affection. "You will be, Bobby. I always told you, didn't I? I'm glad you're on the way."

"Well, I've got a start."

"It's a tough pull, I know, and I admire you for sticking to it. Just keep drawing, that's all. Next time maybe you can paint me." Leon pushed him toward the door. "Okay, now, go on in the station and I'll leave."

"All right. Thanks for everything, Leon. You were swell. Treated me like a rich relative."

"Don't be silly, Bobby. We only wish we could see more of you."

"So long." His voice was so high.

"Good-bye, Bobby."

They shook hands, and Leon did it with such a desperate

pressure and so tenaciously that Bobby felt himself touched by Leon again. He hid in a turn to the redcap and began to check his bags, and as he reached into his pockets for tickets he touched the cardboard of the portrait. He held it inside his pocket for a moment and looked around at Leon, who was still waiting to see that Bobby would get off all right. Bobby went back to the car.

“Hey,” he said, “look. I almost went off with this damned thing and forgot about it.”

Leon took it with one more chuckle, and after another good-bye drove off.

Bobby watched the long, beautiful car roll around the circle out in the traffic. The portrait was going back to the house to live with Leon and Fluffy, in a dark corner, in a closet, a drawer. Incriminating, damning evidence they would always have. But that much he owed them.

THOMAS DOYLE *was graduated from Stanford as a major in creative writing in 1949. At present he is working on a novel and a musical drama begun in the Writing Center. With forty months in the Air Force and twelve as a fighter pilot in the Pacific, he takes some pride in the fact that he has yet to write, talk, or think about war experiences. He is married and a father. "El Conquistador" is his first published story.*

EL CONQUISTADOR

THOMAS DOYLE

After twelve years of marriage and eight children by his wife, Teresa (it is customary to count only those by a wife), Corky Montado began to drink. His brother Jaime had a dark little place on North Market Street about six doors down from the big white bank on the corner, and Corky, before two o'clock every Saturday afternoon, sat quietly and alone on the shadowed, cool concrete step before the entrance to his brother's bar. His thoughts usually ran haphazardly around from the aching, sweating work of the past week on Mr. Big-John's ranch, and the slow-breathing joy of each night's sleep, to the sorrowful contemplation of his next day's—Sunday's—duty: eight o'clock mass. He wished mass-going wouldn't follow Saturday night so quickly. God was getting to be pretty devilish, taking up the bothering of a man early Sunday mornings—right where the Devil had left off only two or three hours earlier. In fact, God was almost more devilish than the Devil: the Devil only came around when somebody looked for him; God looked for a man regularly, every seven days. Saturdays at two o'clock Jaime opened his doors; Corky, whose full name was Cortez El Conquistador Montado, unhurriedly got to his feet and went inside to look for the Devil. The following morning Mr. Big-John roused the Montado family early and took them to church in his pickup truck.

Late one Saturday morning, after a particularly long night's

sleep, Corky awoke to find Teresa in bed beside him. She was not used to staying in bed, especially on Saturdays, when preparations and plans for the trip to town were to be discussed eagerly with the children. Corky was surprised, and he got out of bed, dressed quickly, before he looked at her or spoke.

"Do you feel bad, Teresa?" he asked. His wife's dark face was turned toward the window above the bed, and her black hair clung like the tendrils of a vine over and around the many-times-folded winter blanket they used for a pillow during the hot summer nights. "It is late: we must hurry to town. Will you go?"

She began, "I thought maybe this morning—you slept long: had good rest . . . we—" but Corky interrupted her as he looked over at the small wooden table by the sink.

"I do not eat today? Then I will go at once." He took out his bandanna handkerchief and passed it over his neck, then his forehead, then his upper lip, as he stepped toward the door. It was not yet hot inside their little house, which consisted of the square room containing two beds, a wood stove, sink, table, and three chairs, plus the smaller screened-porch room that held two more beds and slept six of the children. Nevertheless, though the main room was still relatively cool, Corky found himself sweating; he made a rather deliberate show of mopping himself with his handkerchief. Lately, talking with his wife invariably made him sweat.

"Wait," Teresa said, "I'll go with you, please." She slipped out of bed, and Corky watched her naked body, with its gathering implication of great weight at the waist and hips, its fat round upper legs tapering down to unusually narrow, thin, bony ankles. She shook the upper part of her body into the green silky dress; her arms over her head, Corky saw the threaded edges of the ribs in the dress's armpits, and he turned to the door, went outside.

He heard and then saw three of his children playing keep-the-ball against the wall of the shed behind Mr. Big-John's garage. Two more were earnestly scratching designs in the gray-brown dust; one of his girls was sobbing under the nearest tree, and the other two, older, were scrambling after each other up in the tree.

His feelings were kind and warm as he watched them for a moment; then the mere effort of attempting to keep track of all simultaneously brought a bitter smile to harden his lips: it was as if the simple weight of their numbers depressed him. Eight! His voice was hoarse and gruff as he closed the door behind him and shouted at them.

"Hey, you, Maria! Come in, wash your face: we leave for town in a minute! You other kids get ready, too. Right away, Juan: throw that ball into Mr. Big-John's yard."

Corky moved over to the thin wooden bench along the white-washed side of his small house and sat down. It was nearly noon, so far as he could tell; the penetrating, clinging, oppressive heat began to be felt, and the feel of the sun made him wish he were already in Jaime's cool place, drinking wine. Drinking the wine was a necessary price for sitting in the dark coolness, alone, and it was not until Corky returned to the ranch that the effectual value of the wine came out. Sitting on the bench, Corky felt a strong sense of urgency as he watched his children file slowly into the house; he clapped his hands.

"Jésus! Bring me my hat when you come out. My God, do you want me to die of this fire of a sun?"

Juan smiled a little and pushed Jésus inside. The children obeyed their father instantly on Saturdays: it was a different day from the rest of the week. Corky loved to play and tease with them, especially after mass on Sundays; Saturdays, however, they had learned was no time for foolery: their father was quick with the hand or stick before they went into town, and when he returned late at night, his curses and blows were terrible to hear and receive. On Sundays it was "Do no work on the *Sabbath*, children—do you hear, Teresa?" and on Saturdays it was "Hurry: to town!"

Fifteen minutes later, the Montado family was walking along the nearly abandoned railroad tracks that connected San Jose to Los Gatos. Corky was by that time in very bad humor: the children's dog Terry—whom Corky had never liked (he called it

El Terrifico in derision)—had happened to come upon them as they set out, and was now determined to accompany them to town. El Terrifico was deaf, though no more than three years old. Corky had been the cause of this defect: the brown dog with the foot-long straight tail no longer came within reach of Corky's heavy shoes.

Every ten or twenty steps Corky stopped, picked up a stone or stick, and threw it at the dog. Shouting did no good at all. The things which Corky threw did little: El Terrifico would shy and dart away, but as soon as Corky resumed walking, the dog would pace along rapidly beside the children.

It was nearly four miles into town, even by taking the shortcut along the railroad tracks.

"I am not going around with you today, my wife. It is so close to two o'clock already that I have the taste of the wine high in my head." Corky turned to fling another rock at the dog. He promised himself to break that stick of a tail into a hundred joints—a thousand!—if ever he caught the terrible dog.

Those were the only words he spoke during the walk, save for an occasional cry to one of the children to quit lagging behind; and Teresa did not answer. By the time the Montado family turned on to a sidewalk, it was a scattered, block-long line.

Usually, the entire family shopped and window-shopped through town: up and down First Street, up Market, taking leave of Corky and returning to the ranch as two o'clock neared. They went into stores: Kress's, The National Dollar Store (where Corky glared at Charlie Yee, who had pulled a knife on Corky instead of paying up on the pot Corky had won once at the Lucky Club), Walgreen's Drug Store (where Corky bought cheap chocolates for the children, and he and Teresa had a Coca-Cola), the Salvation Army Shop (clothes). One of the first places they all took in together was the Liberty Theater, where Corky read the bills of fare and talked of taking in Cantinflas' next picture.

Today, however, Corky kept going when Jesús and the others ran to smudge at the glass enclosing the posters before the theater.

He kept walking down Market Street until he came to his brother's place.

It wasn't until he had tried the door several times and peered through the glass into the gloomy bar that he noticed the crudely lettered sign taped inside the door.

Corky cursed, sending his inconsiderate brother to Hell. The sign read that "Owner Gone Stockton Ten Days. Be Back Soon."

Corky sat down on the cool pavement of the step. Once or twice he twisted around and read the sign again. Cursing his brother repeatedly by making his lips form the familiar words, Corky sat there for about ten minutes.

Someone spoke to him in Mexican. He looked up: it was Teresa, standing above him—alone.

Corky stared angrily about him for the children. "Speak English, Teresa!" was all he could say for a moment.

"You can buy some wine in bottles. Over there: across street. Eighty-four centavos the bottle, Cortez."

"Do not call me Cortez!" He looked around again. "Where are Juan and Marguerita and the little ones?" he asked. "I have told you not to come here"

"Jaime told me last week he was to go to the valley very soon: maybe move there. I did not think to tell you sooner. But, you can bring *la Botella*—bottle—home: I have sent to the pictures show our children."

Corky approved of the idea of buying the bottle, because it was so cheap, but he did not want to go home. This change in his accustomed schedule for Saturday made him feel trapped; somehow he felt that it was a bad omen: worse things could be expected; the entire day had gone poorly so far—there was no reason to believe the rest of it would pass any differently. He saw El Terrifico sitting quietly by the curb three or four doors down and staring steadily at him; he got to his feet and shook his fist angrily at the dog.

He looked over at his wife and agreed that to buy the bottle was good; nevertheless, he had misgivings about drinking wine at

the ranch. Somehow, he felt as he did after leaving one of the little shuttered houses on Dupont Street: unclean—and, since he usually visited the houses on Saturday night, fearful of the nearly immediate visit he must make to the House of God.

“No! I buy some wine, but I don’t go home!”

“I will not trouble you.” Teresa spoke slowly, her head turned away. She was looking at the dog. “You do not want me any more: it was to come, I know. I will walk over to Senora Gonzales through the trees and come back for your dinner if you want. It is not good, what you do: but I will not trouble you; you need not drink for that any more. I cannot find anger for you for such a thing.”

“Be quiet!” shouted Corky; then he looked around to see if he had disturbed anybody. No one was looking at them. “Allow me to think, please,” he said more quietly. He felt the moisture of his perspiring at his neck, down into the small of his back.

There really was no place for him to go, he knew. Mr. Big-John—but where else? And, abruptly, Corky wished to drink his wine in his home.

“You must wait for the end of the show,” he said. “Someone must bring them home. I have decided to take some wine to our house.”

He began to move across the sidewalk; as he passed between two parked cars, he called back, without looking at her: “You are wrong to say what you do. It is not good to talk like this.” Then he half-ran across the street and entered the liquor store on the corner.

When he came outside again, Teresa was not in sight. He glanced at Jaime’s bar once more and commenced to swear again: such a brother—who would force such an uncomfortable situation upon a poor brother with a fat wife and eight kids (so soon!). Not yet thirty and a family of ten: it was too much to think about.

That was what the drinking was for; the wine was cure for the thinking, and nothing more. It did not matter where he drank it; any of the bars on Market Street would do. He could

easily get along without Jaime's place, though it had been nice to know that if he got too drunk, Jaime would take him into the little room in back and make him lie down. But he did not drink to get drunk; he would watch himself more closely in some other bar: he would get only half-drunk before he went home and laughed hilariously as he got into bed beside Teresa.

Teresa should not get so smart with Corky or he would have to beat her and work hard on her as he used to do until she always struggled to get off the bed and away from him. (Once when she was awaiting her first-born, Juan, he had so frightened and hurt her she had cried out in terror, in hate: "*Cortez—El Diablo: Diablo! Y no El Conquistador! Diablo—El Diablo Cortez!*")

Corky smiled as he remembered and walked rapidly out San Carlos Street to the overpass. Once he reached the railroad tracks, he hurried along. It was so "Godd'm hot!" and nothing to drink yet.

When he arrived home, he kicked off his shoes and threw his flimsy straw hat on the bed by the window. He took the water glass from the sink and sat down at the table; with his fingernails he slit the covering over the end of the bottle and gouged out the cork.

He drank swiftly and silently for a time, but after a while he began to laugh a little and croon short passages of song. He set the glass down too hard and it slipped away from him; and he watched it with a broad smile on his lips as it rolled noiselessly to the edge of the table. As soon as it shattered on the floor, he laughed aloud. With his bare feet he swept the bigger pieces from under the table, then dusted off the bottoms of his feet with his hand.

It was not long before Corky was passionately shouting—in an odd, unique rhythm—the words of "La Paloma"; then he quickly shook his head and forcefully sang, "*Alla donde vivia, alla donde vivi-a-ah!*"

And he remembered a few years before, no more than five, when he used regularly to go to Alum Rock Park every Sunday

for a picnic. Carrying the two youngest children (only four then, though Teresa was big with the fifth), with Juan and Marguerita hanging on to his pants legs, Corky sang all afternoon among the tables of his friends and relatives. They slapped him on the back and winked at his growing family, asking him if singing were the only *other* thing he did; and he drew frowning looks of disapproval from the better-dressed people, which made him smile more merrily and sing louder for their enraptured golden-children. He often sang very loud.

The knocking on the door startled him, and his first reaction was to clutch the bottle close to his chest.

"Hey, that you in there, Corky?"

"Ah—Mr. Big-John: come in. Come in!" Corky shouted. He overturned his chair as he got to his feet; holding the bottle tightly in one hand, he ran to the door. He was slightly confused, filled with a mixture of elation and embarrassment.

"What the heck are you doing, making all that noise in here this afternoon, you crazy little greaser?" Big-John began when Corky opened the door. Then he saw the bottle. The affection dropped out of his voice as he said, "Hey, now, Corky: I won't have you wining it up on that Dago Red around here, and you know it. Where's Teresa and the kids? Something happened?"

"Come in, come in, I beg you, Mr. Big-John!" Corky cried. He swung the bottle in a jerking arc away from him, indicating the direction in which he desired the other to proceed. "Please: enter. I will tell you all about it and you will perhaps drink with me."

Then Corky saw El Terrifico peering inquisitively around one of Mr. Big-John's legs.

"So," he said slowly. El Terrifico gave one short bark from his protected position, then broke for the more distant safety of the hedge. "I wish that you had followed me all the way into my house, you hare-brain dog!" Corky shouted after it.

"What'd he do," asked Big-John, "follow you home?"

"Yes, that rabbit soul, he—but, please, enter. Let me tell

you about the great El Terrifico: about why he does not raise his leg at the tree as he should, but squats in shame as a bitch!"

Big-John laughed and stooped to enter the room. "You had better have a pretty good reason for this, Corky," he said. His face was heavily tanned and looked as dark as Corky's, but his blue eyes did not have the same dark brightness. He moved Corky's hat on the bed and sat down.

"I swear to you: the dog does not lift its leg!"

"You know what I'm talking about. What's happened to all your brood? And why aren't you down at your brother's?—I'm not going to have you start drinking out here. I mean it, Corky."

"I agree—the very words I give to my wife! The brother you speak of is in the valley: may he fall of the heat! and I fear the police officers and the jail bed for tonight: there! Now, as for the dog—will you have a glass?—I must tell you about that cat of a dog before I shoot it and forget it."

Corky straightened up the chair and then sat on it; he jumped up at once, however, and ran to the sink. He poured some of the wine into a cup and brought it over to Mr. Big-John.

"I wish you to accept this," Corky said gravely. "I promise you I will do this never again: it was my ignorant and fat wife Teresa's doing. And I was so thirsty I left my senses on the sidewalk. You drink with me and never say I got drunk on Mr. Big-John's ranch."

Big-John took the cup and put both his large hands around it, one thumb through the handle.

"First time and last time, then," he asked, "that's a promise?" He smiled when Corky nodded quickly. "Well, go ahead about the dog. What are you talking about?"

"Yes!" Corky, happy and excited, put the bottle on the table and sat down again. "That fearful dog! The winter of last year it was. When the stupid thing had room for even less brains. He stood against the bumper, or a loose wire from the taillight, maybe—anyway—you have opened a car door and been . . .

tingled?—you know?—well, it was a raining day: El Terrifico begins to rain on the bumper and—such a yelling!—he jumps high as this: over the table it would have been: and runs like a shadow across the wall! We don't see him until the next day. And now he will not try again, but sits forever."

Big-John laughed, then tasted the wine. "How do you drink this stuff?" he asked, making a face. "Your El Terrifico couldn't choose any worse." He stood up and walked over to the sink, drained the cup.

"Well," he continued, turning around and looking at Corky, "I was just wondering what you were in here singing about. I have to go into town, myself. Want to come along?"

"No, Mr. Big-John." Corky was staring solemnly at the bottle and did not look up. There was a long pause, then, "I wonder," he went on, "if the dog works on the female—in his condition?"

Big-John laughed again and slapped Corky on the shoulder as he moved to the door. "I've never seen any of his pups, so I guess he's worried about that, too. Well, I'll see you in the morning." He paused at the door. "You don't have to finish the whole bottle before dark, you know," he said.

After Big-John had left, Corky sat silently, taking slow mouthfuls from the bottle every so often. Though mindful of Mr. Big-John's last words, he at last had emptied it, and he turned to gaze ruefully at the cup on the sink. He continued to sit there for a few minutes, then he got up. His walk was unsteady as he stepped to the bed. While he was taking off his shirt, as he sat on the edge of the bed, he felt the late afternoon sun through the window behind him. Without bothering to take off the rest of his clothes, he curled up on the bed; and before he went to sleep, his mind dwelt unhurriedly and regretfully on the thought that it was too early to go to bed: he would never be able to sleep the entire night through—although he felt he wanted to, for some reason he had forgot.

When he awoke, it was dark, and he could hear Teresa's

breathing beside him, could feel the warmth of her body. He had not heard them come home: he was hungry and wondered if they had eaten. He cursed silently for being so wide awake and was careful not to move, though he began to want to stretch.

Corky waited impatiently for the night outside to grow lighter; and at last he was forced to move his tense body into a new position, and he did so slowly, at intervals.

By the time the dawn did begin to make a gray square at the window, and extinguish the flickering stars he had been watching, Corky was weary and certain he had been awake since midnight. A little later he felt Teresa stir and he closed his eyes. He heard her turn toward him, and when she put a hand on his stomach, he nearly cried aloud. She had immediately taken her hand away, however, and had turned her body over again. Corky knew that she had felt his tense stomach muscles and now knew he was awake.

It was about half an hour later that Corky realized that Teresa was crying: the bed shook ever so slightly, but there was no sound. Corky listened for a few minutes, and when he felt his own eyes begin to smart and water, he sat up in bed.

"You are my wife!" he cried. "You must stop! It will do you no good—makes me mad! It cannot be, do you hear? No more, by the mother of God! No more!"

His clenched fist came down heavily, quickly, on her shoulder; he pressed it down hard on her flesh to keep from striking her again.

"You must stop it, Teresa!"

But she had quieted at his touch. She did not move, and Corky kept his hand on her arm.

He had opened his fist and was gently patting on her arm and shoulder when he heard somebody outside. Then there was a pounding on the door.

"All right, you heathen in there!" It was Mr. Big-John's voice. "Get up, you lazy tramps: don't think you can lie abed all day. Time for mass! I'll have the truck started in ten min-

utes, and you'd all better be ready. Come on, you Christian greasers: get up!"

Corky turned his head back down to Teresa. "Will you go to church, my Teresa?" he asked.

"Yes, Cortez" she answered. "Tell Mr. Big-John, right away we come. It is necessary."

"It is necessary," Corky repeated quietly, slowly. He felt her body move, gather itself to rise, and he slid his legs off the bed and stood up.

"Teresa," Corky went on, "—perhaps now that Jaime is going away, it will no longer be necessary to drink the wine: I don't think I would like any other place, and Mr. Big-John has told me to drink here no more. Do you understand me?"

"Yes," Teresa replied, "and I hope you will not find it necessary, Cortez."

"—Hey, in there!" The pounding resumed, and Corky stepped around the edge of the bed and opened the door to speak to Mr. Big-John.

"Good morning, good morning! We comè at once: never do we miss the church! God does not leave us to go to Stockton, does he—but perhaps he should some days! Give us five minutes, Mr. Big-John."

Big-John squinted at him. "You still drinking that wine, Corky?" he asked suspiciously.

"Oh, no, Mr. Big-John!" Corky turned his shocked face to Teresa for a moment before he smiled at her. Then he turned back. He lowered his voice in a confidential whisper—that he knew his wife could hear.

"You know what, Mr. Big-John, I bet you I don't ever drink the wine again: I just decided. What is its good? Nothing!—so, no more: what do you think of that?"

THE MORNING STAR

N. V. M. GONZALEZ

The sailor went back to the outriggered boat and returned with a lantern. It lighted up the footpath before him and his flat unshod feet. He walked in a slow, shuffling manner, the lantern in his hand swinging in rhythm.

"Can't you walk faster?" the old man shouted from the coconut grove.

Instead of saying something in reply, the sailor shuffled on, neither hastening nor slowing his gait.

"You're a turtle, that's what," said the old man.

As the sailor approached, the lantern light caught the entrance of the makeshift shelter. Then the oval of light completely engulfed the shelter, which was shaped like a pup tent and built of coconut leaves woven into loose shingles. A matting of coconut leaves was spread on the ground and, walking across it, the old man hung the lantern from a ridgepole at the far end. A woman sat in one corner, her back half-turned to the entrance.

"Now if you aren't stupid. Quite like a turtle, really," the old man said to the sailor.

"Ha?" the other said, with a twang.

The old man had expected that; there was something wrong with the sailor's tongue. "And how about the jute sacks and the blankets?" the old man said. "Didn't I tell you to get them?"

"Ha?" came the sailor's reply.

"Stop it!" said the old man, angrily. "If you weren't born that way, I'd give you a thrashing." He waved him away. "Be off! And while you are at it, bring over some water. There's no saying whether we'll find drinking water hereabouts. Would you care for supper, Marta?"

"No, thank you," said the woman in the hut.

"It'll be best to get some food ready, though," said the old man. "We've salmon in the boat."

The sailor had shuffled away, the coconut fronds on the ground rustling softly as he stepped on them.

"Bring over a tin of salmon. And also the pot of rice we have on the stove box," the old man called after the sailor.

From somewhere a bird uttered a shrill cry; and the old man spoke to the woman again. "If you'll step out of there just a while, Marta"

"I am quite comfortable here, Uncle," she said.

"But you should be walking about, instead of sitting down like that."

"It seems better here," said the woman. But later she said: "All right."

"I'll build a fire," the old man said.

The bird's call came again, in a note of wild urgency. "That's the witch bird. I can tell for certain," the woman said. "They take newborn children away."

"No, it's not the witch bird," the old man said.

He gathered some dry leaves and twigs and in a minute had a fire blazing.

"Still, it's a fine time for having a baby, Uncle. Isn't it?"

"It's God's will," the old man said. Marta was laughing at herself. "We'll do the best we can. Walk about, stretch your legs; hold on to a coconut trunk over there, if it hurts you so."

"I'm quite all right, Uncle," said Marta.

The fire crackled, and the old man added more leaves and twigs. The blaze illumined the large boles of the coconut palms.

The clear sky peered through the fronds of the palms, but there were no stars. The night had a taut, timorous silence, disturbed only by the crackling of the fire.

The woman walked up and down, not venturing beyond the space lighted up by the fire. She was a squat, well-built woman. Her arms and legs were full-muscled, like those of a man. If she had cut her hair and worn trousers instead of a skirt, she would have passed for a man. Her distended belly and large breasts would not have made any difference.

The old man watched her with unending curiosity. Like him, she wore a field jacket, the sleeves rolled up, being too long. Her skirt was of a thick olive-drab material, made from fatigues that some American soldier had discarded.

"Is that his name printed on there" the old man asked.

In the firelight the letters "Theodore C. Howard" could be read in white stencils on the back of the drab green jacket.

"Oh, no, Uncle," said Marta. "This isn't his. He gave me three woolen blankets, though."

"That's fair," said the old man.

"What do you mean, Uncle? Please don't tease me," said Marta.

"Well, others do get more than that. For their labor, I mean. You worked as a laundry woman, I suppose."

"Yes, Uncle," Marta replied. "But afterwards we lived together. Three weeks. We had a hut near Upper Mangyan. You could see the whole camp of the Army from there." With her hands, she held on to her belt, a rattan string, as she spoke. "It pains so, at times. Well, I washed clothes for a living, Uncle. That's what I went there for."

"Did you earn any money?"

"No, Uncle. I'm never for making money. He said one day, 'Here are twenty pesos,' " she said with a laugh. "He had a way of talking to me and never saying my name, as though I had no name. The others, the ones I only washed clothes for, had a nickname for me. 'Sweet Plum,' I remember. That's how they called me. 'Sweet Plum.' What's a 'plum,' Uncle? They say it's a fruit."

"I don't know," said the old man. "In our country, we have no such fruit."

"He would not call me 'Sweet Plum,' even. And, as I said, he wanted to give me the money. 'What for?' I said. And he said, 'For your mother.' But I have no mother, I told him so. 'Well, for your father and brothers and sisters.' But I have no such folk. I told him so. I said, 'Keep your money. I love you,

so keep your money.’ And he was angry, and he swore and then left the hut. I never saw him again, but he left me three woolen blankets.”

The old man listened to the story with great interest, but now that it was over he made no comment, beyond getting up and thoughtfully tending the fire.

“No, Uncle. You’re wrong to think I ever earned money,” Marta said. She walked a few paces and returned to the fireside. “By the way, Uncle, how much does it cost to go to San Paulino in your boat?”

“That’s where you live?”

She nodded her head.

“For you, nothing. Not a centavo.”

“I can give you one of my woolen blankets.”

“The trip will cost you nothing.”

“Of course, you’ll say, ‘What a foolish woman she is! To think that she does not know when her time comes!’ But truly, Uncle, the days are the same to me. The nights are the same. I can’t count days and months. Maybe, Uncle, I’ll never grow old. Do you think I’ll ever grow old?”

The old man did not know what to say. A soft chuckle, and that was all.

“And I am going home. Am I not foolish, Uncle?”

To humor her, the old man said: “Yes, you are quite foolish. A good thing you found my boat, no?”

“I feel lucky, yes,” Marta said. “I must leave, that was all. Maybe, it isn’t my time yet. The long walk from Upper Mangyan, and then three days on the beach, before finding your boat . . . Maybe, this is only the seventh month. How long is nine months, Uncle?”

The old man wished he could give a good answer. “Nine months,” he said finally.

“I understand. You old men know a lot. Now, don’t laugh, Uncle. I’ve been married before, and this man I married was an

old man, too. May he rest in peace. Oh, it pains so! Here, right here!" She indicated the approximate location of the pain.

"Walking relieves it, so they say."

The leaves crackled softly on the ground as she trod upon them with her bare feet. She went back and forth, and talked on as if to amuse herself.

"Now, this man was a tailor. You see, I worked as a servant in a rich man's house. And this tailor said, one day, 'You don't have to work so hard like that, Marta. Come live with me.' Ah, you men are tricky. Aren't you, Uncle?"

"Sometimes," the old man couldn't help saying. "Some men are, I must say," he agreed readily.

"This tailor, he saw how industrious I was—and, I dare say, I am. Because God made me so; with the build of an animal, how can one be lazy? There's not a kind of work you men can do that I can't do also. That's a woman for you! My tailor was pleased with me. I was a woman and a man all in one, and he was so happy he stopped becoming a tailor and took instead to visiting with neighbors, talking politics and things like that." She stopped short, and then as if suddenly remembering something, she said: "But he left me no child. Oh, he fooled me so, Uncle!"

"Well, you'll have one soon, I must say," said the old man.

"As I was saying, I lived with this old tailor. He was a widower and had been lonely, and now he was kind to me. But he died of consumption—he had it for a long time—the year the war started. I went back to the rich man's house where I had worked before. When the Americans came back I said to this rich man, 'I am going away. Only for a short time, though. I hear they pay well at the camp of the Army, if you can wash clothes and do things like that. When I have enough money, I'll come back.' That's what I said. Oh, oh! It hurts so!"

"It's time the sailor returns," said the old man. "Does it pain much?"

"Ah, but pain never bothers me, Uncle. Didn't I tell you I am built like an animal? This tailor, he used to beat me. I didn't care. I can stand anything, you know. I chopped wood and pounded rice for him. I was quite sorry when he died. That's the truth, Uncle."

She stopped and laughed, amused more than ever perhaps at the way she had been talking. The old man looked at her quizzically.

"And you'll bring this baby home to San Paulino?" he said.

"Why, of course, Uncle. It'll be so tiny, so helpless—you know. Why do you ask?"

The old man hesitated, but in the end he decided to tell her: "There are places—in the city, for example—where they'll take care of babies like that"

"But can they take care of him better than I? That's impossible, Uncle," the woman said, excitedly. "Oh, it hurts so!—I do like—oh!—to look after him myself"

The firelight caught her faint smile. She had a common-looking face, but her eyes were pretty and big and smiling.

She had stopped talking. The sailor appeared in their midst, saying, "Ha!"

"Warm the salmon in the fire," said the old man.

He took the jute sacks and the blankets into the shelter and prepared a bed. Outside, in the light of the fire, the sailor opened the salmon can with his bolo and began drinking the soup in the can.

"Can't you wait for me?"

The old man crawled out of the hut, annoyed partly because the sailor had begun to eat and partly because Marta was groaning.

"Don't wail there like a sow," he told her gruffly.

Then he sat before the pot of rice that the sailor brought over.

"A sow doesn't wail so, Uncle," said the woman innocently.

The old man said nothing in reply. He and the sailor ate hurriedly, making noises with their mouths.

"Ha!" said the sailor, in that helpless way of his, looking in Marta's direction.

"She doesn't care for food. She said so," the old man explained. And to Marta, he said: "If it's too much to bear, you may go in. We'll keep some of the salmon for you. Afterwards, you'll be so hungry."

Marta followed his advice, crawling into the hut. Her head struck the lantern that hung from the ridgepole, and for a while it swung about, the oval of light dancing on the ground.

"I'll be with you in a minute," said the old man. "Why you've to let me do this, I don't know." It seemed he had become a different person from the *uncle* Marta knew a while ago; he felt the change in himself.

"Uncle," the woman called from in the shelter, "what's a man called when he does a midwife's business?"

The old man was washing his mouth with water from the container the sailor had brought from their outriggered boat. When he was through, he said: "You horrible creature! I'm now sure of it! You've fooled me. You planned all this You're more clever than I thought"

There was silence in the shelter. From afar the night bird called again, clearly and hauntingly. The sailor, calling the old man's attention to the bird, said, "Ha, ha!" He pointed with his finger at the darkness, but the old man did not mind him.

The silence grew tense, although there were soft noises from the shelter, noises that the movement of feet and arms and body made upon the matting, as if a sow were indeed lying there to deliver a litter. The lantern glow fell full upon the woman's upraised knees. She had covered them with a blanket.

"Uncle!" she called frantically.

Before going in the old man looked up at the sky. There was a lone star at last, up in the heavens. He could see it through the palm fronds. He'd like to remember that. He wished he could see a moon, too, and that he knew for certain how high the tide was

at the beach; for, later, he'd recall all this. But there were no other signs. There was only this star.

"I'm so frightened, Uncle," Marta was saying, her voice hoarse and trembling. "And it hurts so! Uncle, it will be the death of me!"

"Stop this foolish talk," said the old man angrily. "Pray to God. He is kind," he said.

His hands and knees were shaking. He knelt beside Marta, ready to be of assistance.

"Oh—oh—oh! Uncle, I want to die, I want to die!" she cried, clutching his hand.

When the sailor heard the squall of the child he said "Ha, ha," with joy. He wanted to see the child, but the old man told him to go away.

"Go!" the old man said, waving his arms.

The sailor returned to his sleeping place and lay as before. The night was warm and restful, and soon he was fast asleep.

The old man joined him under the coconut tree, their feet touching and pointing toward the smouldering fire. Through the palm fronds the old man could see the sky growing light, for soon it would be morning. The star peered at him as before, through the thick coconut palm leaves. It had watched over them all this time.

The old man turned and using his arm for a pillow tried to sleep. The sailor was snoring peacefully. The old man could see Marta in the shelter, her legs flat on the mat and the child in a bundle beside her.

The old man fell asleep thinking of the child, for it was a boy. A gust of wind woke him up, and when he opened his eyes he did not realize at first where he was. He felt glad he had been of help to the woman, and he wondered if in any way he had been unkind to her. He wished he had not called her a sow and had been gentle with her. He sat up and saw the lantern in the shelter.

“Are you all right?” he called, for he heard the woman stir.

She did not answer but sat up, moving in a slow, deliberate way, her shadow covering the child like a blanket.

“It’s the witch bird, Uncle,” she said in a tired, faraway voice. “Did you hear the witch bird? Now he is dead—Uncle, he is dead!”

The old man lowered the lantern. It had a faint blue flame. The baby beside her was limp and gray like the blanket wrapped around it.

“You’re a sow, that’s what you are! God Almighty,” he crossed himself, “may You have mercy on us!”

“Believe me, Uncle It’s the witch bird”

The sailor had wakened. He got up and sat hugging his knees and stared at the old man.

“You build a fire, turtle!” the old man shouted at him. “Don’t you see it’s so dark?”

“Ha!” the sailor said.

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A START IN LIFE*

ROBERT G. KELLY

Albert Porter was not born laughing—as his classmates and teachers fondly supposed. He was not even born crying. He came into this world quietly, gravely, and with a certain weary foreboding, almost as if already aware of his fat, outsized, unfitting self—almost as if he understood those first startled voices:

"Why—what a—a *large* baby, I mean to say. Yes, a *lar*—oh, a *fine* large baby!"

For the first nine years they laughed at him.

As a baby, Albert was given to rashes in the folds of his moist, pendulous body. His hair straggled on his forehead. His face was flushed and bloated. And his wrappings hung on him in looping, sagging lines, so that he appeared decidedly ill-dressed and slovenly even when he had practically nothing on.

His mother tried for a time to keep him tidy. With her long grey face slightly averted, hissing between her teeth, she poked and pulled at his garments, and sometimes, with cold, dry fingers, touched gingerly his flesh. But she achieved no noticeable improvement. There was somehow no place to begin; she could find no foothold of neatness in the huge mass. And even when she concealed the greater part of him with crisp, white things,

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his disreputable head stuck out, and his damp, red legs and hands protruded against the whiteness. And in a few moments his things were neither white nor crisp, but had narrowed and parted to allow still more of him to come bulging through.

Eventually his mother withdrew. After the intimacies of his birth and her nursing of him, she edged away; she avoided ever looking at him directly. And Albert, noting uneasily her absence, learned remarkably early to care for himself.

Soon came days when his mother went away. Early each morning, sitting on the window seat of the bay window upstairs, he heard the front door creak open and click heavily shut. Patiently then he waited in the murmuring house until the door again opened, and up the creaking stairs came a big lady who smelled of tobacco and perfume, and who moved heavily about the rooms during the morning and early afternoon. She scraped and splashed in the kitchen below, and banged the garbage lid; and she returned often upstairs to move about the living room, wiping edges of furniture with the end of her blue skirt. She never spoke to Albert, or even looked at him, but occasionally—two or three times during the whole long day—she shuffled near and handed him things—a piece of brittle toast, maybe, or a cup of warm coffee. These he accepted unnoticingly, his hand for a moment near her hand, and he watched her closely as she drew back and turned away, for he longed somehow to prolong her nearness. He wished to hold her beside him and lean on her his tiring weight and close his eyes, and remain so a long time. In spite of her ugly tobacco smell, he was very fond of her. Her skin was brown and she wore a piece of red glass in either ear.

Evenings his mother rocked a tasseled chair by the stove, and without ever turning her head toward him or speaking his name, she talked aloud to herself so that he could hear. She talked about a shop where there were yokes and patterns and cuttings and seams, about a Miss Posey who borrowed her pinking shears without asking, and about her husband, who had gone off somewhere—she was sure of it—with a bleached waitress. Some-

times she talked about Albert's causing the departure of this husband, or about this husband's causing the distasteful presence of Albert. She never smiled; she never lifted her flat voice; she filled her narrow-windowed, high-ceilinged house with an atmosphere of heavy gloom, which combined with Albert's inner sense of tragedy to make his world, from the very beginning, all of one color. Never did he feel any troubling suspicion of cheerfulness, or uneasy promise of pleasure. He was uniformly depressed. He felt a heavy blame for living.

Most of the time he sat on the window seat, which smelled of furniture oil and geraniums. Brooding alone, his infant bulk drooping into a crouch, he here learned to talk by droning tonelessly to himself. He talked at first about yokes and hems and seams. Later, listening to the cries from the street below, he talked about fresh fish, cantaloupes, and the fact that losers go first.

Before Albert was five years old there began to be evening visitors in the house. Elderly women with short hair, with green eyeshades and men's coats, and with smoking cigarettes in their mouths, gathered at the big round table in the living room upstairs. Clicking the red, blue, and yellow chips, and drinking beer from cans and various glasses, they leaned together under the smoke, and touched hands as they talked, by turns chattering, falling silent, and then bursting into whoops of laughter. So long they sat absorbed and unnoticed that Albert, alone on his window seat, felt rise within him a goading restlessness. Yet he made no move and asked no attention. He was familiar with their attention. For sometimes when, very late, they all rose from the table and counted the chips and stood about the room to depart, they circled near the window and looked at him. With broad, thin smiles they stared at him. They made faces and talked under their hands, laughing stiffly at the sides of their mouths. They held their purses over their stomachs and laughed, looking straight at him until he ached to divert their eyes a little aside from himself. But he knew no way. Under their intense,

grinning scrutiny, he loathed his own motionlessness. He longed to reach into his pocket and draw forth for their hungry eyes, a bright golden ball.

For nine years.

At school the children were perfectly honest and straightforward with Albert. Theirs were no awkward, half-hidden laughs, no smothered exclamations. They assaulted him openly and proudly, yelling, "*Pig! Fat pig Albert!*" swaggering together and springing suddenly near with raised fists. But as he was patient, and their moods were swift, they soon became largely indifferent and left him for whole days quite alone.

The others played together in the dusty yard, chased and fought and laughed together, and sometimes huddled in secret pairs, holding hands. But none ever wanted to hold Albert's hand. Not even the teachers wanted to. Alone, apart, he sensed the strong unpleasantness of himself. His hands were forever moist and grubby, and his flesh, always half-bared by his twisted garments, had none of the sweet clean smell of the others. The others, he felt, would be dirtied by touching him.

When he was seven, his second-grade teacher, Miss Burt, said that the group games were too strenuous for his overgrown body. Each morning, immediately after the salute to the flag, she put him in a corner with a lump of blue clay and a wetly painted sheet for marking on with his fingers. And in these colored pastes, with slow, thoughtless movements, he immersed himself until some child raised a delighted cry to bring the others running:

"Just *look* what Albert's done *this* time!"

Then he lowered his eyes, hid his daubed arms behind him, squeezed his legs under the table, and suffered their intent gaze until Miss Burt and squinting Mrs. Carr clapped their hands and loudly told the children to stop laughing and to get back to their game. But Albert could see that the ladies were themselves laughing; and laughing, they were then very close to the other children. He himself could never, he felt, get close to the tall ladies so long as the other children came in clean numbers between.

So from the middle of his seventh year he habitually watched out for an opportunity to be alone with one of the ladies.

During a rainy afternoon when there were no classes because the children were parading their Halloween costumes in the auditorium, Albert came back to the empty classroom and waited hopefully for one of the teachers to find him. But for a long time no one came, and he forgot why he was waiting. As he hunched over his desk, dozing comfortably in the warmth and quiet, the strong-smelling, new-oiled floors began to remind him of furniture oil, and this suggestion somehow confused the classroom with his living room at home. It was sharply pleasing to see how much his desk was like his window seat—to see that his desk *was* really, now, his window seat, with the sun there coming in through the curtains, coming blurred and dusty through the curtains, and with a shadow appearing there against the sky.

But abruptly Albert again knew the classroom, for the shadow was Miss Burt standing on the cement porch outside the doorway. She was looking at him. He did not raise his eyes; he breathed stiffly, and his hands were itching and hot; but he was not afraid. He knew what to do. She would come in and sit at her desk, and he would go up and tell her about the furniture oil. Then she would lean back, quiet and unhurried, regarding him seriously—and they would talk together. He felt they would get on. But she had not yet come in. Whispering in the doorway, she was not alone. Still, however, Albert waited, looking shyly down, glad that he had something good to say. He sensed now the man teacher, Mr. Bosworth, whispering with her: "*What is it about him? . . . not like a child . . .*" They were staring at him—he not like a child. They leaned together, staring. His warm assurance lessened. He swallowed; he hiccuped softly. "*Oh! Oh!*" burst forth the whispers. "*Like a drunk! See? Imagine! Like a slovenly drunk, that child!*" The sounds were unclean and hard. The whispers laughed at him. Away now, crossing the yard, now rising into voices, they were laughing and exclaiming. About him, Albert.

For nine years.

And each semester as they passed him along from one grade to the next, the ladies conceded playfully, "Well, no, he's not a *clean* child!"

By the time Albert was eight years old the ladies said they simply could do nothing with him. During quiet hours in class he would often begin to talk very loudly, although no one was listening to him, and though he was scolded for it repeatedly. White-haired Mrs. Nichols, her mouth and eyes tight with pain, told everybody that a child who did such ridiculous things was definitely "odd"; and Albert, overhearing the remark, thought it very likely that he was. But though he did not want to be ridiculous, he found it increasingly difficult to determine just which of his own actions made him so. He was too much apart from the others to measure accurately his own conduct. And when, perplexed, he for a time avoided his difficulty by doing nothing except what he was told to do, the sameness of his days oppressed him, and his restlessness mounted unbearably until, as before, he gave way to the most unconsidered conduct.

Thus at mid-term Mrs. Nichols felt obliged to report that Albert had become increasingly untractable. During the Thanksgiving play, for example, he had insisted on standing with the costumed players at the front of the room, although he had himself been given no part, there being plainly none suited to him. And several times he had been brought in by other teachers who said he wandered along the halls during class, and came into their rooms and sat down among their children.

Mrs. Nichols just wanted someone to tell her if these were the actions of a normal boy of eight.

During Albert's ninth year it was the custom each morning during game period to give him a wooden shovel and a tin bucket with no handle, and send him to dig in the sand pile. He hated the sand pile. The sand leaked into his shoes and crept under his clothing, so that later in class there would be gritty sand on the seat of his desk and on the floor around him. All day long it

would chafe his damp skin. Besides, when he got the bucket full of sand he could never think of anything else to do; and the unprogressiveness of his game embarrassed him.

Yet, until he was nine years old, he accepted the sand pile unprotestingly. To accept was less trouble than to refuse. He had made so many mistakes already that he was hesitant to risk another conflict. Eventually, however, his restlessness increased and became insistent. Uneasily, he braced himself.

On the first Monday morning after his ninth birthday, Albert held his arms stubbornly behind him and told Mrs. Nichols that he wouldn't take the shovel and the bucket; he would insist on playing with the other fourth-grade children. Mrs. Nichols made it plain that she was pressed for time. Twice she told him no, and then she pulled him swiftly across the yard, pushed him toward the group, and turned her back on him.

Under the eyes of Miss Burt—who was in the yard that morning with a whistle on a string around her neck—the children included Albert in their game of holding hands, dancing around in a circle, and singing. He had hoped that they would be playing ball, but, grateful for their generosity, and fearful of offending, he tried very hard to keep up. He watched with pride his own short legs pursuing the longer, corduroy legs ahead. But now Miss Burt was gone; the circle was watching him; and he found it hard to run. When he stumbled, the circle saw and began to go faster and to change directions abruptly. This soon made him very tired. He was used to sitting. He wished secretly to break away, but the circle gripped him and rushed tirelessly on. He wanted terribly to sit. He could, in fact, run no farther. And knowing no other way to escape, he suddenly dumped down in the dirt and let the eager line stumble over him.

Wildly they circled him and shrieked their indignation. He, fat old Albert, had opposed them, had disrupted their insistent pleasure—and this he knew they would not bear. Instantly they began a new game of dancing around Albert. They yelled and kicked dust over him and clasped hands tightly to prevent his

breaking away. But he made no move. Discouraged, he sat with his fat legs spread wide, the dust darkening in patches against his skin. He waited dumbly, peering through the rising clouds; and one troubled hand slowly smeared the mud on his knee. This was very bad, he thought. This might go on for a long time.

Blowing her whistle and pushing the hair back from her face, Miss Burt appeared. She broke into the circle and took Albert's hand and led him away. She was smiling. And the others, he knew, saw her smile. But she held his hand—she still held it—and walking with him toward the school building, she said, smiling, "The only thing to do, Albert, is laugh right back at them! Words can't hurt you!" Then by the building her smile stopped and she held him against the tin trough of the drinking fountain and squatted down before him, and was going to say something. But she only got up again and turned away, repeating curtly, "Just laugh right back at them!"

In the late afternoon, when his mother's house was empty and the polished wood of the window seat was warm against his legs, Albert leaned his head against the curtain and thought carefully about what Miss Burt had said. Holding his hand, she had offered him something. He considered her words; but they were very difficult to think about.

The thought had come to him that he had never laughed—though it seemed impossible, and he seemed vaguely to remember having laughed. Still, since he couldn't recall the particular occasion of his laughing, he felt obliged to proceed for the moment as if he never had. Say then that he would have to learn how to laugh. What did one do? What *was* laughter? He thought of the coarse, taunting cruelty of the other children, of their shrill animal aggression, their shrieking cry advancing over his own punished body. Laughter belonged to the gang. Yet—how *did* one laugh? He hesitated to try. He was frightened by new, strange risks. His familiar, secure misery tempted him back. Yet—had he not prayed in his heart—? But how to begin? . . .

Albert licked his lips and said quietly, tentatively, "Haw-haw

—haw-haw.” He waited. But nothing further happened. Far in the street below rattled a fish wagon, the driver sounding thinly his horn. Painfully Albert recited, “Haw-haw . . . Haw-haw.” But it wouldn’t go, there was no strength to it, no flooding forth. When he stopped pushing, it stopped coming out. Then must one push *all* the time? What an intolerable labor! Frightened, alone, he faced his bewildering task. He tried again. He tried to say a laugh. But it was like forcing vomit from a dry throat. His face reddened. He tried. In an agony of disappointment and frustration he pushed, gagging, “Haw-haw! Haw-haw!” He rolled against the curtain and doubled up, sweating, straining. He would do it—he would, he would. With tears in his eyes and a huge ache in his oversize body, he choked, “Haw-haw . . . haw—*Oh-oh-ho-ho-ho!*” Abruptly his voice had broken through. Laughter caught hold and repeated itself, rushing mercifully forward and upward, mounting joyless and harsh—but triumphant!

Something, then, was funny. Something ludicrous was making laughter. With no pleasure, with a dryness and an ache, Albert laughed more easily now, more assuredly, choking slowly down into quietness, grateful and rewarded, now shaking unevenly, laughing more softly, giggling now . . . sobbing.

Albert learned to laugh by practicing alone on his window seat. He practiced for seven days. On the following Tuesday morning he came early to school, and instead of stopping at the classroom or the sand pile or the wooden bench by the drinking fountain, he walked out across the yard to where the earliest arrivals loitered by the swings and the slide. Two of the older boys were waxing the slide with lunch paper, and one boy kept climbing up and going down the slide to see how fast it was; for no teachers were there to stop them.

Albert approached conspicuously. He saw their surprise. A boy threw a handful of sawdust toward him and said, “Look out, old Albert!” Others turned near by, grinning idly. His slow feet hesitated. Then someone called out, “Hey, let’s roll Albert down the slide!” “Oh, no, no!” they groaned. “Old Albert’s so

fat he'd break it down!" And then they were all shouting. They were all turning toward him.

"Go away, fat pig Albert! Go away!"

Albert's courage shriveled. What foolish thing was he about to do? He faced the still-neat morning clothes and superior brushed screaming heads. Far, far behind him, beyond a huge waste of playground, lay the inaccessible building. Hopeless. He should never have—he couldn't possibly—yet, after such an agony of hope—He lifted his face and barely spoke.

"Haw-haw," he said quietly, evenly—like two words, like a hyphenated name.

The group quieted at a stroke. He already had spoken. He had said something back at them. And now they listened hungrily. This would be good. This would set them wildly on.

A towheaded boy in white creased pants, with white cloth suspenders over a blue shirt, stepped out to demand, "What did you say?"

"Haw-haw," repeated Albert.

The circle gazed. They hesitated long. The towheaded boy frowned. "What are you talking about?"

"Haw-haw." Just that. A remark of mine. I meant only to say—"Haw-haw . . . Haw-oh-ho-ho-ho-ho!"

The circle drew back, staring, no longer dancing, clean legs planted stiffly in the dust. An uncanny stillness prevailed, broken only by the spasms of his cold, edged, rising voice. An uneasy chill blew from witch's laughter in the sunbright morning. He saw that they did not believe—that they felt it simply could not be—but that perhaps—maybe—maybe he, Albert—yes, yes—that he was really and indeed *laughing!* *Albert!*

"Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! Oh-ho-ho-ho-ho!" cried Albert. It was going good now, taking care of itself. *But how long would they stand there, staring at him?* He doubled a little forward, pushing.

And it was he, Albert, all right. And he was indisputably laughing, all alone here, like a performer within the circle. Any-one could see he was greatly amused—but—at what? At him-

self, perhaps? Not seemingly. Then at—at what? *He could not tell them.* Restlessly the circle glanced over itself, doubtful now—searching itself, not Albert—shrinking from the horror of unexplained laughter. What was funny, where?

At that moment a boy named Carl, a thin, clumsy fellow with knobby knees and elbows and trailing feet, moved toward a better view of the spectacle, tangled his legs behind other legs and fell thrashing violently into the dirt. The throng turned on him, startled, comprehending, delighted.

Look at Carl! That's it! Here is the funnyness! Released, relieved, they laughed extravagantly. *Oh, they turned away from him!* They roared and stamped their feet and circled the terrified Carl, pushing him back down whenever he attempted to rise. How astoundingly funny! They looked jubilantly from Albert to Carl, borrowing Albert's laughter, relishing Carl's misery, and returning again to Albert for reassurance that this was indeed so very, very funny.

Oh yes it is! roared Albert's laughter. It's hilarious! And he saw then that they all laughed with conviction, with authority—with his conviction, on his authority.

Walking with them toward the building, he did not know how to carry himself under their respectful glance. Beside him they walked, and near, but not touching—leaning near and inviting his laughter, but together still, and around him. Moving awkwardly along, trying not to swagger, he remembered having heard the bell: so they were going in to class. And every moment of the long day would have to be carefully thought out beforehand; no moment would be familiar or certain. Someone spoke to him, and he nodded his head, grinning thoughtlessly; and they turned from him, laughing. Well, now, he had achieved this. He had succeeded. *They were a long time walking!* This was his success. This was all right. It wasn't good. It wasn't what he had expected, maybe. *Already he was tired. There was pain in his eyes.* But it was all right. It would do.

P. H. LOWREY was born twenty-six years ago in Verona, Mississippi. He lived there and in Baltimore, went a year to Johns Hopkins, and returned to Tennessee to attend Sewanee and Southwestern at Memphis. After a tour of duty on a Navy destroyer, he took an M.A. degree at the University of Chicago and then came to Stanford. He has worked as a swing musician, carpenter, janitor, and clerk in a cement factory and has taught at Blue Mountain College in Mississippi. This year he is teaching English at San Jose State College.

BIG CHLORINDA, HAPPY CHLORINDA

✧ P. H. LOWREY ✧

The misty rain that had followed the train from Birmingham all across Alabama and Southern Mississippi imparted a penetrating chill to the heavy greenness of New Orleans. As he was carried toward the lake in the cab, Timmy watched the slightly decaying houses, which always looked perfectly charming in warmer weather, heard the hypnotic sizzle of the cab tires on the wet pavement, and felt the clammy cold that only New Orleans in December can generate. Behind all that, deeper in his mind, was fixed the constant image of his Aunt Chlorinda. He sat quite still and thought about her. His fabulous Aunt Chlorinda. He was excited about seeing her again.

Sitting in the cab so silently made him feel mature; he wondered if it were possible to appear poised at nineteen. He surveyed his long skinny legs, twisted slightly to fit into the rear seat space, and looked at his thin fingers, his polished nails. It was important to be well groomed for Chlorinda.

New Orleans did not fascinate him now as it did in the spring, when the azaleas seemed literally to cover the ground. A city of color, vibrancy. His Aunt Chlorinda was a woman of color, vibrant, like the city. He smiled, thinking of his last time with her, two years back, in 1937, when he was only seventeen. Then, for the first time, she had fascinated him, and he had been think-

ing of her, during the past few hours in rising crescendo, ever since.

He had really begun to appreciate her on the day that they had been strangely alone in her sitting room and she had told him the story of her life. She had lain on the chaise longue in a frilly pink negligee, with her long legs crossed and visible, eating shrimps from a great shallow clay bowl of California-ware, drinking beer and telling him all of it in her brusque, singular language. Whenever she finished a chapter in her life, she would gulp a swallow of beer and snap open an anthology of aphorisms which she held in her bony, mannish hands and read several at random. It had been one of the most pleasurable afternoons of his life. He had sat, admiring Aunt Chlorinda's wonderfully unmade-up face, and the straight pulled-back hair and her off-hand manner of combining the sometimes violent happenings of her life with the pithy, Meredithlike aphorisms. It had finally ended with her pulling the negligee over her legs and telling him that in the first place, he shouldn't look at a discoursing lady's legs, and that he shouldn't look at her legs in any case because she was his aunt and old enough to be his mother, and that it simply wouldn't do. She had laughed her big roomy laugh, sticking out her large yellow teeth; she had looked more equine than ever with her long homely face thrown back and the cords of her neck muscles taut. Then she had ordered him suddenly, in her loud rasping voice, to get the hell out so she could dress. "Why not ogle somebody more shapely," she had said, "someone who'd suit you better." As he went through the door she had called after him, "Perhaps you're not man enough to make the younger ones do your bidding. It's an insult to me to have you around until you prove that you can!"

Timmy stepped out of the cab and looked happily at Lake Pontchartrain lying flat off through the trees. He tipped the cabbie too much (the house was low and expensive; it was expected), pulled his bag clumsily from the back seat, and began thinking of his new calling cards. He approved of the thin Spenserian

script, so admirably restrained, announcing, MR. TIMOTHY PEETE. In the lower right-hand corner his Princeton address looked equally correct and polished. He wondered about presenting the card. A few feet from the door he set the bag down, pulled straight (under his reversible) the maroon blazer with its white piping, and carefully extracted a card from his wallet. He rang, and decided it would be correct if the butler answered the door, even though his aunt knew he was coming. He had so few chances to use them.

As he waited he continued to think of Chlorinda's booming laugh and Uncle Hugh's tart statements. His uncle painted wild seascapes and violent wind-blown trees on top of ripped and jagged hills. He rang again, and the thought that it would be nice to stay longer than a week crossed his mind. He had to go back, though; in fact, he knew he wanted to go back to Princeton, really.

The door opened languidly. A fat, quiet man, with a small mustache and a half-sardonic grin stood eyeing him with suspicion. Good God, Timmy thought, Robert Benchley! He drew back the calling card he had already thrust toward the man and was about to say, "How do you do, Mr. Benchley," because it was conceivable that Aunt Chloe might have Benchley there, but the man spoke first.

"I'm not Robert Benchley, if that's what you're about to say. Everyone does," he added morosely. "I suppose you're little Timmy, the nephew Chloe said would come. Come in, Little Timmy. I'm Martin Dunnington. Chloe isn't here; she and Hugh have gone off to a private show with an Indian or a Hindu or something, I don't really know, but you're to come in, anyway." Martin Dunnington extended his hand feebly toward the library and smiled benignly.

"Thanks," Timmy said, fumbling with his card and his bag. He felt very confused. "As a matter of fact, I *was* about to call you Mr. Benchley." He had planned to go and change his shirt and wash, but now he could not bring himself to say it.

“Everyone does. It gets very annoying. Want some brandy? They never drink it here, always little pink round glasses; you have to drink it while they’re gone. Chloe wants me to be funny and entertaining and it’s awfully hard when you’ve no feeling for comedy. It’s distressing to see people always so disappointed in you.” He was so like Benchley, Timmy couldn’t suppress a laugh. Martin looked annoyed.

They sat down and sipped the brandy Martin brought from the dining room. “Have you come here to live?” Martin asked politely. “Most people who come do, and being a nephew, you could probably stay a year. It’s very nice here. You should plan to stay. Chloe likes to have people around, and you could help me when she wants somebody entertained. It’s quite a strain.” He shook his head sadly and ran a chubby finger around the edge of his glass.

“No, I can’t stay. I have to go back and finish junior year,” Timmy said. “Yes, that sounds like her. I take it you’re one of her old friends.” Then he thought of Chlorinda making Martin the court fool.

“Sort of,” Martin said. “I knew her when she lived in Cleveland; I worked on a paper there and went to a couple of Chloe’s parties. She was raw then, just a cowgirl, straight out of Arizona. She was as wild as a mad hatter; gave poker parties for people who only played bridge, made them eat hot tamales with their fingers and drink tequila and sit on the floor. Sometimes she picked her teeth with a bobby pin, but she progressed to quill picks pretty quickly. I believe she has a gold one now. You know all about her and Hugh?”

“About her,” Timmy said. “She told me once, one afternoon, all about everything. She’s fabulous.” He sighed. “I’d love to live here. She’s so—*free*. She has all this.” He spread his hands toward the book-lined walls and gazed with admiration at the foot-high cherry-wood statuettes—sailors, dancers, athletes—which stood in the library alcoves and on tables. “She’s stu-

pendous. I don't know much about Hugh, really. You never talk to her about Hugh."

"Oh, you'd *like* to live as she does?" Martin said. He peered quizzically at Timmy, pausing. Then he stared back at his glass. "Hugh!" he said, giving a little volcanic heave. "Hugh! In the last few years he's become something of an artist."

"Yes," Timmy said. "I've seen the seascapes, landscapes. But he's so violent. Everything is always blowing in a high wind. And the colors—like the one where the sea is yellow!"

"He's having a show in somebody's house soon," Martin said. "But are you going to stay? You'd like it here—they're gone most of the time and you have the place to yourself. Good books, the dog, radio, nobody to disturb you. I like it. And you might help Chloe." He looked slyly at Timmy. "Besides, I get lonely sometimes. We could go eat at Broussard's, Galatoire's. We wouldn't just wander through the quarter like tourists. You've no idea, Timmy. Quite a town this. 'Fabulous'," he said, mimicking Timmy. "When I was staying in the hotel it was miserable, though."

"You've just moved over here, then?" Timmy said.

"You might say that. Three months ago. I met Chloe one day in the markets on the river. She hadn't seen me in years, but you know how she is. I told her I was lonely and she said, 'So am I, come live with me,' and of course I did. I went right back and packed then and there." Martin paused and looked at him carefully. "You'd be interested in knowing Chloe better, and it would keep me company. What school did you say you were in?"

"Princeton."

"Oh. Never been there myself." Martin's face had a look of polite inquiry mixed with studied boredom that made Timmy bubble into his glass of brandy.

"What's that for?" Martin said quickly. "Does it change the flavor?"

"No," Timmy said. "I just remembered something."

"Oh." Martin looked more puzzled than ever. A shade of annoyance twisted his face, but he went on.

"There's a woman here you wouldn't like, though, Timmy. Name's Beatrice. She's a flighty thing; thinks she's still sixteen. You'd have to watch out, but she's not around much. I don't know where she spends her time, 'cept in shops, buying. She'd be attracted to you. Scandalous. She's forty if she's a day." Martin spoke very confidentially, leaning forward and gesturing with his glass. "Call me Marty, by the way."

"Thanks," Timmy said. "I like informality."

"Yes, everybody calls me that. It's almost impossible to call a man who looks as much like Benchley as I do, 'Mr. Dunnington,' isn't it? It always happens." Martin sat up suddenly, stiffening into the attitude of a conspirator.

"Listen. That's them. Big touring car; no regular exhaust pipe. Oh—listen—I'm pulling out for the museum. They're having some swells in and I don't want to get caught in it. You pretend I was just going. You hear now?"

Timmy heard the loud motor rumble in the hollowness of the garage. There were the noises of people getting out and laughing. He could feel the excitement rising in him now, at the prospect of seeing Chlorinda.

"Drink up quick," Marty said. He gulped his brandy hurriedly. "Then they'll offer us some more." He caught up both their empty glasses and disappeared into the kitchen.

"Timmy!" his Aunt Chlorinda shouted as she came lunging around the library entrance. Both her long arms were thrown up in the air, and splendid jade earrings jangled and banged her jaws. Her tipped-forward turbanlike pink hat, shaped of circle after circle of tulle, with an extra crimped mass of tulle perched on top, shook as she came toward him. It made her look taller than ever. "I'm so glad to see you, darling! Is Marty here? Didn't he let you in? But he must have! He's an oaf!" She drew out the last word in a rasp and threw her arms around him, kissed him hard on the lips. "There!" she cried, and threw her

arms up. "You're covered with lipstick. Wipe it off!" Then her deep-lined face twisted into a scowl. "Oh, damn. One more for dinner. Zenobia will act like a bronc about this. Why didn't you come *after* dinner?" She laughed pleasantly. "Oh, well, that's not very nice, is it? Make yourself comfortable." She turned, and with a cowboy's rolling gait, strode out of the room and clattered vigorously up the stairs.

"Greetings, greetings," his Uncle Hugh said from the doorway. He was leaning back under the weight of two silver coffee urns. "I can't quite greet you the way the old mole did." His face, deep-lined, with the lower lip and chin thrust far out, was more atavistic than ever, Timmy thought. Like a monkey, surveying with disapproval some calamitous jungle scene. Hugh rapped out his words in his dry sarcastic voice. Timmy murmured his greetings and answered questions about his trip. His uncle wandered around the room, trying the coffee urns in various places.

"Black gum and sow belly, why do I always have to lug the guts in after she goes on a buying spree!" he said. His face was puckered and angry, but his eyes twinkled happily. Timon of Athens, Timmy thought. Good old Timon.

"Oh, God," his uncle said, and went languidly through the arch to the living room.

Timmy turned and saw a plump white-faced woman with red hair, just a little too red, standing in the door.

"Hello," he said, and bobbed his head. The woman did not say anything. She walked unsteadily to him, her body swaying gently on spike heels, her flouncing black cocktail dress conspicuous. "Chloe told me you were a cute blond thing, but I never *dreamed* . . ." she said. "So collegiate!" Her voice drawled slightly, tinged with a Southern accent. "She told me you're bright and all about you. I feel I know you—I just have to kiss you, dear." She kissed him slowly on the cheek as he stood awkwardly, not knowing quite what to do, bending slightly at the waist and watching her stand on tiptoe close to him.

"My, you're *shy*, Timmy," she said, and smiled knowingly. "You needn't be: this lipstick won't rub off. Kissproof. Oh, I'm Beatrice."

Marty came back in, holding a crushed hat. "I've told him about you," he said. "That you buy *hundreds* of fancy dresses."

"Why don't you make us something nice like a gin fizz," Beatrice said. "You're sure a dear. What'd you want to tell Timmy that for? Now he'll think I'm *expensive*. Wait—I've got to go upstairs and get into something comfortable. Girdle's cutting me in two."

"I'm just going," Marty said.

Beatrice glided away, looking back over her shoulder at Timmy. "I'm glad you've come, Timmy," she called from the door.

"That's like her," Marty said dolefully. "But she won't take any girdle off with you around. You watch out for her."

Timmy laughed and blushed. "She's attractive enough."

"Ha!" Marty said. "That's what all men seem to think, m'boy. You be careful. She's an animal. She'd be after me if I weren't so fat. She just got rid of a second husband, and don't you think she's not looking for another one. You be careful. She knows no code. Devours young men at a gulp." He leaned confidentially toward Timmy. "Now's my chance. I'm going to run the blockade. People coming soon." He looked about furtively, slid the crushed hat on, and went quickly into the hall. Chloe came bouncing down the steps in a pink negligee just as he got to the front door.

"Now where are *you* going, Marty? Running out on me again?"

"Certainly not, Chloe. I simply told a friend I would meet him fully half an hour ago. I only stayed to *convenience* you."

"Why don't you stay and help *entertain* people," Chloe said. "It seems to me the least you could do for your board and keep."

Timmy did not hear Marty's answer and concluded he had managed to escape. He heard his Aunt Chloe greet someone at

the door; she came back leading a turbaned Sikh by the hand, as though she had found him perched on the doorstep and did not know quite what to do with him.

"This is Mr. Baijarwhal, Timmy: my nephew, Mr. Peete. Now, Baijy, you run along over to those paintings in the living room and look at them, like a dear boy. You understand?" She gave the politely bowing Sikh a little shove and came over to sit with Timmy.

"Ooohhh," she sighed, smoothing her hair and stretching, "you look so fresh and young. You make me feel old and worn out, so you'll have to be nice to me and cheer me. Do you still say 'yessum' to ladies?"

"Yes'um. It's polite, but I'll drop it for you."

"Oh, no. I don't want you to change. But I would prefer you to call me Chloe and treat me more like someone your own age. I'm not hanging on the *grave, you know!*" Her face twisted into a ludicrous grimace and her big teeth flashed out at Timmy.

"You're the most attractive woman I know," Timmy said.

"Get out. I'm as ugly as sin. Better not say things like that to *Beatrice*; she'll throw you on the couch if you do." Chlorinda laughed. "You know Zenobie; the other day I went in the kitchen and asked her, 'Aren't I pretty in my new dress?' 'Nawm,' she says. 'Nawm. You and me, we just ugly, and there ain't no gettin' round it. Clothes won't help hit. We just ugly, that's all.' She is the honest one around here."

She laughed again as Timmy went through the inlaid swinging door to the kitchen to get her a drink.

When he came back the library was empty. He went into the living room and found that a fat, rosy man was seated talking to his aunt; his uncle, dressed in a crimson quilted smoking jacket, and waving a long ivory cigarette holder, was showing his paintings to the Sikh. There were more people at the door. His uncle took him and introduced him to people. He met the Sikh a second time; a general's wife, who looked like a whore he had seen once in a jazz joint, and who dressed very like her, too; an architect;

an old man with a goatee who said he “spoke”; a lovely, beautifully groomed, dark-eyed woman who was very quiet and who asked him if he didn’t want to get out of the South and go North. He drifted, sometimes with his uncle, sometimes with a stranger, around among the people, who kept coming in and circling and greeting each other and going on to someone else. Twice he found Beatrice, dressed now in a blue velvet negligee, looking at him and smiling, but she seemed to be waiting for something. He lost track of who they were and did not notice their faces now; instead of going to the kitchen to get a drink, he accepted a glass from the tray offered by the olive-skinned butler, a man he remembered vaguely as a Persian. Was his name Julio? A Persian named Julio? Whatever his name, he was very distant; when Timmy said he thought he remembered him, Julio drew himself up and said distantly, “Sorry, sir, I do not think I have had the pleasure of encountering *you* before.” He barely saw his Aunt Chloe. He watched her several times, but she had forgotten him; she was absorbed with this man or that woman, laughing, talking seriously, sitting on the floor with her legs drawn up sideways under her, like a little girl. He listened, rather absently, to the long spinning tale of the dark-haired beautiful woman; they sat in the library a little out of the swing of things, and she talked on in a muted, slightly affected voice, a voice slightly drawn in to suggest demureness and restraint. He listened occasionally and said “yes,” or “really,” and that was all that was necessary. With the main part of his mind he thought about Chloe and watched her, thinking how perfectly natural she was here in the midst of her amazing world. He envied her, yet he felt, quite vaguely, a nebulous shadow hanging over them. She did everything so competently; she had so much pleasure from everything. She was so unique.

He found the lovely woman looking at him with her big, almost lustrous eyes, the shadows standing out dark and soft beneath them, and it brought him back. He saw that people were beginning to flow out now, going home, or on somewhere else.

The grey misty dusk had settled in and the people filed out through the hall, past the darkening library arch, to slip away into the chill drizzle.

"I must go, too," the lovely woman said. "I . . . you have been very kind to listen to my experiences and desires; hopes; frustrations. You are a good listener. Your aunt is a good listener also. She listens admirably; then she makes a comment. You differ; you make no comment. She is a strange woman."

She rose gracefully and floated away, leaving him sitting alone in the almost dark room. His aunt was framed, tall and pink-swathed, her black hair slick and straight over her erect head, in the hallway arch. He enjoyed sitting in the dark and watching her in the square of light. She laughed and told them good night, pushed a fat little man and took his cane from him and patted him, as a boy would pat a puppy with a stick, across the tail. He laughed, a high squeaky little ring, and shook his finger at her and said something in French. When they were gone Chloe stood still a moment, her face showing in the light, not smiling now. She sighed and lifted her body erect again, her head poised, balanced gracefully on her long thin neck, and moved to the library door. She flicked the light on and said to him, as though she had known he was there all along, "Whoosh. Gone *that* bunch, almost all of them now. Get me a drink, will you—Scotch, no water—I got to tell the rest off and shove them out, too. It's getting late and Zenobie will just start serving dinner if we're not in the dining room on time. She's punctual as a water clock, and equally inconvenient sometimes. What the devil have you hidden in here for? I thought you *liked* this sort of thing."

Then she was gone again, back to the little bald-headed General in the living room. Timmy got the drink without saying anything to either Julio or Zenobia.

Beatrice headed him off as he came back into the living room. She swayed slightly, lazily smoothing out her red hair.

"The others are all taken up, Timmy, so now we can sit and

talk where it's quiet. I've been waiting so *patiently*." She led him forcibly to the piano bench and sat down. The piano was gilt and was covered with cherubs and ladies in fleshly tints.

"Is that my drink? Come sit down here."

"This is for Aunt for Chloe. Your drink's there. I'll get it for you."

"Oh, for Chloe. I might have known. Don't get entangled; just give it to her and come on back." She patted the piano bench beside her.

Timmy took the drink to his aunt, who went on talking to the General and waved him away. As he returned to Beatrice he wondered why on earth she continued to stay at his aunt's.

"There," Beatrice said as he sat down. "Don't be afraid you'll bump me, dear. Plenty of room. Tell me about school. I had a nephew (my older, much older, sister's child—she married young, too) who was at Princeton. He taught me all the Princeton songs. I remember one sweet little song about some little animals—whiffenpoofs, or something. You know that one?"

"Yes," Timmy said. "I know that one. It's a Yale song."

She could not remember how it went and Timmy showed her, singing the words quietly. He watched her from the corner of his eye as she stumbled along through the song with him. Her head kept bobbing in time to the music and he realized that she must have had several drinks even before she came back to Chlorinda's. She was quite high now. She looked tired and older when she was not smiling brightly. When they finished the song she turned to him and her face was serious, her eyes moist, and he thought she was going to cry. Timmy found himself echoing his uncle's "Oh, God" under his breath.

"Consciousness is dreadful," Beatrice said. "Think of getting old and having to die. D'you think I'm old, Timmy?"

He wanted desperately to change the conversation.

"Oh, no. But it's the way you feel. Take someone like Chlorinda. You don't think of her as getting old. She does so much; she's still so attractive. Really just beginning to be. Who wrote

that thing called *Life Begins at Forty*? It's true in Chloe's case."

"She's older than I am," Beatrice said. "And I don't think *she's* well preserved. She looks like a . . . like an old Indian! Don't you like really attractive women, Timmy?" Beatrice lifted her small foot and stared hard at it, waving it gently. Her lips were pushed out in a childish pout. "Don't you like petite, sweet, nice little women—not someone who talks loud and is big as a barn and . . . and . . . keeps all sorts of rude things in her head, waiting to *spring* them out at you."

It made Timmy angry. Beatrice smiled at him again, a little drunkenly, sat up straight and folded her hands beautifully. He wanted to hurt her.

"Look at Chlorinda now," he said. "That wonderful face turned sideways to us, talking. Look how determined she is; she argues like an intelligent man. There is a kind of beauty in that; she doesn't choose to be soft and helpless. She's big—big minded, big in scope. Besides, I think her legs are very attractive."

He had expected Beatrice to be half-bored and angry. She looked at him with hurt, soft eyes, instead, and did not speak right away.

"You don't understand," she said. "About me and Chloe, or anything. I didn't mean . . . you just don't understand, do you?"

Timmy watched his aunt. He did not want to look at Beatrice. Then he lost track of Beatrice and saw just Chlorinda, standing now by the mantelpiece, with one elbow cocked on it, her free hand raised in an expressive gesture, her dark brows knitted and intent, her oblong face ugly and determined as her mouth worked fiercely, pronouncing words rapidly. The green jade earrings slammed back and forth as her head jerked, emphasizing what she said. One small strand of her tightly pulled-back hair came loose, drifted, matched the frills around her sinuous, bony neck. She moved a step toward the General and began pounding her clenched fist into her open left palm. She towered above him, wrathful, her legs apart and firmly placed.

"You and your kind! A *firm* foreign policy is not a *belligerent* foreign policy. You're as bad as the isolationists; you'll get your war, you keep on! A good policy is the best first battle. It's your misconceptions that make you a harlequin; a crosspatch militarist masquerading as an internationalist. You'll get your war. And kids like that!" She flung a hand toward Timmy. "You'll get it, damn my eyes if you won't!"

Timmy watched in admiration, hearing her strong voice die out. The General looked bald and quite small, sitting helpless before her. Uncle Hugh lay, almost horizontal in a deep chair, with his legs crossed and extended, listening, watching carefully. He said something, his face sour, which Timmy could not catch. Timmy suddenly realized Beatrice was speaking to him.

"What? I'm sorry," he said.

"This is the third time I've said it, but you're so wrapped *up*," Beatrice said, her lower lip stuck out petulantly. "Pay some attention to *me*." Timmy's anger was gone; he felt very sorry for Beatrice.

"I didn't mean to compare" he said. "Let's talk about you. Forgive me? I suppose you're an old friend of Chloe's?" He cursed himself for mentioning Chloe again, but Beatrice did not seem to notice.

"I've known her quite a while," Beatrice said. "It's strange. You don't know—she has needs, sometimes. She likes me somehow. Most people don't." She was silent a moment, and looked hard at Timmy. "There are times. I think she gets lonely, and I fill a certain role. You're too young to know yet—about people, relationships. She has all sorts who come and stay a little while. Like a tourist camp. They all come straight to Old Aunt Chloe's; New Orleans-style cookin', the intellectuals' hangout." Beatrice giggled. "You have to be sent by a friend and you ask for Robespierre and Telefore!" Beatrice pouted again and sagged her shoulders. "Now you've got me talking about her. I'm going to tell you about me! I want to be loved, Timmy. I guess we

all do." She looked at him with full eyes, her face serious. "Don't you think I'm a little bit attractive?"

"The attracting power of a magnet," Hugh said, suddenly beside them, "depends upon the surface area in contact and the electrical potential available. You got the surface area in contact, Bea? I know your electrical potential is very high. You ooze it, Beatrice."

Beatrice whirled to him. Hugh went on, unrelenting.

"You're like a high jumper, Bea, whose muscles are trained to lift and roll over the bar. So yours are trained, I suppose, with the unique difference that instead of rolling *over* . . . you roll" He grinned and his hands turned up suggestively.

"Don't you say things like that, Hugh! You hear?" A slow flush spread over Beatrice's face.

"Why, Bea-trice!" Hugh said.

"Listen, hush now, Hugh. Hush." Beatrice tried to smile.

"Form, they call that, Bea. Your form now— isn't it your best fleshly forte? And you round it out with fresh breastly sport? You like puns, Timmy? So Timmy will feel the beastly flesh snort?" Hugh laughed.

Beatrice was white and her smile was fixed. "Shut up, Hugh," she said. "You don't need to throw that up to me. You're always throwing that or Chloe up to me. I'm an easy target, is that it? I set Chloe off. Well, you aren't so damn fine. You aren't so clever!"

"Why, *Bea*!" Hugh's hand was thrust into the pocket of his jacket, and his face, the underlip protruding fiercely, pouted down at her. His eyes were cold and malicious. He reminded Timmy of an uproariously draped gargoyle.

"Remember, Bea, how you burned your shoulder to be able to show it to all the young men, and I said it should have been your bottom, so you could show it in a more amusing, Rabelaisian way, a sort of cancan to end"

"Damn you!" Beatrice said, her eyes burning. "Damn you,

you little *monkey!*” She jumped up and walked hastily out of the room. Hugh watched her with amusement.

“That disposes of the harridan, Timmy. Peace!” Hugh let his cigarette holder droop languidly. “Pretty clever way, eh?”

“Too damn clever,” Chlorinda said, thrusting into their conversation. Timmy laughed. “What do you want to hurt her for? Sadist.”

“Isn’t this all crazy?” she said to Timmy. “I haven’t had a chance to talk to you since you came, with all these people. Now that mildewed Pictish god of a woad General is gone” She looked slyly at Hugh. “I suppose Hugh has started lecturing you about his ‘art,’ hasn’t he? Of course, I must say I hate ‘em all. The sea you observe being kicked around is *me*, of course. So are the trees being violently uprooted in the landscapes. *But*, the most interesting part he doesn’t tell. Tell the little fellow how you paint them, Hughie.” Timmy winced at the sarcasm her big voice could carry.

“Shut your mouth, Chloe,” Hugh said. “You don’t know anything about painting.”

“Oh, no—I only *live* with it, man. After the hours you’ve talked you think I could possibly *not* know about it?” She jiggled her crossed leg nervously. “Anyway, *I’ll* tell you how he paints them,” Chloe went on.

“What the hell is it to you, Chloe. You don’t know anything about the creative process,” Hugh said. His face was slightly flushed. “Stop now, or you’ll spoil my affection for you.”

“It’s a very *interesting* process,” Chloe said in a mincing tone. “He locks himself in the bathroom and sits on the toilet-seat top, his easel before him. Then he has Julio beat around in the bathtub full of water with a little wooden paddle. He turns on all the taps so that the whole place is just *rushing* water. Then he paints furiously!” She burst into a peal of laughter. “And sometimes he sings!” Her head was thrown back now in full laughter. “You’d love to watch him do it. Ain’t it amusin’ to you, Hughie?”

"Don't call me Hughie!" Hugh almost shouted. "Why don't you get drunk like you usually do? Your taste consists wholly in a gilt piano with chubby little cherubs flitting all over it."

"He's about to start shouting now," Chlorinda said. "That must be your fifth drink, Hughie. He always shouts about my piano after his fifth drink, don't you, Hughie?"

"What gets *into* you?" Hugh shouted, shoving his glass toward her in a frantic gesture. He waved his free arm in the air. "'I have consorted with fools and idiots,' Joyce says somewhere." He turned and stomped off across the room, through the big arch into the hall.

"Pretty clever, huh?" Chlorinda mimicked. Her face was twisted and hurt.

Timmy looked at his Aunt Chlorinda for a long time without saying anything. Tacitly, they looked fully, each noting the changes, each trying hopelessly to probe the surface of the other, just by looking.

"Looking's no good," Chlorinda said. "You have to talk to find out what's inside. So let's talk." Chlorinda smiled, almost wistfully, and they got up and went to the big deep sofa and sat down, close together. It seemed to Timmy very much as it had been that other afternoon.

"I wasn't exactly asking questions with my eyes," Timmy said. "Eyes are always liars; one never sees the soul in a person's eyes, as Plato thought you did. Eyes only mirror one's own hopes."

"Do they teach you that at Princeton? That one-one stuff, I mean," Chlorinda asked, looking at him steadily, a hint of a smile twitching in the corners of her big straight mouth. "If they don't, and you just rattle off stuff like that, you're more of a little tinhorn philosopher than I thought. Why not just say what you mean? Better, just look at a person and keep your mouth shut." She laughed harshly and shook her head. The earrings bounced against the side of her neck.

It caught Timmy off balance and rattled him. He thought

painfully that she probably considered him a fool. Then he had to concentrate on what her rapid words were telling him.

" . . . No need to take me amiss—don't be hurt. I just hate to hear men talk like that. Sometimes I think I'd like to go back out West to a ranch or a cabin in the mountains and get away from this place. Not Hugh though. Not yet. He loves this kind of life. It gives him scope for all the parts of him; he can read and paint and talk just as much as he wants to. And work on people like poor Beatrice. Funny, isn't it, that he turned out like that?"

"But you don't want to leave *this*, do you, Chloe? This is your world. It's—it's fabulous. You're wonderful in it. Other women don't interest me any more—they haven't got your color."

Chlorinda looked at him suspiciously. She grunted out a half-laugh.

"You *are* a fool," she said. "Just a damn little fool. I thought you knew more than that."

Timmy saw, quite suddenly, that she, too, was slightly tight now. Her face looked older. She leaned forward and put her elbows on her spread knees.

"Get out of this, Timmy. Get off and live by yourself and then you come back and tell me what you think of scarlet quilted smoking jackets and cocktail parties where everyone gets tight, but pretends to be sober for God knows what peculiar reason. You just tell me what you think of me then!" Her voice rose and she sat up straight, her face angry and red.

"Tell me then what you like; tell me then how bloody attractive I am, God *damn* your little unconscious, thinking tongue!" She flung herself up, tall and straight, with her fists clenched at her sides and her face puckered and red. She no longer looked lean and smooth, but rather like a huge baby; Timmy saw to his astonishment that tears were squeezing from her eyes and were running slowly, in crooked paths, down her lined face. She turned away suddenly and walked over to the French windows, rubbing her eyes with the back of her fists.

"You're ingenuous, Timmy, that's what you are. That part

of you I like. It's like having a child of your own. But God, you're so crazy! I have to expose myself to show you that. I'm sorry I yelled at you; I didn't mean it. What I really want, I guess, is for you to stay a long time. It will be like that day I told you about everything and we ate shrimps. I want you to stay as long as you like, and I promise not to smother you. I need something, something like you to cling to just *now*, while everything seems to be going to pieces. Christ, why wasn't I a man!"

She turned back to him. He did not know what to say. He was thinking about Beatrice and Hugh and Martin; all of them looked different now.

"You were just in danger, that's all," Chloe said. "I can give you lots in return, if you stay. A certain kind of knowledge that will save you from this." She spread her hand toward the other end of the long room. "You'll never make the mistakes I made. Stop thinking I'm wonderful and *learn*, will you?"

Her voice was calm and even and she looked almost serene, leaning with one hand stretched above her, clinging to the draperies, looking at him hard.

"I can't," he said. "I ought to go back."

"Stay," she said. "I haven't failed completely, you know. Experience has gathered about my ugliness, atom by atom, until I have become more woman than most of these . . . these . . . *gewgaws*!" She spat the word out and her face was hard. "Why not stay a while at least?" Timmy had never heard her use the imploring tone she used now.

"I still think you're the most wonderful woman I know. This makes me more sure. But I understand now, Chloe," he said.

Her voice was very soft and small when she spoke. "Now you see," she said and smiled, "you say things like that unconsciously, not knowing it makes me flower, makes every petal of me expand toward you almost with yearning. If you understood what it did to me, I suppose the effect would be lost. But it does that to me, and I have to tell you. Most people, if I told them that, would tear me apart. That's the side of you that ought to be

brought out. But you don't tear, not you—you're too angelic and childlike to see the awful holes in me." She smiled sardonically at him, a grin that took in both the humor of his being angelic and the wryness of her deficiencies. It was very still in the long high room.

They both heard the front door open and listened to the soft, roughly whistled notes of a musical comedy song.

"That will be Marty," Chloe said. It was the Chloe now he expected. "That idiot will come in loaded down with cheeses, like some sort of Dutch dairy merchant, trying to pay for his board in produce!" She said it in a raucous, loud voice.

Marty came into the living room. He carried sacks and a bundle in brown paper.

"Ah Chloe, my dear, and Little Timmy!" Marty beamed. "Have they all gone? You're quite incorrect, you know." He looked around the room as though he expected some guest to be hiding in a corner. "Quite incorrect, for once. Little presents, yes: salami, onion pickles, smoked fish, two papayas, *pâté*, everything good, and not a *single* cheese!" He said it proudly, with a look of boyish delight on his round face. His hand moved in a feeble expansive gesture. "Not a single cheese; ye judge the good dwarf wrong!" He beamed at her with a sick grin, glancing slyly at Timmy.

Chloe laughed, a big whiskey-rough laugh, with her head tossed back and her mouth wide open. Timmy could hardly hear them for his thoughts. He could not stay, but something pushed him toward it, tugged at him like a shade as he watched Chloe. When he did decide it was very suddenly.

"I've got a surprise for you, Marty," Timmy said. He waited just an instant. "I've decided to come and live for a while. You won't mind?"

"My dear boy, it would make me very happy! Good. *Goo-ood.*" He looked suspiciously at Chloe. "I'm sure Chloe would like it too, even though she has a crowd already" He began pulling things from his sacks. "Pretty papayas—there

—the dwarf has brought them. The *pâté*, excellent. The confidante is away in the attic. But the princess is here—potted meat there. And Lear doth love someone, not Cordelia. And youth, blessed youth, is come among us. Those are the onions. So what care we if the fairies are all gone under the hill, if it do rage and storm outside. There is youth. And here is salami!”

Timmy grinned and then laughed. He looked at his aunt, expecting an answer, but Chlorinda merely threw back her head and laughed again, with a warmth that Timmy had not really noticed before.

JOHN A. LYNCH was born in Detroit, in 1922. He was graduated in absentia from the University of Notre Dame in 1943, while he was with the Army. He served in the Army until 1946, held a writing fellowship at Stanford in 1948-49, and now lives in Birmingham, Michigan, with his wife and son. He has published in *Atlantic Monthly*, *The Pacific Spectator*, *Today*, *Catholic World*, *The University of Kansas City Review*, and *Stanford Short Stories*, 1949. His story "The Burden" was picked for Prize Stories of 1947 and for Best Short Stories, 1948.

THE FIELDS OF WHEAT*

JOHN A. LYNCH

Riding up through Michigan one day, a man said to Eddie, "Why, they're like a symbol, you know. The fields of wheat. Like peace on earth, I guess."

Eddie looked out the window of the truck and saw the fields stretching away at either side of the road. Along a path a child and a dog romped, in the direction of a clapboard house, and farther away a reaper moved through the wheat, cutting it, for the harvest.

There were ditches along the road, and in the ditches dust-choked weeds grew. There were fences beyond the ditches, wire fences, held up at intervals by gnawed and weather-lined posts. And beyond the fences he saw the fields stretching away.

He had come up from a dry river bottom once into a field such as these were. There had been no fence, though, only a low, cracked perimeter of plowed-up soil, and it had been in a far away place, and, it seemed, a long time ago. They had been hungry then, tired, and thirsty. As soon as the first men had edged into the field, following a deep-worn path that seemed to know no direction, but wandered at its own ease through the wheat, the men had begun to reach out and strip the still-unripe grain from

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THE FIELDS OF WHEAT

the stalks. They rubbed the loose bits of wheat between their palms then, breaking off the husks. They blew the chaff away, holding their cupped palms upward, and they ate the grains of wheat.

They drank from their canteens, the last bit of water there was, and they lay down beside the path and stretched out in the hot sun to rest. There was no shade in the wheat, only the sun, and after a while they began to crawl on their bellies through the grain and they began to dig with their shovels and picks and knives into the soil that was hard but still a little cool. They dug in the soil slowly, stopping now and then to bend down the stalks of wheat and strip the grains into their palms and eat them, tasting the mealiness of the wheat.

They lay there an hour and the sun moved very little. From time to time one would say, "Why can't we get on?" but there was no answer. Only that they were there and they would remain there until told to move forward. A man came back from a patrol, walking upright through the wheat, to say that there was a woods ahead a half-mile, but it was across a road and on the road he had seen the bodies of men, and they couldn't get beyond for some time. We are waiting for rations, he said, and for water, and for the sun to go down.

The men crawled farther through the field of grain and lay in the hot sun and waited. All over the field could be heard the rasp and crunch of shovels digging in the hard earth, the clunk of picks. Then a man came crawling up from the rear and said there was a man there who could not stand it much longer. Well, tell him, the sergeant said, tell him, for God's sake, to lie on his stomach, and keep his helmet on. Don't let him take his helmet off, whatever he does. And stay with him, keep an eye on him.

A man came by on his hands and knees and said, "Why don't they shoot? They know we are here, what are they waiting for?" "Yes," someone said, "why don't they shoot?"

They lay there another hour and watched the sun. It had moved a little farther across the sky, going down now, but be-

neath it the heat mounted and increased, and there was no water to relieve it. "Well, I'm going to sleep," a man said. "I don't care what you guys do. I'm going to sleep and you can wake me when they make up their minds." He had dug a shallow hole in the earth, half as long as his body, and he rolled into this on his back, stretching out, so that his legs lay on the ground above. He pulled his helmet down over his eyes, the steel edge of it resting on the bridge of his nose, and he pretended to sleep. The others watched him, and they knew that he only pretended. But they said that they would wake him, they gave him that satisfaction.

It was much quieter than it had been, the men were settling down, and no longer could there be heard the shovels and the picks digging at the earth, for the men had all found in one way or another that they had dug deep enough. They lay in the sun, first on their stomachs, then on their backs, then curled up on their sides. They uncapped their empty canteens and felt that the metal lips of them were hot from the sun. They stripped the heads from the wheat and ate the grains, rolling them in their palms and blowing the chaff away with a little puff. A man began to clean his rifle.

The sun moved farther down the sky, but its work was done, and it didn't seem to make any difference one way or another now. A stretcher came by, a man at either end struggling to hold it up. There were no sounds from the man they carried, and his face was gray, as if they had waited too long. "Don't ask me, ask him," the man in the lead said, looking at the ashen face rolled to its side on the canvas. "We're taking him to the river," the other said. "I think he's done." They picked the stretcher up, heaving it forward, and a man behind got to his knees and said, "I want to go, too." He was red-faced and he got to his feet heavily, dragging himself, leaving his shovel and his rifle behind.

The others lay in the field, and far off to the left they heard the first sharp chatter of a machine gun. It came suddenly, a flash of sound, but they heard it as if they had been waiting for it for a long time. A man let his breath out audibly. "Theirs," someone

said. Nearer, another gun answered, a little slower, and an echo came back from the woods ahead, very light, but distinct, the four quick beats. A man whose rifle was apart began quickly to assemble it. The guns sounded once more, the ripping one, the slower one. Then they did not sound again. The men settled back on the ground, in their holes and beside them, and waited.

Shortly after dusk the first shells began, and the men got up and moved out of the field, and went on.

He remembered a time two years later, in the East, when it was over and they had got together, several of them, and begun to recount the impetuous things, the odd, the mock-heroic, and something of the terror and the fright. They had last met in the South, when their training cycle broke and they had gone separate ways, promising to keep in touch, and some day, God willing, to meet again. They had said it gravely then, shaking hands several times before they would let up. And then, more lightly, with a laugh: "Keep your head down. See you!"

They met at the house of one of them, and talked of the days they had been apart, where each of them had been, the things that they had seen. They laughed a little, talked easily, and now and then they spoke a name and someone said, "No, I hear he's dead."

They had been to foreign lands and spoke of them, the cities, towns, the rivers, remembered for the hundred different things that happened there. They told of a harbor at night, the stillness, and the slide of ships through black water. They told of beaches, and the men moving up like ants across impassable sand, but passing. The times, the places, remembered for what happened, and, too, for what did not. They told of a road into a forest, a canopy of trees, and of a shelling suffered there. One spoke of a time in a shattered, homeless village, and another said, finally, "There was this wheat field"

"I think I could have helped a man," he said, "but he was way in deep, and it was night. Then I got cut off and I lay there

in a ditch, beside the field, and they passed so close to me I could have touched them. It was like being hunted.

"They knew that we were there and they were looking for us. I lay there a long time, and when they finally went away I heard him call. It was so dark you couldn't see anything, and when I went out I couldn't find him. I walked a long time, hearing him, but I couldn't find him."

They could all remember it, for they had known it in degree, the time, the night, the fear, the sense of bewilderment and being lost. The man who could not run and fell behind, the man who hugged the earth and crawled a thousand yards, finding his way out. The field where bullets clipped the wheat and sought the men, back and forth, methodically, from unseen guns, until the gunners tired and turned to somewhere else. The voices heard in darkness, calling out of a depth of wheat, but giving up no sign, no indication of direction, and the final abandonment to night: remembered for a hundred things.

"There was this wheat field"

He knew a time when they had tasted abjectness, when they had been gathered into a wide valley to wait for the day that they should be sent to the front. They came in at night, driving in trucks through the rain, climbing down in a field where they could not see thirty feet, and hearing orders shouted from one place to another but not seeing the men who gave them. Now and then a light flashed and someone swore to put it out, and the light went out and there was only the blackness and the constant shuffling and slopping of feet in the rain, and then they had huddled in some sort of formation and started to march. They went for a while on a hard, paved road and the men stamped the mud from their shoes as they walked, and then they entered the mud again.

By dawn they had come into the center of the valley, where the listing, the classifying, and the herding of ten thousand men went on, and here they were swallowed up. They drew rations the first day and exchanged their clothes and drew their rifles and

went to their tents to clean them. From then on they gathered in long lines to eat, in long lines to be inspected. They slept ten in each tent, but on the road they were thousands. They were within thirty miles of the front, and every day a few were siphoned off and sent away in trucks, and every night a few more came in to replace them, to fill their positions in the long lines and in the tents.

They were sent on marches, and when they came back they gathered in long lines to take a shower, and at night went out again to march. They dug defense positions along a river, and when they had finished, they went somewhere else and dug again. They sat in a field and listened to the sound of captured guns, the crack of bullets six feet overhead. And once in a while a man was killed, and everywhere a lecture on security went out.

In the lowest part of the valley the fields were a foot deep with clover, and the men worked at tactics here. If there was a house, they scouted it, approached it, surrounded it, and demolished it with dummy rounds. If it were a road, they flanked it, cut it, saved its bridges, and possessed it.

They went into higher ground and there worked among the orchards and the fields of wheat, taking cover, seeking positions of offense, attacking in formation, creeping down the paths.

They attacked a farmer's house one day, and through his fields they left circuitous trails of broken wheat. The men came six at a time, crouching, running, stopping, attacking, sometimes taking the trails already made, sometimes striking out new ones. The farmer stood by and watched and could do nothing. Behind the men, orders were shouted, directing them how to run, how to fall, how to set up their guns.

When they were finished, they gathered on a knoll above the fields, and they looked back on the damage they had done. "That's war," one said, laughing, and lying back to smoke a cigarette. But many of the others felt badly, and they watched as the farmer went out and walked along the paths and tried to make the broken wheat stand up again.

Beyond the field they could see the green clover, the roads, the tents, and far beyond them the other side of the valley. And everywhere they looked they could see the men like themselves who had come in at night and who would go out by day, a little at a time, the replacements.

They marched on the roads in solid, square-cut formations; they exercised in the fields in wide-armed precision; they sat in groups and listened; they stood in long, identical lines to receive identical items of issue. One group of men looked just like another, and when they had moved about and interchanged positions, they seemed not to have moved at all.

"If you stood us all in rows, we'd look just like the wheat," a man said. Some of them laughed, and others kept silent. They watched the farmer in his trampled fields, and, beyond, the men who marched and moved from one end of the valley to the other, all of a purpose.

There were the dusty weeds, the fences held up by weathered posts, and the fields stretching away, the child and the dog, and the reaper moving near them.

"They're like a symbol," the man said, away with his own thoughts, riding up through Michigan, looking out at the fields of wheat.

HARRY MUHEIM, a native of San Francisco, was graduated from Stanford in 1941, then worked briefly for Columbia Pictures before entering the Navy. After two years on Admiral Nimitz' staff he returned to Stanford, where he obtained an A.M. in speech and drama, produced a musical show, and began to write short stories. His "Tomorrow Is Another Day" was published in Stanford Short Stories, 1948. In 1949 Mr. Muheim was awarded one of the two Albert M. Bender grants-in-aid; he is currently living and writing in New York.

THE BIG GREY PICNIC

HARRY MUHEIM

In the early months of 1942, the people of Paso Robles, California, were sighing and saying that the town wasn't like it used to be. They were not being hazily nostalgic as is often the case when this is said. They were sad because the town *had* changed—changed clearly, rapidly, and for the worse—and in the slightest conversational pause they would begin to tell you how nice it was when the town was like it used to be.

"Back in 'thirty-nine," the story went, "Paso Robles was a peaceful place . . . a nice place to live. Everybody knew everybody else. Not much went on, but not much had to. It was quiet here, and we liked it that way. But that Camp Roberts . . . that's what changed things . . ."

Camp Roberts, a terrifyingly bleak army camp, was set down about twenty miles north of Paso Robles in 1940. It was a completely typical installation, with acres of brown earth freshly scarred by bulldozer blades, hastily constructed asphalt roads and parade grounds that did not drain properly in wet weather, and hundreds of light-yellow two-story barracks set in neat rows and punctuated with an occasional trim white prefabricated church. For a period of six years, tens of thousands of Americans were trained and "processed" at Camp Roberts, and it is no wonder that whenever they could wangle a pass they got out. The

only place to go, of course, was Paso Robles, and that's what made Paso Robles so different from what it used to be. Los Angeles could have accommodated and entertained this swarm, but a small town was simply and understandably not up to it.

Pete Blake had been stationed at Roberts for about ten weeks when I stopped by to see him on a Sunday in February of 'forty-two. I wanted to give him a few books that he had left lying around our apartment in Los Angeles, and I also wanted to have a talk with him—one of those talks that you always have with a friend who has just gone into military service. You ask him how it is, and he tells you. Some people can tell you in a sentence, others need only two words. But I figured that Pete, with his sharp eye for the ludicrous and his well-integrated thoughts about how to lead an intelligent life, would spend three or four hours telling me how it was. I looked forward with great interest to what he had to say, for I was driving up to San Francisco to get inducted myself.

I passed north through Paso Robles just before ten in the morning, and several hundred soldiers were already on the main street. It was a dark and overcast day, and they were all wearing heavy overcoats which appeared to be made of the matting that is usually placed under rugs. The men were walking slowly up and down the sidewalks. There were no smiles on their faces, and very few of them were even talking to each other. Some sat at the curb with their feet in the gutter, all hunched over and smoking to keep warm, but most of them walked steadily and consistently along the sidewalk, as though it were some kind of dull task to which they had been assigned. It was the first time since the great military expansion that I had seen any more than the fifty or so servicemen who were always waiting to get into the N.B.C. Building in Los Angeles. These men in Paso Robles appeared to be much more a part of an army than the soldiers in Los Angeles did, but I suppose no group could ever look too serious while it had that big pale-green N.B.C. Building for a backdrop.

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Twenty miles north of Paso Robles, I began to see the trim yellow and black army road signs. The first one said ENTERING U.S. ARMY MILITARY RESERVATION, and then in rapid succession other signs prohibited photography, parking, loitering, trespassing, and speeding. The last and largest sign read CAMP ROBERTS—ALL CONVOYS STOP.

The corporal in the gatehouse told me how to get to Pete's regimental headquarters. Six buildings straight ahead, four to the left, and so on. After getting lost only twice in the precise maze of the camp, I stopped before the building that had HQ 82nd REG stencilled in red on the door. From here I was directed to battalion headquarters, and from there to the barracks in which Pete's platoon was located.

The yellow, green-roofed building was cold inside, and I thought at first it was entirely empty, but then I saw a small wizened figure seated on a bunk down at the far end. He was quietly gazing off into space, and as I walked toward him between the long rows of beds, he did not move. A shoe-polishing rag dangled from his hand. I was quite close to him before he noticed me and jumped. He was a private and still in his teens, but from the other end of the dim building he had looked as though he were a little old man.

"Everybody's gone," he said in a flat voice.

"Do you know where Pete Blake is?" I asked.

"Gone. There's his bunk there." He waved the rag at one of the taut, dun-colored beds across the aisle.

"That's funny. I thought he was going to meet me here. I have some books for him."

"He's gone. Funny, you bringin' him books."

"Why?"

"I never thought of him readin' much."

"Well, they're his, and I figured he'd want them."

"I'll take them for him. I read some."

"Fine."

I gave him the books and he read each of the titles aloud

slowly. Everything he said sounded sad and empty. Even his reading of the book titles was melancholy.

"*Poetics*, Aristotle. *Tobacco Road*, Caldwell. *How to Think Straight*, Robert H. Thouless. *The First Seven Years*, Raymond Moley. Funny, you bringin' him books."

"You got any idea where he might be?" I asked.

"Paso Robles. Everybody got a pass. When we get passes, everybody goes to Paso Robles and stands on the curb or walks up and down. Then when the bars open they start drinkin'."

"You sure he went there?" I asked.

"There's no place else. You goin' into Paso, Mister?"

"I guess so," I replied. "I just came through there, but I'll drive back. I'd like to see him."

"How about if you take me along?"

"Sure."

He put on his jacket, and we got into the car and drove back to the gate. I returned the white cardboard visitor's pass, and outside we picked up four soldiers from the thick mass of overcoated men waiting to hitch a ride into Paso Robles. The four smelled strongly of bourbon and they were arguing noisily about the relative merits of General Motors and Studebaker army trucks. One of them drove a GM truck, and he was fending off the other three who were not drivers but were strong Studebaker men. My little shriveled friend, whose name was Wickersham, sat next to me. After a couple of miles during which the argument grew heated, Wickersham turned to me and said in a loud voice, "See? These guys been drinkin' already. And it's against the rules on the base, too."

"Lots of stuff is, boy," said one of the soldiers in the back seat, and then he returned quickly to the argument. Wickersham did not answer him. A little later a light rain started to fall, and Wickersham complained of being cold. He had not worn his overcoat because it was too heavy, but now he was cold. I turned on the windshield wipers, and without a break between his sentences he asked how come I was driving around in a convertible

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and not in the Army. He was reassured when I told him I was going to be inducted in San Francisco in two days and would have to get rid of the car. I let him out at a small town called San Miguel, a few miles north of Paso Robles. One of the soldiers asked incredulously what the hell there was to do in San Miguel, but Wickersham did not reply. He said good-bye and then walked off slowly through the thin drizzle with his shoulders pushed up against the sides of his neck, as a person does when he is cold and uncomfortable. He disappeared around a corner.

As soon as the car started, the soldier in the front seat pulled out a fifth of bourbon and passed it around. I was invited to have a drink, and I took a slug from the bottle. The loud, illogical truck argument continued. It was not really a discussion of the trucks any more. Each man was simply yelling about how ignorant the others were. Just before we got to Paso Robles, one of the soldiers in the rear seat got sick. He ran down the little wedge-shaped window, stuck his head out and was convulsed. They were all embarrassed then, and the argument stopped quickly.

I dropped them at the Mexican Hat, the first bar we saw at the north edge of town, and they hurried in, starting to slip out of their overcoats even before they were to the door.

I drove along the main street again, and now at half-past eleven it was completely jammed with the unsmiling men. They walked or sat on the curb as before, and now there was a solid line of them leaning with their backs against the buildings and display windows along the street. There was no atmosphere of recreation or relaxation at all.

I parked the car in back of a service station. The owner, a sympathetic man in his fifties, gave me some rags and a bucket full of water, and I cleaned the big splashed area under the side window. He said that he didn't clean it off himself any more, but he was happy to provide the equipment. He leaned against the front fender while I worked.

"Happens constantly now, all day long," he said, shaking

his head sadly. "You're lucky he was able to get the window down."

I agreed with him.

"Guess the boys got nothin' else to do," he continued. "I feel sorry for 'em. But the town's sure not like it used to be any more." He walked slowly and thoughtfully back into his station, clucking.

I locked the car and walked up the west side of the main street, figuring I'd look for Pete in the bars and stores on that side first, then swing back on the other side. I went slowly, looking at each passing face. When you look for a civilian, you don't pay so much attention to his face alone. You're familiar with his build, his clothes, the shape of his head—and these things help in identifying at a distance. But when everyone is wearing a same-colored cap and a shapeless overcoat with the collar turned up against the rain, then you have to concentrate on the face.

The stores were all closed, but halfway up the block I found the first bar and went in. It had been quiet, almost ominous on the street, but there was a great noise and tumult in here. A juke box was blaring, and a brief violent fight had flared up. The fight was over in a moment, with one of the contestants lying on the damp dirty floor and the other one being mauled by two powerful MP's who had blasted into the bar. I walked around the dim room, looking at the talking, yelling faces. There was not another civilian in the place, and even though nobody paid any attention to me, my light-blue suit and gabardine topcoat made me feel ridiculous and uncomfortable. I went out to look at the passing faces on the sidewalk again.

I bought a drink in the next bar. With a drink in my hand, I felt less conspicuous and inquiring, and there was enough light in this room so that I could stand at the bar and see everybody. It was a tiny, old-fashioned barroom with a heavy mahogany bar and a dirty brass rail running the length of one side. A large smashed mirror hung in back of the bar, reflecting crazily. The owner had made no concessions to the influx of men. There was

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no juke box. There were no chairs or tables. You drank at the bar or stood with your drink away from the bar. I thought once that I saw the back of Pete's head, but the man turned around after a moment, and he looked nothing like Pete at all.

A middle-aged corporal sidled up to me and said that if he laid ninety-six cents on the bar would I tell the bartender it was my money and I wanted a half-pint of Old Ripple. The corporal couldn't buy bottled liquor, and he wanted to go out and sit under a tree in the drizzling rain and do his drinking there. I said sure, and he put down his money. The bartender came over and we transacted the deal. I handed the soldier the bottle, and he shuffled off happily.

"Thanks, buddy," said the barkeeper to me. "I wish to hell we had you around all the time. Trouble is we can't sell these guys bottled stuff direct, and hardly no civilians ever come in to be able to slip it to them. If we could sell bottled direct, the overflow could drink in the streets, but the law or the MP's or the general or somebody says we can't." I said I was sorry to hear it and ordered a second drink. He brought it, sighing again about the problem of not being able to sell a full-grown man a bottle. He said things were sure different around the town.

"Take that mirror," he continued, pushing his thumb back over his shoulder toward the broken mirror. "Why, I had the same glass in there for thirty years . . . all through prohibition and everything. That's how quiet the drinking used to be around here. Now I've put in four new mirrors in seven months. To hell with them. I'm going to leave the busted one up 'til the day after the armistice."

He wiped his way down the bar.

A half-hour later, I finally found Pete in a place called the Day and Night Club. A couple of the bars I had gone into had been hastily converted from soda fountains, but in none was the conversion from another kind of business so rapid and so incomplete as in the Day and Night Club. It was by far the darkest bar I have ever been in, and it was kept this way not so much

to create atmosphere as to hide the scars of the conversion. In the pre-Roberts days, the Day and Night Club had been a deep, narrow grocery store. The owner had simply ripped out some of the fixtures, painted the large front display windows pitch black, thrown in some small wooden tables and chairs, installed two heavy full-length swinging doors, and then opened his bar. It seemed as though the entire conversion had taken only about forty-five minutes, and you could smell decayed vegetables as well as stale beer in the room. There was a single blue fluorescent tube above the cash register, and the juke box gave off a red glow, but most of the light was provided by the stabs of white daylight which cut into the room each time someone walked or stumbled through the swinging doors. It was then that you could see the canned-goods shelves stacked up in the rear and the large colored cardboard signs high up on the walls advertising Johnson's Wax, Quaker Oats, and other products.

Again I stood at the bar holding a drink, but I didn't want to drink any more because I was starting to feel a shade high. I tried to look carefully around the long, deep room, but the place was so dim and there were so many men sitting around and milling through the darkness that after a few minutes I decided it was no use. I put the drink down and turned to go. Then the door flew open, and I took one last look around. I saw Pete's face in the bright light. He was at a table far back in the room and over toward one wall. His three companions were singing wildly and gaily, and Pete was seated with his body slumped forward awkwardly and his head lying on its side on the table. My good friend Pete was out cold.

The door swung closed again. I groped my way to the table, waited for their song to end, then I introduced myself. The three soldiers were well along and didn't make very good sense, but they invited me warmly to sit down and have a drink because any friend of ol' Pete's was a friend of theirs. The biggest one pulled up a chair, and I sat down next to him at the little round wooden

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table. I was facing the door, and when it swung open now it seemed as though we were all seated in a long dark tunnel.

The big guy on my right who had pulled up the chair was Bierholdt. He was a huge friendly Nordic with thick hands and straight short hair and a square face. Bierholdt was an inept comedian who helped his jokes along by pounding on the back of the person nearest him. He felt that nearly everything he said was funny, so I took quite a beating. Occasionally he would pound on Pete, because Pete's slumped back was directly under his upraised right hand, but Pete would not respond, and then Bierholdt would switch hands and start pounding on me again. Directly across the table sat Muir, a small corporal with a ferret face. He had a bitter, taut laugh which indicated approval rather than enjoyment, and his beady eyes were uncomfortably easy to see in the dim room. In the chair on my left was Judd. He said nothing at all and was supremely happy. He had a wonderful permanent smile on his round face, as though he had hooked fishhooks into the corners of his mouth and then tied the leaders back over his ears. He agreed with everything, he argued with nobody, and Bierholdt's comedy technique delighted him.

Each of them had a fifth of bourbon on the floor beneath his chair. The procedure seemed to be to come in, buy one drink in order to procure a glass, and then continue to refill the glass with liquor from the bottle. Pete's bottle stood on the table in front of him, half-empty. Bierholdt shoved it over to me along with Pete's glass, and I poured a straight shot. Bierholdt explained mushily that ol' Pete just got going a little too fast on the morning drunk, but that he'd be right back on his feet for the afternoon drunk and the big party tonight. They were having three drunks in a row today, and Pete got started with too much of a bang, tha's all. All three laughed heartily at Bierholdt's explanation while Bierholdt walloped me on the back several times. Then they started to sing again.

I was surprised about Pete. Not that I hadn't ever seen him

completely stoned before. I had seen him just like this a few times, but it was a shock to see him out cold at the stroke of noon, and I had never seen Pete collapse while there was singing to be done. He had a wonderful baritone voice, and he could sing the real baritone parts, too—not just the tenor part an octave lower as so many phony baritones do.

Suddenly Bierholdt grew serious and started to tell me that they were all in the bes' little ol' combat intelligence platoon in the United States Army. Muir agreed intensely that it was the best, and Judd sat there weaving back and forth, smiling silently and nodding his head affirmatively. I asked what a combat intelligence platoon did, and Bierholdt tried to explain it, but he couldn't make sense. He could see that it wasn't coming out properly, so he turned it into a gag. Every couple of sentences, he'd make a vague joke, slam me on the back, and say, "Who said that? Who said that?" Then he would swing around in his chair, looking for the person who said that, and Judd and Muir would explode with laughter. I laughed along with them by now, but I hadn't had enough bourbon really to enjoy the performance. I remember wondering if I'd ever be drunk enough to think that Bierholdt was funny.

In a break between songs, Muir pushed his tiny mean face out over the table and asked where my uniform was. I started to explain how I was going to San Francisco to be inducted, but Bierholdt pushed Muir's face back with his open hand and told him to can it. He put his big arm around me and, breathing right in my face, he said he didn't care why I wasn't in the Army. Anybody who was a friend of Pete's was a friend of his. Then he swung back and grabbed Pete's body across the shoulders and simultaneously shook the two of us violently to indicate his friendship.

We had another drink, and they started to sing a song about two prostitutes and a set of false teeth. I knew the lyrics, so I joined in. Halfway through the song, Bierholdt leaned over toward Pete with a glass of straight bourbon in his hand and poured

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the contents into Pete's ear. Pete awakened immediately, yelling with pain, and batting the side of his head with his fist in order to knock the liquid out. Bierholdt and the other two roared at this, and Bierholdt asked him if he wanted a chaser. Pete wiped out his ear with a dun-colored handkerchief, then looked over at me. He recognized me immediately.

"Harry, Harry, you old son of a bitch," he said, and we shook hands across the table. He clasped his left hand over mine as we shook.

"Hi, Pete," I said. "Just dropped by to say hello."

He kept pumping my hand for a long time.

"Well, well, you old son of a bitch. You old son of a bitch, you."

He repeated the phrase several times, then suddenly withdrew his hands and held on to the edge of the table for a moment. He got up unsteadily, turning so white that he looked almost luminescent in the dark room. He excused himself and stumbled off toward the toilet. I started after him, but Bierholdt held me back.

"He's okay. He's okay. He can handle it," he said.

At that moment a soldier came up to the table with three large paper bags.

"Hey, Pete, here's Trent with the food," Bierholdt called out, but Pete paid no attention and kept going.

Trent, another member of the platoon, had brought back twelve cheeseburgers and six large paper cartons of black coffee. Bierholdt introduced us without using my name, and Trent sat in the chair between Muir and Judd. As he laid the food on the wet table, Bierholdt rose ponderously to his feet, rapped on a glass with his ring, and announced formally, "Gentlemen. It's twenty-three minutes after twelve. We will now sober up so we can get rolling on the afternoon drunk."

Trent invited me to have Pete's burgers. He was more sober than the others, and it was hard to believe that such a young face could have such a washed-out appearance. The skin around his

eyes drooped and sagged so that his eyes looked like the eyes of a bloodhound. As we started to eat, Trent said that he wasn't able to get a room at the hotel for the big evening drunk. The clerk had remembered him from last week. Now they'd have to stay at the Day and Night through the evening. This disappointing news seemed to accelerate the sobering-up process. Apparently, big things had been planned for the evening drunk, and a hotel room had been a vital part of the plans. By the time they had each eaten two of the cheeseburgers and swilled a carton of the hot black coffee, they had turned almost completely sober. It was an amazing performance to watch, for when sober they seemed deflated and puzzled and completely different.

"This whole business was Pete's idea," explained Muir, munching quietly on his third cheeseburger. His violent intensity had left him. "Pete told us how the Romans used to have a vomitorium at their parties. That way they could prolong a party for days and days."

"And this is just like it in a way," added Trent in his tired drawl. "By drinking fast and sobering up fast, we can get three complete drunks into a twelve-hour pass."

"I see," I said.

"Only trouble is that Pete gets so far gone on the first one that he has a hell of a time sticking with us for the other two."

Bierholdt and Judd were silent as they ate, and with our own little group quiet the Day and Night seemed much noisier. All the tables were full now, and men were jammed in between tables, standing, sitting on the wet floor, holding glasses, swaying, weaving, cursing, and singing. A soldier with an overwhelmingly powerful voice had leaped to the top of the bar and was singing a hilarious song about not being able to remember Pearl Harbor because he was too busy remembering the *Maine*. He got a tremendous laugh and hand, but my companions did not join in. The sudden sobering up had taken all the magic out of their day. When the last cheeseburger had been consumed, we all sat there, and they looked at each other or at the table or at me, and they

were silent. They didn't seem like comrades in arms any more—like members of the best little old combat intelligence platoon in the United States Army. They had become just a small group of strangers sitting around in the middle of California, probably wondering for a moment what was going on back home on this Sunday afternoon. Trent and Bierholdt sat looking down at the table. Judd continued to smile, but there was merriment only in his mouth now. His eyes had lost their amiable glint and were cold and worried. Muir's little face was screwed up earnestly. He seemed to be working out a problem. Finally I asked, "You guys know a fellow by the name of Wickersham?"

Bierholdt decided to get the party back on its feet. He boomed out a big laugh. "*Know him!*" he shouted. "I'm just about ready to kill him. I gave him one more week to learn how to use his rifle, then I'm going to shoot him in the back by mistake. But even if I don't kill him, he'll die of fright before we ever get out of Roberts. That guy uses more toilet paper than anybody else in the regiment."

Bierholdt intended all this to be very funny, and during the drunk it would have been. But now nobody laughed.

"Wickersham's always getting off at San Miguel," said Trent. "Never comes on into town."

"I know. I gave him a ride in," I said.

"I got that all figured out," said Bierholdt. "He knows an old maiden lady in Miguel. He goes over there for the afternoon and sits by the fire, sipping Shasta water and reading Bible quotations."

It sounded to me as though Bierholdt's stuff was improving, but still nobody laughed.

"I wonder how this is all going to work out," said Muir, breaking a five-minute silence.

"Whaddaya mean, whaddaya mean, whaddaya mean?" said Bierholdt in a big gag blustering manner. But he was trying too hard, and his timing was off, and he got no response.

"Well, they call it combat intelligence," explained Muir. He

was serious and relaxed now. "Our platoon is supposed to go ahead when things bog down and report back on why they bogged down. But I don't think anybody has any idea of how it will work out. Our host, Lieutenant Burton, tells us it will all work beautifully. But what does Lieutenant Burton know about it? He's never been in a war. He got his information from some other second lieutenant at Fort Sill a couple of weeks ago. And how do we know what he knew? Seems to me it could be one hell of a mess," he concluded.

"Maybe we'll all get shot in the ass," said Judd. This was the first thing Judd had said since I came to the table. He was not being funny. The smile had dropped from his face, and he really meant it.

Trent banged his fist on the table. "Gentlemen," he said, "Judd has stopped smiling. I can see that it's time for the afternoon's festivities. Let's go."

He pulled a heavy paper carton out from under his chair and took out a couple of fifths of bourbon. I must have looked surprised, because he explained to me immediately that his uncle was a wholesaler in Los Angeles. "Who needs a new one?" he asked. Nobody needed a new one right at the moment, but Bierholdt took one to keep in reserve under his chair. Trent handed a bottle to me, but I wanted to find Pete and excused myself.

I pushed my way over to the men's room, but Pete was not inside. I hadn't seen him leave the place, so I searched carefully through the gloomy room, moving slowly from table to table. I couldn't find him anywhere. There was a soldier lying in the long empty area under the bar, but I rolled him over and it was not Pete. Then I left the bar and did another complete circle of the main street. The weather had cleared up some now, the sun was breaking through, and the faces of most of the walking men were more flushed and red than they had been two hours before. I looked in all the bars again, in the hotel lobby, the vacant lots, the service station rest rooms, every place. But Pete was not around.

When I returned to the Day and Night Club the second drunk

was already turned up to full volume. It was a noisier and less good-natured drunk than the first one had been. There was no singing, and the four men were working harder to have a good time. I could hear Bierholdt's loud, powerful voice as I swung the door open, and when I got to the table, he grabbed me and bellowed delightedly that he was glad to see his old pal. He threw me into my chair and held me there, insisting that I stay and get wound up with them. I stayed. I had a vague hope that Pete would show up soon. Judd reached over and patted me gently on the back. He was smiling again.

My glass lay shattered on the table, and Bierholdt had a deep gash on his hand. Bierholdt shoved his own glass into my hand, filled it with bourbon, and I took a drink. I asked him what he would use for a glass, and he told me not to worry about old Private First Class Bierholdt—he'd get by all right. With this, he cupped his cut hand, poured some bourbon into it, threw the liquid into his mouth, and went on with his rambling, disconnected story. He was explaining emphatically that goddamn it, he knew how to stay out of trouble in the Army because he knew his articles of war. When he knocked out the welterweight champion of California down on Main Street in Los Angeles, he didn't get in trouble because he knew his articles of war. Ahhh, that was a great week end. He spent six hundred and fifty dollars and knocked out the welterweight champion of California down on Main Street in Los Angeles—all on a thirty-six-hour pass. But no matter whatever happened to him, he was always up soldiering with the best of them the next morning at six. Bierholdt told of how his friend in the headquarters company had led a lynch mob once down in Alabama, and after that he told how his grandfather used to punish him by walloping him with a kitchen chair. He swung Pete's chair through the air, demonstrating how the old man used to do it, and then launched into a violent denunciation of Eloise, a girl he'd met in Tucson who was no good. He rolled on and on from subject to subject in this wildly erratic way, all the while drinking from his cupped bloody hand. I had

never heard anything like it before, and I just sat there drinking and listening. Bierholdt wasn't hitting me or trying to be funny now. He spoke jerkily, his voice getting thicker and thicker, and it was like listening to a big animal—a bear, say—which has somehow been taught to speak words. Finally Bierholdt leaned forward with his elbows on the table and his head bowed, and he began to cry because his boss at the garage back in Arizona had been killed in a midget auto race. When he began to sob the Catholic burial ceremony, Muir reached over with his bottle and poured several ounces of bourbon into Bierholdt's close-cropped hair. He rubbed it in, then he rapped Bierholdt hard on the head with his knuckles and told him to shut up for a while. Bierholdt seemed exhausted. He obeyed Muir without a word and sat quite still.

"When he starts to cry I can control him," Muir explained to me. "But not before. The fumes from his head'll keep him quiet now." Muir's eyes had their vicious sparkle again. He had been lecturing heatedly to Trent while Bierholdt's monologue had gone on, and now I turned to listen to him. As I did so, I noticed that my eyes were not focusing too well.

"Just walk up any street in town and look at the poor clowns," Muir was saying as he swung his arm in a wide sweep. "They hate us now, and who the hell can blame them. I wouldn't want to live in Paso Robles now myself. How'd you like to have ten thousand people vomiting on the main street, starting ten o'clock Sunday morning. But they'll get used to it. People can get used to anything . . . anything at all. They'll build a silly damned recreation hall, give us paper and envelopes, and darn our socks. And when we're gone eight or ten years from now, they'll actually be sorry to see us go. They'll still hate us, of course, but they'll be damned proud of *themselves* for helping us so much, and that's why they'll be sorry to see us go. And I'll tell you something else"

Muir was pounding on the table top and speaking only to Trent. Trent's mouth hung half-open, and his wrinkled eyes were

almost completely closed. He held onto the edge of the table and nodded at Muir, saying, "Sure, sure, sure." Bierholdt took two gigantic belts from his bottle, then wiped his mouth with his sleeve and sat looking glumly at the table. The tear stains were still on his cheeks. Judd was just about gone by now. He had his elbows on the table and was shoving his cheeks into big puffs under each eye with his closed fists. "Gotta go slow," he mumbled. "Save ourself for t'night."

"That's right," said Bierholdt, without raising his eyes. "Big tonight. Three in a row."

I went to the toilet, feeling the drinks quite clearly by now. Standing there, I looked at my watch and was surprised that it was almost four-thirty. Pete had been gone for more than four hours. I figured I'd better be on my way. It was over two hundred miles to San Francisco.

I returned to the table and picked up my topcoat from the back of the chair, then I shook Bierholdt and said I'd see them a little later. He was in a partial stupor, still looking down at the table. Without moving, he said, "Okay. T'night." Judd had fallen forward, and his head was now resting quietly on the table. Pete had been in exactly that same position this morning. Trent was nodding as Muir explained heatedly to him that the only reason the people of Paso Robles tolerated the United States Army was because they were making money on it.

I worked my way toward the door through the sweaty crowd. The unventilated room was saturated with the smells of liquor and wool and breath and bodies. The heavy door swung open easily, and I stood for a moment outside, breathing deeply. Then I walked down the sidewalk with an unsteady, determined gait. The soldiers were still walking up and down, even though the clearing sky had been only a temporary thing and now the California rain was coming down heavily. I got into the car. The windshield wipers came to life as the engine started, and I headed north out of town.

In San Miguel I stopped for a cup of coffee in order to clear

things up a little. As I sat at the counter, it occurred to me that Pete probably had returned to Roberts. In spite of what Wickersham had said about everybody clearing out and staying out, I decided to check.

I got another visitor's pass at the gate and drove without an error this time directly to Pete's barracks. Wickersham had returned. He was sitting in exactly the same position on his bed when I came in, and across the aisle Pete lay sprawled on his bunk.

"He was here when I come in," said Wickersham. "He's sick."

"I know," I said.

"He's real sick. He's got the stuff in the corner of his mouth. That's how I can always tell."

I looked at Pete closely in the grey light. He was much thinner than he had been in Los Angeles. His face was drawn tightly over his skull, so that he looked almost like a caricature of himself. He was breathing heavily and there were little flecks of white and brown and grey surrounding his mouth.

"Let's cover him up," I suggested.

"Okay, but he's lying on his own blanket, and you can't use mine. If he gets sick again, I don't want it on my blanket."

"All right, all right," I replied.

I lifted the lower part of Pete's body and slid the folded blanket out from under his legs. Then I flipped the blanket open and threw it over him. Wickersham did not help, but sat watching me from his bed. I turned and said good-bye to him and wished him good luck.

"Bye," he replied. "I'll give him his books as soon as he wakes up."

Dusk was settling down over the area as I drove out of Roberts and turned north for San Francisco.

That was the last time I saw Pete. He was killed in North Africa, but his thin pasty face came clearly back to my mind one day last summer when I drove through Paso Robles again. It was a magnificent warm July afternoon, and the town was pleasantly drowsy and empty—just as it had been back in 'thirty-nine. The

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Day and Night Club was a grocery store again. Camp Roberts and the yellow road signs were still standing, though, and I understand that they've dusted the camp off for the new draft. Perhaps by now Paso Robles is getting to be not the same as it used to be—all over again.

C. W. PARKER was born in Portland, Oregon, in 1917. From the University of Oregon he got an A.B. in 1942 and an M.A. (English) in 1948. He has had a number of different jobs: grocery clerk, gas station operator, truck driver, and logger. He quit the last of these to enter the Army, where he served as an aerial gunnery instructor. He is now teaching and studying for a Ph.D. in English at Stanford. He is married and has three children.

. THE FLIMSY WALLS*

C. W. PARKER

Sam reached for his heavy briefcase packed with mid-term examination bluebooks. As he lifted up the car door and pushed with his shoulder to make it shut, he heard the wails of children worn out from play and hungry for their supper. He felt again the small tightening of the muscles between his shoulder blades. Stepping around a turned-over tricycle and a smashed orange crate, he looked at the long rows of lighted windows, with a squat little porch for each three windows. The apartments had been fashioned with a cynical disregard for human nerves and modesty, Sam felt. But, holding the lowest professorial rank after the long struggle for his doctorate in history, he was grateful for the cheap rent.

He heard his own baby start to cry as he stooped to pick up the evening paper from his porch, built on the end of a wing. Straightening up, he glimpsed his wife's head and shoulders through the semiopaque window of the kitchen, and pushed back his hat with the side of his hand. All the windows were semiopaque. The wings on their block had been psychopathic wards before the university had taken over the sprawling hospital from the Army and divided, with government aid, each ward into living units. Martha said that if any patients ever returned to visit their old haunts, they'd say the place hadn't changed a damn.

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She loathed the apartments, Sam knew. Her loathing had appeared, like a dun little snake, soon after they moved in here a year ago. Now it was large, and coiled around them often in the small rooms. The Grayfields fed it. Sam tried to be reasonable. A childless, middle-aged couple, the Grayfields had moved in next door at the first of the term. Grayfield was a newly appointed professor in the School of Education. They ate early every evening; and, once their dishes were put away, scarcely a sound came from their unit. Apparently they read a lot. They did not go out, except on Sunday afternoons. When they did go, Martha always brightened; and then Sam, because of her relief. Sam didn't know why they kept living in the noisy wings, considering the salary Grayfield was probably making as a full professor. There were apartments in town, if you could meet the price. Martha said they liked to hear the young couples spilling over. When she said so, Sam hitched his shoulders. Undeniably, the Grayfields could listen if they wanted to. The interior walls of the wings were thin, actually nothing more than two sheets of wallboard nailed to studs and splashed with ice-green paint.

"It's me, Martha," Sam called, coming in the door, which brought him directly into the living room. No answer came through the closed kitchen door to his right. Picking his way around the baby's playpen, he laid the paper and his briefcase upon the sofa, bristly and royal-blue, that came with the apartment. Pulling aside a tan monk's cloth curtain, he stowed his hat above the towels in the tiny alcove inset between the unit's two small bedrooms. He heard indistinctly the hushed, almost sibilant talk of the Grayfields.

"I'm home, Martha," he said, opening the kitchen door. He felt foolish when she didn't answer. She only glanced at him, swiftly wiping the back of her hand across her cheek. Slender, dark-haired, she wore navy-blue slacks and a faded, red-plaid blouse, freshly ironed and neatly tucked into the waist of her slacks. Her hands moved with furious speed as she shredded lettuce.

"How's Eli?" he said, going over to the baby in the high chair. He started to kiss him, but the baby's nose was running. "Uh-oh, catching cold. He'll be crying tonight."

"Yes," she said.

He stepped to her side, intending to kiss her, but she immediately dropped her paring knife, swung away from him, and went to the stove. "What's the matter, Martha?" he said, and thought his voice had a tinge of whine in it.

Turning, she looked directly at him. "Mrs. Grayfield paid me a visit today," she said.

"You mean the ice is broken?"

"Broken, and it cuts. It wasn't pleasant."

"On her first call?" Sam said. "Why, Martha? What did she say?"

"Do you remember last night when I asked you to get me some aspirin and a glass of water? When I couldn't sleep?"

"Sure," he said cheerfully. He was glad that Martha was talking, and eager to be sympathetic.

"Well, that's what the visit was about."

"The visit?"

"Mrs. Grayfield came over here today to inform me that *her* husband got up to get *her* a glass of water and aspirin."

"What for? Couldn't she sleep, either?"

"Ah, don't, Sam," she said, clenching her fingers and shaking her head. "The walls, the flimsy, damn flimsy walls."

"Grayfield heard you, you mean, and thought it was his wife." His voice broke a little from the laughter rising in him; but, looking at her tears, he felt the laughter quickly die.

"It's not funny, Sam," she said, her voice quivering.

"No, I guess not," he said. "What did she make of it?"

"She said, 'Mr. Grayfield hoped we would try to be more quiet.' At least, in our bedroom." Martha winced as she spoke.

"The bitch," Sam said half-aloud.

"I can't take this any longer, Sam," Martha said. She was openly crying now. The baby spontaneously joined her. "We

can't stay here. I won't live next to that creature and that rotten old man. She sits over there alone all day. Not a sound comes from that place. She sits. She waits. Every word I say or you say, she hears, she knows. She listens, Sam, for us, and I feel naked."

"Martha, get a hold of yourself," he said gently and pleadingly, going to her, lifting her head, and holding her body against his. "It's not that bad."

She stiffened instantly. "It is, Sam, it is!" She shoved him away. Then she went over and pulled the baby from the high chair. "I won't stay here, Sam. Not longer than the end of this month." She smothered Eli against her breast, and patted the back of his head.

Sam stood still. Then he said slowly and stubbornly, "We can't afford to leave here, and you know it. We've talked about it enough. Not until we pay back Uncle Leo. We got the degree. Now, he gets his money. You know we don't have the money to leave here. Not for another year, at the least."

"A year?" she said fiercely, her voice climbing. "Another year in this megaphone." She came toward him. Eli, shoved back into the high chair, started to cry again.

"Get a hold of yourself, Martha," he said, and realized that he had taken a step backward.

"Another year?" she said again, her voice rising higher. "If you think I'm going to dance in that old witch's pot another year—"

"Martha—" he said, his voice strained and trembling.

"—you've got guts for brains!"

"Shut up!" he bellowed. Instantly he was sorry, but he said roughly, "Take care of Eli, and get dinner on the table." Then he left the kitchen. The muscles across the back of his shoulders ached dully.

They ate dinner in a kind of throbbing silence. Neither of them looked at the other, even when he helped her carry the dirty dishes into the kitchen. After folding the tablecloth, Sam carried

one of the two living-room lamps over to the table, and, taking the bluebooks from his briefcase, stacked them upon it. Then he sat down and began to alphabetize the bluebooks. Before washing the dishes, Martha bathed Eli in the kitchen sink. Carrying the baby to his bedroom, she did not stop, as she usually did, so that he might kiss Eli good night. Twice, while washing the dishes, she had to go to the baby's room and soothe him. The second time, however, she left the kitchen door open when she came back. When the dishes were dried, she came into the living room, sat down on the sofa, and opened up the evening paper. He then forgot her, losing himself in the job of grading the examinations.

"Sam," she said, when he was halfway through Endicott's bluebook. "They need stenographers in town. Kannersin's needs one."

"I suppose," he said, looking up momentarily.

"Mel said I could come back there to work anytime, when I quit. You remember?"

"I remember." He reached for his cigarettes.

"Sam, it's a hundred and fifty dollars a month at least."

"So?" He laid his red pencil down and lit the cigarette.

"I want that job," she said hurriedly. "I can go to work, and then we can move, Sam. We can get out of here."

"We decided you were never going back to work after I got my Ph.D.," he said. "Do you remember that?"

"I remember," she said. "But it's different now."

"Sure," he said. "We've got Eli."

"With that job, Sam, I could pay somebody to take care of him."

"A ten-month-old baby? No, Martha."

"Some of these girls around here would be glad to do it," she said. "They need money. They have children of their own. They're good mothers."

"You wouldn't be, Martha," he said gently. "And you forget. According to your plan, we wouldn't be living here anymore."

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"I'd get up early in the morning and drive him out here," she said. "Oh, Sam, I would."

"And drive him home late after work," he said. "Eight hours a day at Kannersin's and an hour a day running the baby back and forth. Nine hours a day. What happens to my home?"

"What's happening to it now?" she said quickly. "It's bad one way or the other, Sam. But it's worse this way. Can't you see that? We've got to get away from that old woman. It's not fair. It's wrong. We have no privacy, Sam. None. We have no secrets from her. There's nothing we say or do she can't know or doesn't know. She's evil. She's prurient—"

"Don't start it all over again, Martha," he said. His voice was anxious.

"Wait a minute!" she said swiftly. Her voice had dropped to an urgent whisper. "Listen. They're doing it again." She leaned forward and cocked her head a little to one side, away from him.

There was complete silence in the room. "Don't be silly," he said. "Doing what again?"

Her head was still cocked to the side. She said, as if to herself, "She takes a water glass and puts it against the wall. Then she puts her ear against the glass so she can hear better."

"Martha, don't be ridiculous," he said.

She turned her face toward him, and said simply, "I heard her break a glass one night, Sam. After you had gone to sleep."

He started. Then he sat back. Finally he said, "Anybody can drop a glass. Maybe she was taking medicine or something. You don't know."

"O.K., Sam," she said, getting up, and letting the paper fall unfolded to the sofa.

"Martha, I'm only trying to carry out plans we made long ago," he said. "We have the Ph.D., and we have Eli. Now we have to go along with the obligations they brought us."

"Maybe she wanted an aspirin, eh, Sam?" she said, looking directly at him.

"Maybe she didn't," he said. "Maybe she was listening. But you were, too. Remember that. Either you or her, it doesn't make much difference. It really doesn't. People listen. It's instinctive."

"Sure, Sam," she said, and turning, she walked away from him.

"Wait a minute, Martha," he said. "Don't act that way about it. This deal is no good. I know that. I really do. As soon as we can afford it, we'll leave. In the meantime, we keep our distance, and they keep theirs."

"Like this morning, you mean?" She had stopped in the doorway of their bedroom.

He elaborately tamped out his cigarette before answering, even though the stub he held was so short that it burned his fingers. "They wanted to register a complaint, I guess," he said, trying to pick his words, and aware that he sounded makeshift. "People do. And they—she—came to you and made it. That's their right. She did it the only way she could, decently. She came and knocked on the door and told you."

"You bet, Sam," she said, and went into the bedroom.

It was impossible for him simply to sit there. He got up and followed her. "Martha, you stay in bed tonight," he said haltingly. "You stay in bed and get a good sleep. If the baby fusses, I'll get up and take care of him."

She merely glanced at him from the corner of her eyes, as she turned back the bedspread. "Sure, Sam," she said.

He plunged back into the examinations, and worked intently until he was very tired. His watch read twelve-thirty when he stacked the graded papers in one neat pile, and the ungraded beside them. No sound came from Eli. He undressed quickly after checking the baby to see if he were well covered. Before turning out the light and climbing over to the far side of their bed, he saw that Martha slept on her back with one arm thrown above her head. The movement of her arm had pulled her breast partly out of her nightgown. Sam shook his head tiredly. She usually slept modestly on her side. He kissed the upthrown arm very gently

before settling down next to the wall. Tomorrow, maybe, she would be all right. But for how long, he wondered, even as he fell asleep.

He awoke with a jerk of his whole body. The baby was crying in his bedroom. Somebody, he thought, had called out his name. He looked at Martha. Her arm was still flung above her head. He looked out the window. It was dark outside. Then he heard his name called again—in a sharp, feminine whisper. “Mr. Shank,” it said insistently, “Sam Shank, your child’s awake.” He looked at the wall, and, as quickly, looked away. He felt his heart pounding rapidly. Gingerly, he got out of bed, and stood a moment, hesitating to turn on the light. Then he went in the darkness to the crying baby.

He came back into the living room, holding the baby in one arm, and, fumbling for the switch, turned on the lamp beside the table. His hand was shaking as he reached for the newspaper on the sofa. Knocking the stacks of bluebooks off onto the floor with a sweep of his arm, he spread the paper out on the table. One by one, he turned the pages, searching for Kannersin’s ad.

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THE LADY WALKS*

JEAN POWELL

It was early afternoon. The last hovering wisps of brown fog had scattered and dissolved, and as the two heavy glass doors of the clinic swung out and back they glittered, riddled with sunlight. Ravita gazed at them with a feeling which was almost exultation. She would pass through those doors once more and, after today, Time with the empty eyes would no longer stand still. Already he had begun to move swiftly past her. The eyes in the hollow sockets were fixed on her; the voice said, "A little while, now; a little while." And, because it was Ravita's nature to be proud and self-confident, she did not feel afraid or surprised, but only relieved, loosened, her own eyes already turned to the wind-filled space behind his head.

Walter, tall, fair-haired, with bluff features, got out of the car and stood beside her. "What are you staring at?" he asked. No you don't, thought Ravita. You don't guess my secret yet. Presently she would have to tell him, but not yet. Until confirmation came today from the doctor, she would guard her knowledge, like an encased jewel, for her own solitary glory.

"I'm not staring at anything," she said. "I'm only looking at the building."

"Davis Tumor Clinic," Walter said ironically, reading. "A nice building, too." It was, of course. Chiefly it was decorous. It was low and modernistic in design, sheathed in golden-gray

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stones, and skillfully blurred with variegated vines, small palms, and scarlet-starred poinsettias.

"Yes, very nice," she said.

Walter turned suddenly, his moccasins making a scrubbing sound on the black asphalt of the parking lot. "Why are you so stubborn?" he asked. "Why is it you haven't ever let me go in there with you?"

Because I am alone, she answered without moving her lips. I have always been and now have most need to be and I am proud of that very need, do you understand? "It would be stupid," she said aloud, not looking at him. "It would only take your time. If you came in with me now, you'd miss your class."

"The students would rejoice," Walter said, undeflected. "I've never even seen your doctor."

"Why should you? I'm the patient, after all."

"It seems other people don't agree with you. I notice most of them come here in twos and threes."

"Well, of course you're right," said Ravita. She was annoyed, partly because he was forcing her to protect him, but chiefly because he did not understand her will to be alone and was by his persistence reducing them to an ordinary marital level. "Look, Walter. Day after day I've watched husbands bring their wives to this fantastic place, and wives bring their husbands too, for that matter. I've seen brothers and sisters tagging after other grown siblings, and aging children escorting their parents, and friends coming all the way from Bakersfield or Diego—for what? To sit around and make everybody nervous, including themselves. Well, it's stupid."

She paused, and then added obliquely, "I had not guessed, until this winter, how adolescent Americans are."

Walter nodded. A sharp, curious expression came into his face. "Who said that in Utopia people will still go to cafés, and the band will still play in the square, but there will be no families?" he asked.

"Silone."

"Yes." Walter, the schoolteacher, commended her memory with a glance. "He is an Italian," he reminded her.

"All right. Human beings, then, are adolescent."

Walter's face became expressionless. "I give up," he said pleasantly. "Good-bye, Suffragette. I'll see you at the tea at four." He turned and walked back toward the car, his briefcase shoulder, the left, drooping slightly.

Ravita smiled. Her annoyance vanished and she felt affection for Walter because he had let her win their argument. Ravita's dominance over her husband was a delicate, thin-stalked thing, and had grown because his original feeling for her had been larger than hers for him. Therefore she valued it highly and was inclined to be gentler with him than she might otherwise have been. Too much love, she well knew, lowered the bars around the spirit and left every wild thing free to enter and prey upon it and subdue it.

Of her own spirit Ravita had always been a jealous guardian, and never so much as in these past months, when for the second time in her life it had been challenged and attacked. Each time, she remarked to herself now in surprise, as she began to cross the parking lot toward the clinic with long slow steps, it had been attacked through the flesh; and this time, as before, her surrender had been sudden and distasteful and she had been compelled to double her guard elsewhere. Of her flesh, too, she had always been proud; that was what made it difficult.

The first onslaught had been through love, and thinking of it Ravita stopped by the edge of the walk and touched a flaming poinsettia. How harsh the blossom was, she mused; its petals were not the petals of flowers but were leaflike and strong; there was no scent, only that shrieking color.

She had been an only child, reared with adoration, and conscious of her beauty from an early age. For more than four years once, with all her pride, she had been reduced to the common flesh, as abjectly and despairingly, confidently and stupidly loving as a chargirl. Looking back, it seemed like madness. She had

wanted marriage, which the man had refused to give; had tried like any craven trollop to trick him by having a child. When that failed, she had seen a doctor and learned that the physical fault was hers. Dismayed, she told the man, who became scrupulous with disapproval; he reversed his theories, clambered into a fine rejection, and left her. Ravita was twenty-five. She suffered horribly and denounced humanity. She resolved that never again would she strip herself naked for either wretchedness or joy; she concentrated upon the restoration and reassertion of her earlier proud spirit. She began deliberately to make a life of the in-between, of the complacent middle range, reserving the high and low registers for memory and for art. If she had believed in an afterlife, she would have saved them for that, too.

Gradually she achieved a complete averment of her spirit's entity. Virginal, that reaffirmation had been, with the fine-cut arrogance of her youth; solitary, not fierce, but stony to the destroying touch. She succeeded also in her attempt to look back upon that unhappy period as a time of illness, if not of a delicate insanity, and began to deprecate the pangs it had caused her and to stress her capacities as a self-healer.

When she met Walter Anderson, Ravita was thus in one sense beyond the need of another human being. Nevertheless she was acutely aware of social stringencies. She was thirty. She wanted the fact and aura of marriage, and Walter was so dissimilar to her lover that it was easy to trust him. During the eight years she had been married, Time had placidly stood still, and not until this winter had she been reduced again to the terms of her own flesh.

She reached the clinic and went inside, the shining doors falling shut behind her. She saw that, although it was not two o'clock, the reception room was cluttered with patients. The room was extremely large and beautiful, touched caressingly by hidden light, furnished with chairs and couches of bright cheerful rose and green and blue. A huge mirror at one end reflected massed greenery at the other: stone pools, ferns, cacti, tiny palms.

Often the patients waited here for two or three hours, for there were many of them, and the four specialists were rushed. They sat with nervous pinching fingers and stiffened faces, the men who spoke through an aperture in the throat, the women whose eyes slid dark and quick with worry. The nurses came out and called them back one by one and then the long half-hours converged acutely, drawn to meet this moment: their modesty laid bare, their fear unhooded. The doctors were truth wrapped close in gentleness, but somewhere behind the doctors—where exactly, in the next examining room, behind the X-ray machine, in the pathology lab?—truth, keeping its more ancient guise, shone like a noncorruptible sword, and smote with a clear loud ring.

But Ravita, having already heard that sound, was here only for confirmation. She did not, she discovered, want to sit today on one of these raucous luxury couches. At the front desk she gave her name to a girl with red braids marching across the top of her round head and a constant personal-yet-generalized smile; like the doctors', that smile, a trick of environment, no doubt. She went toward the back of the building, past the examining rooms and dressing booths, until she reached the X-ray department, with its straight, severe chairs along the walls and the swinging dark doors cut by peering squares of glass. She seated herself erectly on one of the straight chairs.

Across the hall and staring at Ravita with lonely eyes was, once more, the child with the distended belly. She was about seven and slight, with long straggly hair. Her pointed face was thinner than ever today and the tumor pushing against her woolen jumper gave her the look of a five-month pregnancy. Her staring dark eyes were lusterless; she rested her head tiredly against her mother's shoulder.

The girl's mother, a chattering, loosely pretty brunette, met Ravita's gaze with recognition. She would begin to talk, Ravita knew, and wished to prevent it, but could not. "She has to be tapped again," the mother said, sighing.

She should not speak in front of the child, thought Ravita. She replied stiffly, "How unfortunate."

"And how she hates it!" the mother went on. "I had to drag her out of the house. To look at her so quiet now, you'd never think how she was screaming a half-hour ago." Almost proudly she glanced down at the girl, whose face held no expression at all.

"Well, it's no fun, is it, Pat?" asked a woman with a pinched gray face, who was sitting near by in a wheel chair.

The child shook her head slightly in reply.

"It's less than two weeks since she was tapped the last time," continued the mother, tossing her hair to indicate amazement. "How that stuff collects so fast beats me. Three hundred c.c.'s they took out of her, can you imagine?"

"It feels better after it's out, doesn't it, Pat?" the woman in the wheel chair said sympathetically.

The child's eyes rolled toward her in terror, but she said nothing.

"Sometimes we have to have a lot of things done to us before we can get better," the woman explained in a gentle lying voice. "Look at my leg, now," and she held it out, great and swollen. "I can't even walk, Pat; think how that would be!"

"My soul," the child's mother said, "that leg certainly is something. Does it give you a lot of pain?"

"Some," replied the woman, "but most of it is here." She touched her abdomen. "What the connection is I haven't figured out."

"It certainly is something," the mother said again.

Ravita turned her head away from them. She could not be drawn now into this taking and giving of sympathy. Let the child die, she thought dispassionately, taking with her, her early and last full womb. There are enough still upon this earth; and not they even, not the healthy and well, can touch me now one-half as deep and sure as the machine beyond the door. Yet the machine, too, had failed. I have not been touched, she thought.

After a few minutes, two men came in from the back entrance. One was middle-aged, and had grown a goatee to hide his scarred and twisted chin. The second was the little Chinese whom Ravita had seen the morning he first came to the clinic. It had been difficult to tell by the face that day if he were man or woman. His scanty hair had fallen long; the right cheek and eye were wrinkled and puckered into the nothingness of extreme old age; the left cheek was greedily gnawed by the living cancer.

The girl behind the front desk, the one with the red braids, had come back to ask the old man some questions. Ravita, gripped with nausea and disgust twelve feet away, had observed how the girl's blue eyes had not once slipped down to the terrible cheek but had clung smiling to the old man's own eyes, as if she were determinedly reminding herself that there only was the part of him that mattered, the part which said that he, too, had a soul. The doctor, when he came, had no such scruples; he had looked eagerly at everything, even as he beckoned the old man into the examining room; and the nurse, who after the examination had been called in to do the dressing—Ravita did not know how she felt, but she had walked fast.

Today the old man was neatly bandaged; his puckered slanted eyes darted brightly from side to side as he made his way up to the front.

What was this, thought Ravita, a procession of the lame, the halt, and the blind? The unfit, whom we would forget, whom deep in our hearts we still carry to the bony mountaintops and leave there to die? And she, Ravita, would turn away, leaving them, but for this chain which dragged now bitterly deriding against her proud will: was she not, too, in that sad parade, a makeshift thing like the others, since she sat here shorn of her right breast, a sponge rubber facsimile in its place? Radical mastectomy, the doctors called it, hiding under words the fact: one part of her womanness stripped away, her perfection lost.

"But, darling, if it's to save your life, it's such a little thing," Walter had said, bungling with his devotion. "Thousands of

women have it done. It makes no difference. Surely you don't think it makes a difference to me?"

She had turned away despairing. Thousands of women—but she was not one of thousands. She was herself, Ravita, whose beauty had been authentic and irrefutable since childhood. As to the question of his loving her, she had not even thought to be concerned about that, they were not children discovering one another in a haymow; she understood love well enough to know that a defect in her would but increase Walter's tenderness.

No, it was ignominy that Ravita was fighting. It was that she had felt, for the first time, last September. Pain in her perfect breast; then, curiously, a swelling in the armpit. The doctor's hands had caressed her; his godlike, impersonal touch reminded her of her earliest ventures into petting twenty-odd years ago, when only a naïve, genuine desire to learn had prompted the touch and the allowing of the touch. So she had thought, sitting erect and amused in the small examining room that first day, the white clinic gown pushed back from her bare shoulders. She had been so amused that she smiled at the doctor, her charming, gay, social smile; the doctor's eyes lifted and met hers; they looked at her with profound gentleness; she was dimly shocked. This was something she had not known before.

Under the doctor's eyes, she had felt disgraced and reduced and she was filled with anger; the anger passed as she realized that here, for the second time in her life, was a challenge. It was in this manner that Ravita had gone on to meet the blood tests, the X-ray films, the biopsy, the surgery, the dressings, the X-ray treatments, and, two days ago, again the X-ray films; the whole endless ritual and she the least of the acolytes, and yet at the same time she higher than any of it, above and apart from it and never in any degree converted or persuaded. Nor would she be today, though it was for her final confirmation that she had come, and she waited only for the doctor to move his hand in the shaping of a scrofulous cross, murmuring, "You, too, my daughter."

The child Pat and the woman in the wheel chair had been taken

some time ago. Now a nurse Ravita had not seen today came swiftly down the hall, her brown curls jumping under the starched cap. She began to smile and talk when she was still several feet away.

"Hello, Mrs. Anderson," she said. "Want to get ready for your examination?"

"Thank you, yes," Ravita said quietly, waiting.

"After you're ready, you can go into room six." The nurse's light-colored smile began to slide on to the next patient.

"I know where it is," Ravita said. She rose quickly and went back into one of the little dressing cubicles. She took off her coat and her shirred peach-toned blouse and hung them on a hanger; she stripped to her waist and put on one of the white cotton gowns which lay folded on a shelf. The gown was knee length and it fastened by strings down the front. Before she left, she looked at herself in the mirror. Even in this hideous gown, she thought coolly, she was the most beautiful in the clinic. She would keep her beauty, moreover, until the end. The creamy skin and straight body might alter, as indeed the body already had; but the clear features, the dark eyes and hair, the glance of self-possession, would remain. She picked up her purse and walked rapidly and proudly down the hall to examining room six and went in.

There were two white metal chairs in the examining room; Ravita seated herself on one of them. After a moment the doctor came in and closed the door. Today it was not the clinic founder but the head of the radiology department, which was to be expected, since he dictated the film reports. He was tall, with the thin unexpected neck of an adolescent and mild greenish-colored eyes; and, perhaps because he was younger than the other three specialists, his manner was less suave and more diffident than theirs.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Anderson," he said quite formally. Then for a few minutes he said nothing more. He drew the second metal chair over to Ravita, lifted her gown aside and examined her, his eyes and fingers moving swiftly and perceptively. When

he had finished, he pushed his chair back. "Well, your wound certainly healed well," he said, as if the healing had been a special assignment.

Ravita ignored the remark. She hoped that she would not have to pull words out of him; she did not want to waste time. "What did the chest X-rays show?" she asked directly.

The doctor hesitated, fumbling with her chart, a bulky manila folder with her name on a green paper tab along the edge. He turned to the progress notes and read the last paragraph, as if he himself had not dictated it. "Well," he said, "I'd rather like to speak to your husband about them."

So that was it, Ravita thought in anger. They used the relatives as dummy shields to receive the bullets.

"Whatever you have to say to him, you can tell me," she said coldly.

"Yes, of course," the doctor said, and cleared his throat. Again his eyes moved to the last page of typing in her chart. "There seem to be one or two little indications of something here, Mrs. Anderson, and we are going to start you on a new series of treatments right away. Tomorrow morning, perhaps, if that is convenient with you."

Ravita leaned forward. "What do you mean, 'one or two little indications'?" she demanded, forcing his eyes to meet hers. "The cancer has gone to my lungs, isn't that what you mean?"

He blinked, and put her folder down on the white sheet of the examining table. "As far as we can tell, yes," he said hesitantly. "But there is no cause for any alarm. As I said, we will start treatment tomorrow."

"Why don't you tell me it is hopeless?" Ravita asked. Her voice was still cold. "I know about the treatments and the new drugs, Dr. Harris; they may retard but they do not cure. There is no cure, is there?"

"If the disease is caught in time and the primary source completely taken care of," he began, using the words of his bible rhetoric.

"In my case," she cut in. "In *my* case."

He turned his eyes once more upon her folder. "At present, no cure, no."

"There!" said Ravita, and a thrill went through her.

But he had been too well taught how to gloss; he could not stop. "No reason for despair," he said quickly. "The treatments and drugs you mentioned are often very efficacious indeed, and new and better ones may be perfected any day. If you come regularly"

The wretched creature with his mumbling words. "My God," Ravita said contemptuously, "do you think I am afraid to die?"

"No, of course not," he said. He fell silent. He made a small pleat in the cuff of his white coat.

"Please read me the film report in the chart," said Ravita.

Nervously the doctor's long fingers picked up the folder; he glanced once more over the last page. "This is irregular," he said, "and I doubt if you will understand the terms."

"So it won't matter if it is irregular. Read it to me, please." She spoke commandingly. It was for this, after all, that she had come. She leaned forward tensely, not to miss a word.

"'January 18, 1949. Both leaves of the diaphragm clear,' " he began. "'Numerous diffuse, hazy infiltrations in both lung fields. Largest area measures about two centimeters in diameter. There is possible mediastinal involvement.' " He stopped, cleared his throat, and his greenish eyes looked almost timidly at Ravita. Her glance did not waver and he returned to the page. "'Impression: extensive bilateral pulmonary metastases from carcinoma of the right breast.' "

A succession of thrills ran through Ravita. There was her accolade; there was nothing more to wait for. She had memorized the last sentence as he read and she repeated it slowly to herself and the sound of "carcinoma" and of some of the other words was beautiful. If the devil wrote poetry, she thought, he would use such words.

She rose, pulling the white gown together over her breast. "A couple of months?" she asked.

He looked at her and then looked away. "Perhaps more."

"Thank you," said Ravita. She held her head high as she left the room. When she reached the cubicle she dressed with care, for she had waited less than an hour and a half today for the doctor and thus had ample time to get to the tea. Now, she thought, half in anger, she could tell Walter; there was no longer any reason to keep it from him.

Ravita walked along the street searching for the right house number. 102, 104, she read. The tea this afternoon was one in an endless series, given by a committee of students and amenable faculty wives. One or two professors were invited each week; staff members and friends of the college volunteered their homes. All the students were free to attend, but the teas were an old story and frequently there were no more than six or eight present.

This was Walter's week, and as usual he wanted Ravita there with him. She did not mind teas; she always rather liked to attend college functions and be pointed out for her beauty. *So young, so fair . . .* But thirty-eight was not young. She had got over being young a long time ago. For more than ten years she had had nothing to do with age at all, she had been herself, Ravita, standing still with Time. *Did you know that Mrs. Walter Anderson . . .* She would not have it. No clucking tongues or pitying eyes. Not for her. 112. Here was the house. She walked up the path and pushed the bell.

The door opened and a young man stood there: one of Walter's students, no doubt. Why did young men so love to open the doors of other people's houses? The young man was tall, with curly hair and reddish skin and a smiling face.

"Come in, come in!" said the young man exuberantly. "I'm John Emery!" And he looked at her with the smiling face.

Yes, I'm sure you are, Ravita thought. But, recognizing his

appreciative glance, she allowed the obedient social expression to order her features. "How do you do, John?" she said. "I'm Mrs. Anderson."

"Oh, Mrs. Anderson!" he cried, letting her see that in his opinion Mr. Anderson had chosen well. "Come in, come in! The party is gathering."

Ravita walked past him into the hall. There was a narrow table with a silver dish on it and a mirror above the table. A Japanese girl in a white apron slid up to her and said, "I'll take your coat." The coat fell from Ravita's shoulders; she thanked the girl. Another student, or a full-time maid? Probably a student, for the girl was not obsequious.

"The food is in here," said John Emery, hovering. He pointed to the dining room on the left. Five or six people, mostly young, stood round the table. Two graying faculty wives, priestesses of coffee and tea, sat at either end. The right hands of the young people reached down to the white tablecloth and back: the hands picked up small frill-edged paper napkins, spoons, minuscule round and square sandwiches with no tops, cupcakes with green frosting, salted nuts. The old familiar, the rarely considered, scene; and Ravita felt today as if she had never observed it before.

"Thank you," she said to John Emery. "I don't care for anything." Did that sound discourteous? "I'll wait for Mr. Anderson," she added.

She left John Emery and went down two steps into the living room. Again, as when she had looked at the dining room, she felt as if her vision were sharpened, and she gazed with the greatest clarity and a certain strangeness at a room which, though large, and, she supposed, gracious, was no more so than a hundred other rooms she had entered. There were brocaded love seats, cream-colored chairs and couches, bookcases, a grand piano, a fireplace with a fire burning in it brightly, Dresden figurines on the mantel.

In the room were half a dozen people, all young; their youth gave the room a hectic yellow glow. There was no stability in them; they were all, figuratively, Ravita felt, on the edge of their

chairs. They laughed, talked, and balanced their teacups on their knees. Ravita had never minded young people; they were too amorphous to envy; but today she did not want them to cluster around her and be polite. She nodded stiffly to the group, fending their approach before it was made. Plateless and cupless, she sat down on one of the love seats by the fire and folded her hands in her lap. After a moment the talk of the students, which had fallen to a simmer at her entrance—shouldn't they greet her, who was she, now?—started to bubble again and had soon climbed to its steady, eager, senseless roll.

"No, I always meant to take him, but here I am a first-semester senior with fifteen units of required staring me in the face. Oh tragic fate!"

"I've heard he's getting reactionary, is that true?"

"Tim Duggan is going to run for senior class president next fall."

"Cripes, he'll get it, too."

"He won't. Who'd vote for him?"

"All the women." Laughter.

"He's going to let her direct the symphony. Isn't that amazing?"

Ravita's hands, loosely folded in her lap, did not move. The young and healthy, putting food into themselves, could send it out in gesture and remark. But the food she ate no longer went straight to the benevolent tissue; the evil was drawing it now, slipping it into her lungs, transforming it into useless and breath-cutting fluid. The more she swallowed the thinner would she become, the shorter would grow her breath.

It was interesting to think of this. She looked down at her postured hands, still, for a time to come, soft and shapely; soon gaunt and clawlike. No longer would eighty-five-cent nail polish matter, or the pink and scented lotion smoothed each day upon the lying skin. For the cell, which we think so obedient, is lawless and feckless, and, disciplined for generations, may suddenly run amuck. For the flesh is truant, the pathologist squints through the

lens and, like a judge determining moral intent rather than deed accomplished, pronounces malignant or benign.

She glanced about restlessly and, startled, she saw on the out-thrust of the grand piano a bronze head of Nefertite. Her glance stopped there. How sensitive and clear the features were. Ravita was always moved by the Egyptian's lonely gravity, her aspect of serene, self-acknowledged beauty. Years ago, in a class of ancient history, she had discovered and become akin to Nefertite. It was strange to find her in this room, an emblem surely of second-rate culture; yet she could never look at her too much. And gazing at that golden, eternally ageless profile, she felt as though she were piercing through the skin to the flesh beneath. Flesh, Neferite, made of cells? Dichotomized also by flesh and spirit? You, too, lonely and proud one? Ravita was touched by an impersonal sadness. She turned her head to shake it off; and returned, against her desire, to the room and the chattering students.

Two girls sat near her on low hassocks, their bright plaid skirts flowing onto the floor around them. Ravita had been distantly conscious of their babbling voices. Now a boy in a dark suit came up to one of the girls and looked piercingly down at her. He had a bullet-shaped head covered with kinky black hair, long thick brows which nearly met, and glowing, round brown eyes.

"I am sorry you did not think it necessary to come last night," he said. He spoke with a German accent and an intense formal air. "We discussed the causes of fascism, as you may know."

The girl had a lively manner and was wearing glasses with red rims. "Well, I'm sorry, too, Rudolph. I'll bet it was a good meeting," she said. "But I just couldn't make it."

"So I observed. I said to myself that of course it is foolish to expect a busy and popular young lady like Betty to keep all her engagements." His posture was bad, Ravita saw. His bulletlike head jutted out from hunched shoulders.

"Oh, honestly, Rudolph!" the girl exclaimed. "I only said I'd come if I could, and then I found I could go somewhere else

easier because somebody else had a car." She looked up and laughed merrily, obviously hoping that the boy would laugh, too. Instead, he grew rigid.

"Now I see how you choose your friends," he said rapidly and intensely. "It is very nice to know that you choose them by whether they have cars. Thank you for explaining." He whirled around and returned to the center of the room.

Betty stared after him, poking at the bridge of her red glasses. "It's so funny," she said to the girl beside her. "I started going with Rudolph because he seemed so different and I wanted to prove he was just like anyone else. His father was killed in a gas chamber and Rudolph and his mother escaped to Holland. Well, I sure have proved it. He gets jealous like any fellow and makes me just as mad as any of them do."

The other girl laughed. "He's got a lot of brains, though," she said.

"I know it," Betty said, "but he still makes me mad."

What extreme banality, thought Ravita; and she could no longer concentrate on the students. At the same time, she was having difficulty in directing her own thoughts and could not help wondering if there were not something off-center about them. Then of course the question, what was center? What precisely should she be thinking about right now? The death of people she had known, of friends and relatives, did not tell her. For the most part they had died suddenly, in accident or war, or privately, beyond her knowledge. On the few occasions when she had been present, they had seemed to ignore the entire situation until the last moment and had then either passed into a coma or become maudlin. Her father, she remembered, had insisted that she pick out a good husband, and in his right mind he would not have given marriage that much importance.

No, the only people whose deaths had touched her profoundly were those whose final thoughts she had known; and these were not people at all, properly speaking, but characters in literature. Only in art, perhaps, was it easy to die well. But even they, whose

reputed thoughts she could recapture, were valueless to her now; for if a dramatic purpose had not been served by their taking off, most of them had at least regretted death and wished to live longer. As for herself, she continued to feel that although it was strange that she was going to die, she was not sorry; that just as she could continue to live tranquilly for fifty years, she could also live not at all. It is only the young who think they will live forever. With each year the acceptance of death increases, and she was thirty-eight.

At the same time, she wished to die well. That was not, she believed, a prevalent desire. Since she had been going to the clinic, she had seen many people, each absorbed in his own individual process of dying, and she had observed that they died as commonly as they lived. To do either with distinction was beyond their capacity. It was not beyond hers. She would hold to this present and make it proud. She would not, she promised herself (sitting here in the midst of youth with the fire dancing and Nefertite sure beyond any belief in the swelling outthrust of the grand piano), in her last extremity, turn usual, mouthing the large, shiftless, secondhand terms which despair makes ready in the lips of the custom-taught, the cloudy mediocre. When everything else had gone she would yet hold fast to discrimination and thus, as she had ever bridged it, to distinction.

Yet there were other problems too. There was Walter, who had given her always only kindness. What can you do with people like that, she thought with exasperation, when in the end you must hurt them? Leave them groveling, to stand erect again holding that kindness—diminished, spilled, a little of it?—for someone else to warm his hands in. But could you ever be sure of that? Not ever, she answered herself. That was the bitter, untried olive of the questioner.

“What you want, Ravita.”

“Oh, don’t be silly. What *you* want.”

“But that’s it.”

“You talk such bosh; be an individual.”

Looking at her, smiling, no fear in his face. "I can leave that to you." And then she, with all her egotism, mysteriously strengthened and warmed and, thus confident, often she changed what she wanted to what she thought he did, and he saw through it all . . . and that was their marriage.

She started. He was coming. She heard his voice in the hall and would not turn to see. Then it was lower and she knew that he had gone into the dining room, wishing to gratify anyone who might possibly have made the tea, frosted the cakes, or poured nuts from a white paper bag into the crystal dish. But he would not stay long. She felt herself drawing him on a thin skein and half-turned her head to break it off, to let him stay as long as he wished.

As she turned she saw him coming across the hall and down the two wide polished steps, balancing the tea things in one hand, nearly striking the door molding with his tall blond head. He looked toward her, his face expressionless as he had long ago taught it to be. He was not good-looking, she thought. Other people sometimes said he was but she had never seen it. At first he had been only different from the other one and then he had become Walter and then it had not particularly mattered, as nothing particularly mattered after the big things were over.

After that first expressionless, privately questioning glance, Walter smiled quickly at her. Then he went on to the students, made the complete round with greetings and remarks, even managing, somehow, to shake hands and to gesture with his free right hand while balancing the plate and cup in his left. He was really remarkably able in many ways, Ravita thought, watching him and smiling; and then suddenly, oddly, even as she smiled, she felt a slight, tentative tug at her heart. Again she wanted him not to hurry; to take his time.

But when the round of badinage and inquiry was over, Walter came to the love seat and sat beside her. He did not speak at once. Instead, intensely large and integrated, he picked up a sandwich and took it in a bite; he flung a handful of nuts into his mouth; he

gulped tea. He put the plate down and chewed vigorously. Ravita sat with her head uptilted, watching his face: the fair and well-known skin, the straight rough brows, the bluff features. She felt again that odd, tentative pull, and she could not bear it that he should be hurt. Yet, believing that his defenses would be stronger here than at home, she reached out and took his hand.

His fingers closed around hers, he looked at her quickly. "How was it?" he asked her.

"The same," Ravita said, watching the fire.

"I'm going to have a talk with him," Walter said in a hardened voice. "This nonsense has gone far enough."

"There's no need for that," Ravita said.

He was staring at her. "What do you mean?"

"I mean that I know." How the fire danced, she thought! The flames had blue hearts. She had not noticed them before.

"You know what?" demanded Walter, his voice coming rough.

"What there is to know."

"What's that?"

"I have a few months."

Walter said nothing and Ravita did not look at him. Although his fingers still clasped hers, there was no movement or pressure in them, they were like dead fingers. Be strong, she said to him in her mind. Be strong. Don't be hurt. And she thought that this had been the best place to tell it, here in locale, with the fire burning, tea being served, his students laughing and chattering, and the expanding, prismatic yellow of today touching book and figurine.

"We're going to see some other doctors," Walter said finally.

The protest period, she thought. "Why bother?" she asked quietly. "These four men are the best in Los Angeles, you know that. Perhaps they're the best in the country."

"There must be something," he began. "It seems impossible . . ."

"Well, there isn't anything. They'll fiddle around and use

me as a guinea pig for some of their new drug injections, but that will be that."

"Maybe they'll get something right away," he said, rubbing her thumb quickly with his. "I was reading another article on it night before last."

Walter and Dr. Harris. "Cancer is as old as living matter," she said.

"They'll lick it someday." Walter sounded angry. "Why not now?"

At the word "someday," Ravita smiled. Were they indeed living on the precipice of tomorrow, she wondered idly, or was that an illusion like all others of its kind, apposite to every highly self-conscious age, and was this rather another stretch of yesterday's ancient road? She suspected the latter, but it did not make any difference to her one way or another.

"Will it be hard?" Walter asked slowly.

"Not for a while," she said. "Toward the end, I expect, when the morphine stops taking."

"God." His hand came to life. It gripped hers so tightly her rings cut.

"No histrionics," she said. "I've always considered it quite a fluke that anyone is alive."

"I know you have. But that, Ravita!"

"And I have always said that whatever anyone else has done, I can do too. If not better." She had hoped that out of his identification with her, he would derive a confidence from hers. She looked at him now but she could not tell what he was thinking. His jaw was set firmly; under the rough brows his blue eyes looked ahead straight and expressionless. She began for the first time to grow nervous, although whether for his sake or her own she did not know. It was a strange nervousness, like a tiny beat in the pit of her stomach. If he had no confidence, it could be that her own was not real. But that was nonsense.

"Don't you believe that I can?" she asked. (*I will, whatever comes, remain a person, she said firmly to herself. I will stay me.*)

"Of course I do, darling."

"Very well, then." Ravita sat up straight, folded her hands once more in her lap, and gave Walter a smile. "Now shall we return to the party?" she asked.

"All right." They drew slightly apart. Walter worked his shoulders once or twice. Their faces assumed new expressions, and they turned from the fire, toward the living room.

"But wherever fascism has grown it has been under the guise of nationalism," Rudolph was saying. He had apparently been speaking for some time. He looked very intense; the brown eyes glowed; his head shot out reptilelike from the hunched shoulders. He had forgotten Betty, Ravita observed. He had moved from one emotion to a second, and like many youthful intellectuals he would give completely of himself to each.

"What did they cry in Spain," Rudolph continued, "but Spain? And in Italy, but Italy? Germany is not the only one. It is always thus. And so in America." He waved his hands. He looked bitter, disappointed, tragic; he indicated that to him, more than to any man, it was given to comprehend the worst.

"What about Spain?" Walter asked, in the tone he used to draw out his best students. "I thought the story there was a little different."

"I was of course generalizing," Rudolph replied quickly. "You are right, Professor. There it was modified by the aspect of Catholicism." He nodded his kinky bullet head. "You must understand too that reaction is identified with nationalism only in the countries of greatest advancement. In countries which have not yet attained their independence, it is the progressive element which is nationalistic."

"So why be pessimistic?" cried Betty. Then, like a child, she clapped a hand over her mouth. "I was trying to think it was right because it worked out that way," she said. "How dopey of me."

"It must be appalling," Walter remarked in a light guarded voice, "to be young in an age which doubts progress."

"Oh, Doctor Anderson, you're not that old!" one of the girls exclaimed. "Anyway, I sort of believe in progress. I think if you have had a happy childhood, you do."

"Spoken like a true psych major," John Emery said in a hearty voice.

There was a brief flash of laughter which faded rapidly. Rudolph, with his words, had become a center; and the others returned to him, stripped of their casual dogmatism, expressing only earnestness and curiosity.

"What do you think, Rudolph?" asked John Emery. "How does it look to you?"

Rudolph sighed, lifted his shoulders, and hunched them again. "Myself, I am pessimistic," he said. "I should like to think we are not too far on the wrong road; but the signs are bad."

Ravita, glancing about, saw that the faces of the listening students were grave. One or two looked actually frightened, as if Rudolph were not only a prophet but an announcer of doom, speaking into the microphone as the pictures shattered and the walls crashed around him. The red-spectacled Betty had forgotten her annoyance. He was no longer the boy she had quarreled with, but a voice. "Oh no!" she cried in a heartbroken, pleading tone.

Rudolph's thoughtful dark gaze met hers. "Little Betty," he said, amused and caressing. "I hope not, of course."

It was so entirely imbecilic that Ravita could stand it no longer. She pierced her aloofness for the first time and spoke. "What difference does it make anyway?" she asked in a clear cold voice.

They all looked at her then. The hydra head swung round and gazed. Ravita looked back at them. All right, she thought. If it was such a horrible thing to say, laugh.

But no one laughed. "It makes all the difference," said Rudolph, still feeling the spokesman. "Else why is anything? Is it not, after all, our world?"

Betty poked at her glasses. "Most of the time we do forget

about it," she said, courteously pretending to touch Ravita's side, "and just work or have fun or something. But underneath—or anyhow when we stop to think—why then it really seems to mean everything."

"Yes," Rudolph said tensely, nodding his head. "Many times I have thought of suicide. Oh yes. Society is so filled with stupidity. But always I say to myself, this is my only chance to watch how it goes."

"Or to give it a push," John Emery remarked, jovial again.

"Well, I see I spoke out of turn," Ravita said with her automatic social smile. The students laughed and by degrees returned to themselves; their conversation circled as before, but she no longer listened, nor could she have uttered another word. Rigid, stricken into silence, she stared at the fire. The burning wood crackled and sparks went up with a hiss.

Ravita sat stiff and alone and her aloneness filled her slowly with fear. Though Walter sat beside her, his hands were on his knees now and she no longer felt his nearness. The students spoke in low voices among themselves; she felt that they had closed themselves against her. She did not know why she cared about this, but for some reason it seemed to matter. They were so young and foolish, she would have said; they knew nothing of life because they had not begun to mold it individually; like adolescents they worked, conversed, struggled, and played in groups. Yet their words rose from the blue hearts of the fire; their syllables revolved in the sparkling blue and gold flames of the proper grate.

Why is anything, they had said; and nothing had ever been why. *It is our world*, and, surrounding her unclaimed, it had not been hers. Time had had empty eyes and she had stood still with him and the pulp had drained from her sockets too and she had not cared; and now that he was moving she could not bring him back, no never. But he moved not from her alone, he moved from everyone. The dyings she had scrutinized in the clinic were common because they *were* common and hers was; and distinctive because they belonged to each. *Watch how it goes* and she could

not, never again to see, to witness the debacle or the creation, to guess at the level or the climbing of the road This was pain. It was pain she had never known. It seemed physical as a blow; it tore her with a juggler's cleaving knives. She sat alone in the room in a fog of agony and the words and gestures of the students, Walter beside her, Nefertite on the piano, the flames in the grate, twisted jerkily through the fog. She felt that she could not endure it; that she would have to bend double or cry out or fall to her knees.

She did not know what to do. Her aloneness in pain terrified her. She reached out and clutched Walter's hand. And this was not the end, she thought in horror, this was not the end but the beginning. The end could never be reached without help. "Distinction," oh mad word! What had she been prating about through this hollow afternoon? How could she say, what could she ever say to beg

"Be with me," she said in a low voice. She had intended to say "bear," but the "be" came out.

Walter's large warm hand pressed hers. His kind blue eyes looked deep into her frightened ones. "Of course," Walter said. He understood, he had been there before her. But she—she had only begun to walk.

THE OLD ACROBAT AND THE RUINED CITY*

CLAY PUTMAN

It was one of those fine bright days that come only in mid-summer, as clear and sharp as crystal, with a high wind hissing in the willows along the shore and the castle standing serenely upon its hill. Joseph Staple remembered something static in the scene: like the faded engraving on the wall above his desk in which the figures hang suspended behind thick glass, motionless against a luminous, unruffled landscape. The people walked sun-dazed on the white sand, lay like slow-breathing animals on the grassy banks, and he knew that they were there for a time of storing-up. Something wrong also: their laughter too shrill and too eager; he saw no one but the young there. They came down from the Gartenplatz and the other broken streets to swim and lie in the sun; in bright dresses, the women, and it afforded the soldiers a great deal of pleasure to watch them change into their bathing suits on the beach—an exceedingly delicate operation in which several things had to be attended to at once. They lay on the warm grass, their arms raised against the glare; the wind flicked a spray of water on them, perhaps, and small, secret smiles crossed their faces.

"Listen," the child said. "Listen, listen! I know a song." He looked up, one day down by the river, to see the white-haired child squatting before him, her face frowning and intent.

"Listen, have you a cigarette?"

He was drying himself after his swim, and he said, "I have, as a matter of fact." The child spoke in German, but his first impulse had been to answer her in English. German was his official tongue, an acquired thing, and he was never quite at ease in using it. Just as in his office there was always the unbridgeable

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space between himself and the people who came, there was, with this second language, an obstacle between expression and thought.

"But have you not a full package?"

He tossed her a full pack, and she took it and examined it minutely.

"German cigarettes have pictures of cinema stars," she said. "Yours have none. Take them back."

"What's your name?" he asked.

"Annalise," she answered.

And then the mother was there, smiling, her hair damp and rising with the breeze. "Oh," she said, "you have made a friend today. How kind of the Herr Hauptmann. Oh, he is not a soldier? An American and not a soldier? But how well he speaks . . ."

Somewhere a portable gramophone was playing a metallic waltz, and the thought came to him that these Lorelei were not without their music.

"Listen, I know a song . . ."

They became friends, the daughter and himself. The mother remained beside them on the beach, but aloof. The child Annalise shared a sandwich with him, he examined the books in the bag which she wore on her shoulders, and she sang him a song in a dull, droning little voice.

He had wine, and when the child saw the bottle she began to weep. The mother, stooping to wind the portable gramophone, water glistening on her tanned skin, told him that the child wept because once they had spent three days in a wine cellar during a bombing. There had been no water; they had all drunk the wine, and the child had become drunk and ill, and now she wept remembering it. She was often a very difficult child, the mother said, laughing. The mother had a way of lifting her eyebrows ironically, of smiling and tilting her head so that the pale hair fell loosely about her face.

Annalise, he discovered later, lived with her mother in one-half of a basement in a cadaverous old house on the Gartenplatz.

Each morning Ferda strapped the leather schoolbag to Annalise's shoulders and sent her off to the school conducted by the nuns just above the American headquarters in the castle. Returning home after a day with the nuns, who ate little and were irritable, Annalise was given something or other to eat and put to bed. She slept sometimes with her mother, and sometimes in another part of the basement, and never inquired into the reasons for this. She knew only that she was sent from her mother's bed when Vincent came. And the aloof mother, the damp-haired Lorelei-woman, on other nights when Vincent did not come, got up at odd hours to play her gramophone and was inclined to grab Annalise and hug her fiercely in agonies of tenderness.

This much the daughter had told him.

Joseph Staple, Civilian Director of Indigenous Labor (CAF 13), a bureaucrat in a ruined city, was waiting for the daughter to come. He lit his pipe and put his feet on the ledge of the tile stove. In this room of gilt and firelight where typewriters clicked during the day and lapis-lazuli-eyed cupids swam on the ceiling—in this room of a castle which was not really a castle but called that, a gimcrack mansion of chocolate-colored stone built by a manufacturer of racing-cars—he waited, a heavy, dark man with a face that had begun to soften around the edges. He was tall and broad, with eyes that seemed tired and yet strangely eager, virginal, in that face which had begun to soften, to be smooth like a rock which had lain a long time under running water. He, who—abstractly speaking—gave a damn, was not old, but he had lately come to feel a pleasure in sitting before a fire; fifty perhaps, and a good man.

Outside the window it had begun to snow and to be dark simultaneously; the snow came thinly through the arch of trees still in their moldering leaves, came thickly and compactly the scabrous spires of the church at the summit of the hill. He knew that there was a certain life left in the ruined city, knew that if you could take a stick and stir the rubble you would find a certain

life left; but in the wintertime, as the sky blurred and the black mountains bulked closer, the city lay crumbled to silence beneath the snow. Sitting there, he remembered a time in his youth when he had walked out on a stretch of prairie in the spring thaws; he had come upon the body of an animal, frozen, a coyote lying in a crevice of the fields, and he had tipped the carcass with the barrel of his rifle and seen, beneath the lifeless form, a sluggish movement, a wriggle of half-frozen things coiling and stretching in a mound of snow. The shawled women and the numb men who came to stand, stupefied by the heat of the room, before his desk—where did they go? These cold people, these hibernators who looked forward only to the summer. They formed queues in the hallway and he heard their voices; they stood before him and answered his questions and received his permissions, but they could not be touched. Well, they had left a track of slush across the carpet.

He heard the breath of someone passing behind him, and Leni, his secretary, a big-rumped Polish woman with a blob of wiry hair, tiptoed to his side with a report for him to sign. She sucked laboriously at a cigarette as he examined the figures, and he sensed the heavy body close to his shoulder.

"It is so dark here," Leni said. "Shall I light the lamps? Do you want the boy to bring more coal?"

"No, thank you. Have these items been checked, Leni?"

"Oh, yes, sir yes." She deeply admired him; she allowed her face to say: see, I think of nothing but what you are telling me. Her soft eyes bulged and her voice grew whispery as she spoke. "It is snowing again. Will it ever be summer?"

"Will you please bring the black-market file and leave it on my desk?"

"Yes, sir. You will not go for dinner?"

"Not for a while yet."

Her heavy figure bulged through the square of light that fell from the hallway. His staff were leaving for their billets, drawing on coats and overshoes, stamping out into the cold. Their

voices came harsh and revived, for they were on their way to supper and cognac and other, rarer pleasures. *Vi-o-lett-a*, someone sang in anticipation, and Leni wailed, signifying that she had just been pinched. Laughter and a door closing. *Dumdedumdee*.

He took a cigarette case of fine gold and enamel from the drawer of his desk; this he turned over in his hands and scratched with his fingers the gold initials embedded in one corner. The case had been given to him by Annalise.

Feeling the warmth from the stove creep up into his body he thought, with a mixture of irony and satisfaction, that he had come to the best of all possible places to lie fallow. That was what he wanted. The truth is, he had found himself alone in middle age with the current shut off; all the years he had spent marooned between what he had wanted to be and what he had never become were solidified behind him, frozen like the ice on the river; and he, in a manner that was almost shameful to him, had begun at the bottom to make contact. He realized that somewhere behind him he had lost touch—with people, with himself, but most of all with the old idea he had had of himself. Not a soldier, no longer even an ambitious man, he had come to this place to lie fallow for a time, to recuperate. And as he fingered the cigarette case, the gift of Annalise, he acknowledged that he wished also to do a good thing in this place where it no longer seemed possible to do a bad one.

“Good night, Staple.”

“Oh Vincent. Good night.”

“Want me to give the hound some chow on my way to supper?”

“No, thanks,” Staple said. “I’ll attend to it.” He reached down into the well of his desk and ran his fingers through the old dog’s sleek fur. “Please don’t go for a minute, Vincent. I want to speak to you.”

“Yes.”

He decided not to ask Vincent to sit down. It would be best to have the thing over as soon as possible, and in this case he pre-

ferred to preserve the distance that his desk implied. "I'm not sure how to say this."

Leaning forward, Vincent placed his hands on the desk. He laughed softly, and Staple thought of a hole, a pit suddenly opening: an empty erupting little laugh. Vincent was his chief clerk; formerly a sergeant in the occupying forces, he now served as a kind of major-domo in the headquarters at the castle. He handled records, ordered supplies, and he was, Staple admitted to himself, efficient. He had a handsome face, one of those young faces as smooth and impenetrable as a piece of classic sculpture, and his laugh was like a crack, a flaw in that perfect finish.

"Vincent, I don't usually ask much of people. You're to take what I say as a request. As a warning, if you prefer."

"What do you mean?" Vincent said.

"I mean Annalise. Your lady friend's kid. It isn't strictly necessary for you to wallop her, is it?" Realizing that he had assumed Vincent's own tone in addressing him, Staple felt himself redden.

"I didn't know you took such an interest," Vincent said. "In the kid."

"Good Lord, man! Why shouldn't I?"

"Don't mind my asking," Vincent said. "But would you tell me why you give a damn?"

"Because you're messing them up. Your other affairs don't concern me much, but in this case you're hurting two people."

"What's the kid been telling you?"

"She's told me nothing. I saw for myself."

Vincent gave a swipe at his immaculate jacket and put on his cap. He said nothing.

"Why don't you leave them alone?" Staple asked.

"I'll tell you this," Vincent replied. "She doesn't give a damn what happens to the kid. She's a regular nanny goat. But I'll tell you this, too. You've got a nice fat dog. You've got him all clean and sleek and DDT'd now. You're a helluva good guy, but why don't you stick to dogs?"

"Watch out, Vincent."

"Watch out, Staple. A man like you doesn't want to get himself mixed up in things."

"Tell me what you're after, Vincent. What do you hope to get?" Staple felt cold, and he walked to the stove and shook the coals with a poker. The fire leaped behind the round eye. He stood with his back to Vincent, warming himself. How could he get at this man? He wanted to tell him that it mattered to him what happened to the woman and her daughter, that he cared when two people got hurt. He wanted to tell him, also, that he had found it necessary to give a damn.

"Are you finished?" Vincent asked. "I've got a date."

"No," Staple said. "I'm not quite finished." He walked to his desk and took the cigarette case from the drawer. "Have you ever seen this?" he asked.

Vincent looked at the cigarette case for a moment and said, "No, I've never seen it. What are you getting at?"

"Annalise gave me this," Staple said. He stood facing Vincent across the desk. "Where do you and Ferda go every night? What do you do across the river?"

"You're out of your depth, Herr Director. I don't have to answer your questions. If you want to get tough you'll have to fill out forms. The civil service says you can't can a man if he puts up a fight. I'll give you a great big one. Besides, you wouldn't like the effort. I don't understand you, Staple. What do *you* hope to get out of this?"

"Leave them alone, Vincent. This is a warning."

The door closed, and Staple heard the click of Vincent's boots across the hallway. He subsided into his chair, and the dog padded toward him. It was true, and he admitted this: he did not want to make the effort. He thought that he had learned, somewhere in the years behind him, that the majority of people were selfish by nature and behaved well only through an extension of that selfishness. And in his own case, he wondered, was it necessary to become tired in order to become good? The fugitive year

that he had spent in the ruined city had convinced him that perhaps this was so. There, either you gave a damn, as he did, or you rapidly got into the swim of things. You began to write to an understanding sister in Evanston, say, who was pleased to choose bright dresses and lipsticks from a mail-order house and send them to you for your inamorata. You found means of increasing your Scotch ration without diminishing your cigarette supply. There were comparatively undemolished flats to be had for yourself and Ingeborg. There was, to be sure, the black market. All this, it was generally agreed, was exciting; it gave a fine, free spirit of competition. But he was tired of competition; he did not wish any longer to make the effort.

Below him now the city rose, a jagged and motionless sea caught between the black mountains; a jumble of white walls like floes of ice threw greenish and pinkish shadows under the spent light. The bubble-dome of the station, its steel girders laid bare, looked like a huge umbrella that had been caught in a bad wind.

Through the window he saw the group of children, attended by an elderly nun, file from the church at the summit of the hill and move toward him, down through the coppery tunnel of beech trees. They moved waveringly, a ragged frieze of children with the arthritic Sister Thomasina at the rear of the group, her black robes flapping in the wind, her steel spectacles glinting in the dusk; she hovered about the children, Staple thought, like a black and solemn bird dog flushing a covey of winter quail.

Annalise was among the last rank of blue-nosed little girls. She walked with that curious gait that some shy children have, a kind of fierce walk, throwing her legs out abruptly, her head ducked slightly to one side. She was wearing a gray undervest of quilted *ersatz* silk that had once belonged to some Wermacht corporal, and there was a red stocking cap on her head. She was a little thing, and not very pretty. She was too thin for one thing, and her teeth were bad, and she had a way of looking at Staple that left him with anger.

He opened the window and called out to her.

The old nun raised her sharp nose as if sniffing the air for some evil dissolved in it. She placed her hand across her black bosom. "Ah," she said, pointing to Annalise. "She has been very difficult today. With twenty children to catechize, it is very difficult if one of them is not obedient. She teases, she quarrels, and she annoys Uli"—Sister Thomasina reached out and jerked a small girl by her coattail—"who is a good child."

She commanded the children to stamp their feet and raise their knees as they walked, and she called back to Staple that this warmed them but, she feared, gave them appetite.

Annalise came into the room and shook hands with him. Still not looking at him squarely, she walked to the tile stove and raised her skirts to the heat. She said nothing. After she had warmed herself she sat down and began to rub the old dog's back. She was often unkind to the dog; she pulled his fur, stuck her sharp fingers between his ribs. Staple had asked her often to treat him more kindly, and she had replied only, "He is so fat."

"Are you going to give me some coffee?" she asked.

He walked into the cubbyhole where Leni presided during the day over her typewriter; he took the pot of coffee which she had left on the stove and carried it back to Annalise. He filled a cup for her and watched her pour cream in it until the coffee was white.

"Annalise," he said. "This cigarette case you brought me yesterday. Tell me carefully, please, where you got it."

"I don't know," she said. "I forget."

"Try to think, please. It was too much to give me."

"It was my father's, I think."

"But the initials are A. M. Annalise, your father's name was Schumn, wasn't it?"

Annalise frowned. Sitting there on the floor cross-legged, with the red stocking cap on her head, she looked like one of those plaster trolls which some Americans plant in their gardens under a bush.

“Annalise.”

“I don’t know. I forget.” She reached down and began to smooth a little place on the carpet, running her fingers over and over the curve of a fat purple leaf. “There is a boy at school. Today he didn’t know his lessons, and Sister Thomasina smacked him”

“Did Vincent give it to you?”

“Listen,” Annalise said. “Listen, I know a song—

Going to take a sentimental journey,
Going to take a journey home’

“Do you want to hear me sing?”

She sang in a listless voice and snapped her fingers for her own accompaniment.

“‘Heaven, I’ll be waiting up in Heaven’”

She was trying to jazz it; she mimicked the gestures and the inflections she had heard on the radio and seen in the moving pictures.

“Stop it.”

She became silent and gave her attention to the carpet.

“Did your mother know you brought this to me?”

“She has more. They get them”

“Vincent and your mother?”

“And rings. Nice ones. Many things. She has a new nightgown and we eat good. Will you give me a ride home in the jeep?”

“How do they get them, Annalise?”

“With food, with blankets. Everybody is cold.”

Staple thought of the summer and the woman on the white beach, the water glistening on her tanned arms; and he looked at her daughter squatting on the carpet before him. She had removed the corporal’s jacket, and just above her elbow he saw a faint circle of bruises. Her eyes had grown large and perplexed, and she sat watching him.

“Will you give a ride home in the jeep?” she asked, finally.

“Come on.”

Outside, in the cold light, there seemed to be a hidden logic

in the ruins. In the jumble of black outcropping shapes there ran crisscrosses of white where light struck the snow or a cleared place in the rubble. He could see the river, glittering, and he could not hear a sound except the crunch of their feet on the snow. It was early, only just dark, and already the city had recoiled into silence. They walked across the grounds of the castle to the motor pool, and as they descended a flight of steps Annalise gripped his hand and pointed to the statue of a faun which stood before a rustic summerhouse. The statue was of bronze, and long exposure had turned it to the color of absinthe. The snow melting on its haunches had dripped holes in the crusts below.

"Look," Annalise said. "He has just made water. You can see for yourself."

They drove down the tunnel of trees to the ruined city, crossed the pontoon bridge (about this river and a couple of other bridges American poets had made bad verses in the last century), and turned off onto the Gartenplatz.

The basement apartment was dark. There were no lights anywhere on the rubbled street. Annalise climbed out of the jeep and walked toward the door; she looked back at him, her face white in the glare of headlights.

"Are you afraid, Annalise?" he asked.

"Yes," she said.

"Come here a minute."

"Yes."

"Would you be afraid anymore if you could go away? You and your mother to the country, to your aunt's house. Away from Vincent."

"I would still be afraid of the dark."

Then he knew what he was going to do. He took a fountain pen from his pocket and searched for a piece of paper in the compartment of the dashboard. He wrote rapidly. "I have something that you must do," he said. "Will you do exactly as I say?"

She nodded.

"This is for your mother, Annalise. It is very important. You

are to give it to her in the morning, not to anyone else. Do you understand? Tell her to do exactly as I have written."

Annalise took the note.

"Now tell me what I have said."

She repeated his words.

"And don't be afraid."

He started the motor and turned the jeep around. He drove back across the pontoon bridge and onto another littered street and stopped at a building from which the sounds of music came.

Four men in greasy *lederhosen* thumped and squeezed out a reedy tango, and there was a greensick blonde girl at the piano who smiled listlessly at everyone. He saw the man he was looking for, a young lieutenant, and he walked to him where he was standing by a billiard table and drew him aside.

"Hello, Sam," Staple said.

"Well, the bureaucrat. Have a drink with the military."

"Sam, I want you to throw a raid on a place."

"When?"

"Tomorrow night. I've got a tip. 28 Gartenplatzstrasse, Seckenheim district."

"Anything big?"

"I really don't know. A squad should handle it."

"Any special time?"

"Around midnight, I suppose. There's an American involved, a civilian, I'm sorry to say."

"We'll be there. A drink?"

"No, thanks, I've got a heavy day down at the office."

"You're kidding."

There was beginning to be a brawl in the club as he left. He got into the jeep and drove to the end of the street and turned in the direction of the bridge once more. He was on the cobbled road that led up through the tunnel of trees to the castle when he stopped the jeep, turned around, and headed back to the city.

Leni was happy to see him; she took him into the apartment and poured him a glass of wine. There was no awkwardness in

her manner. She sat in a straight chair, her hands folded primly on her lap, and puffed at a cigarette. Her hands, he noticed, were big and clumsy.

"Is it about the woman?" she asked. "The mother?"

"No," he said. "I was lonely." In his head he felt a curious whirring sensation, diminishing like a machine running slowly to a stop. Wait a minute, wait a minute, he thought, in a conscious effort to avoid thinking for a moment in order to begin to think of something else. Really, it had all happened so fast.

So they sat for a while. Snow fell. The room grew cold. They could hear the noise of rats racing in the next room. He was tired, exhausted, and he knew at last why he had come to Leni. Beside her, he found himself telling her what had happened. She, this cowlike woman, had a pliancy of mind which appealed to him now; she accepted an idea, molded herself to it, and then gave it back so humbly, so unpositively, that he felt at ease with her. But as he spoke he saw her manner change; she was deeply, maudlinly concerned. With a dreadful display of sympathy she assured him again and again that he had acted wisely.

"These are bad times," she said. "Bad times." She wept, and her face became swollen. "I knew. I have watched Vincent. I know what he has done to the woman and her child. Do a good thing. Speak the heart's language. You have done well—a good, unselfish thing."

But again he was thinking of the woman on the white sand. The nanny-goat mother; the Lorelei-woman.

A day passed. Staple was taken with a bad cold. Vincent came to the office and went about his duties and said nothing. He left at his customary hour for supper, and it was a bad day for Staple.

He believed now that he had acted wisely. On impulse, yes; but he consoled himself, somewhat wryly, with the thought that he was, after all, somewhat out of training. On the morning following the raid he had breakfast alone in the dining room of the

castle. Throughout the night he had alternately chilled and fevered, and he had awakened with the feeling of having neglected something. For a long while he stood before the mirror in his room and examined his face and naked body, tracing with his hands the furrows across his forehead. He could not lose the thought that he had left something undone.

By eight o'clock he was in his office at his desk. It was a perfect morning; the snow seemed to have cleansed everything. He saw, through the window, the group of children, carefully marshaled by Sister Thomasina, move up the hill and enter the church. Annalise, he was relieved to see, was not among them.

Already the drone of voices had commenced in the hall, and Leni, too, was upset. Her eyes were rimmed with red, and she spoke to Staple with a proprietary and faintly chiding tone. The first person in line to see him was a heavily muscled old gentleman with a bullet-shaped head and huge blue-veined ears. He had come seeking a permission to work for a circus; he was a tumbler of no political affiliation, a virtuoso, he said. Would the Herr Director please stamp his papers?

The old acrobat, who spoke in an almost incomprehensible dialect, became excited. Staple was nervous, and the interview went badly. The tumbler could not understand his German, and Staple found himself, in spite of his efforts, lapsing into his native language. There were no circuses, Staple told him, and this offended the old tumbler; he had spent fifteen years waiting for the circuses to come back. Where were they? To prove a point he suddenly stepped back from the desk and did a *jambatte* in the middle of the room. He balanced himself elaborately, leaped with his arms hugging his knees, and somersaulted.

But the old tumbler sprained his back in the *jambatte* (which once had been the finest in Europe, he declared), and he was forced to take a seat by the fire and be rubbed by Leni. He could not understand what had happened, and he sat there by the tile stove, sweat pouring down his forehead, and he said over and over, "I don't understand"

The telephone rang.

Vincent walked into the room.

Staple sank into his chair. He heard Leni on the telephone "Yes, this is Bandage 7200. Yes yes. One moment, please."

Vincent sat down beside Staple's desk and began to rub the dog. "I have news," he said.

Leni was at the door, in tears. "Mr. Staple, it is the lieutenant of police. Will you come? Something dreadful"

"Ferda and the kid are in jail," Vincent said. "Did you know?"

"No."

"Mr. Staple, come to the telephone, *please*."

"Take the message, Leni," he shouted. "Leave us alone."

Vincent moved toward him. He reached into his pocket and took out the piece of paper on which Staple had written the note to Ferda. "Let me ask it now," he said. "Have you ever seen this?"

"Where did you get it?" Staple asked. "For God's sake, man, tell me what happened."

"If the Herr Director would please stamp my papers," the old tumbler said. "My permission, please"

"Go," Staple said to the old man. "Get out."

Vincent began to read the note. "I advise you to leave the city as soon as possible, by tomorrow evening at the latest. Go to your sister's in the country. You know, I believe, what I mean when I say you must go. I do this to help you. Tell no one. Let Vincent come to your house at the regular time."

"Vincent, that note," Staple said. "I warned you"

"You even signed it."

"But what happened?"

"There's a thing you forgot. Ferda doesn't know English. She brought the note to me to translate. She thought it was very kind of you to write."

"And you left her there to be arrested?"

"I left her there, but I told her the truth. I told her that the Herr Director would like to move in. Wasn't that it?"

Staple sat silent, and Vincent laughed his erupting little laugh. Once more Staple felt that Vincent's laugh revealed too much of him; he had the sensation of looking into Vincent, through the chink of that laugh. He shuddered, and he felt a dryness begin over him.

"I really didn't think you'd make the effort," Vincent said. "You did—I give you credit for that; but you didn't follow through." He rose and walked toward the door. "This letter," he said. "I warn you now. Watch out."

When Vincent had gone, Leni came into the room. She was weeping still, and she had news. Ferda, the young lieutenant had called to say, had hanged herself that morning in the prison. Had there been a mistake?

Staple went down to the prison in the afternoon. It was snowing as he drove down the tunnel of trees that led to the ruined city. He told them at the prison that he wished to see the daughter, Annalise. She came to him, and he saw that somebody had combed her hair and given her a moleskin coat to wear. The prison authorities were very understanding. The Herr Director would take the child? How kind of him, how very kind. The child was fortunate to have made such a friend.

He brought her back to the castle, but he really did not know what he was going to do with her. She asked for coffee and sat down before the stove and began to sing into the fire. She sang and snapped her fingers, and when her eyes met his Staple remembered the day down by the river, and he knew that he would never be sure, quite sure. There, by the river, he had wanted to speak the language natural to him; and later, he had tried, he sincerely believed, to act in the way that was native to him. But there was always the abyss, the uncompleted thing, the desk between, the years, and always the damp-haired woman pinned motionless against an unruffled landscape. He was tired; he did not understand.

STANFORD SHORT STORIES

Later he made arrangements with Sister Thomasina to look after the child; he paid her a monthly sum and supplied them with food and certain articles of clothing, and it was understood, between the arthritic old nun and himself, that this was a kind of penance.

LESLIE SMITH was born in Alberta, Canada, thirty-three years ago, attended school in Los Angeles, held two dozen jobs, and was in the Navy from 1942 to 1945. He has attempted running a band in this country, and with equal lack of success has tried forming his own recording company. A novel built on these experiences is in process. Though he has published articles on jazz in *Esquire* and *Downbeat*, "The Grass on the Other Side" is his first published story. At present Mr. Smith is taking graduate work in writing at Stanford, having been graduated with an A.B. in 1949.

THE GRASS ON THE OTHER SIDE*

LESLIE SMITH

He walked across the concrete floor toward the stairway that led up to the offices. He was so seldom in that part of the building that the plant took on a different aspect for him and he was aware of different perspectives of the familiar machines. Looking through the dirty windows along the front of the giant metal building, he could make out segments of the block letters that formed the name INDEMNITY IRON WORKS on the sign outside. The rumble of the furnaces filled the building with a hoarse sighing. The lathes and sheers and presses were quiet, though, for it was lunchtime.

Most of the men ate in the fenced-in yard in back which adjoined the parking lot. A few of the old-timers stuck by their machines and ate, sitting cross-legged on wooden boxes or piles of scrap, with the morning's *Journal* or a labor paper propped up before them. He looked them over as he went along, but they didn't seem to notice him. He climbed the stairs, relieved that he wasn't noticed, but feeling the effort of the climb. He wasn't a young man any more.

On the landing, he walked by doors that led into the backs of the offices. At a door marked PERSONNEL DIRECTOR he stopped

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and shifted his lunch box from his right hand to his left and entered the office.

The desk in the outer office wasn't occupied, but through an open section in a glass partition into the inner office, he could see two men side by side at an oval table. Their backs were toward him. One of the men, broad shouldered in his pressed gray suit, pink necked below his neatly trimmed gray hair, twisted around to see who had come in. His forehead above his frameless glasses furrowed momentarily. "Yes, Miller, what is it?"

"Do you have a few minutes, Mr. Foster?" Miller asked. He looked pointedly at the man beside Foster and then added, "I'd like to see you."

Foster looked hard at him. He said, "I'll be through here in a few minutes," and turned back to his companion.

Miller expected more. He waited.

The two men bent closer together and talked in low tones, and then the other turned to glance at Miller, his eyebrows raised.

Foster said more sharply, "All right, Miller, have a seat out there. I'll call you."

Miller crossed the carpet to a leather armchair by the window and sat down. From there he could hear Foster and the other man talking and laughing together. He reached over to the desk and took a magazine, but not seeing it with his mind, he just flipped through the pages.

Glancing out the window he saw the girls returning from lunch across the neat green lawn in front. Their colored dresses seemed as much in place as the men's work clothes on the other side. The bridge tower loomed up behind the buildings of the street. Smoke curled up from the river traffic.

Foster and his friend got up. Miller could see them, vaguely, through the opaque glass, standing close together. He was envious of their intimacy, their controlled laughter, their good clothes and carefree manners. He longed to be like them.

Then the friend came out and walked across the room without glancing at Miller. At the door, as he was going out, a girl entered.

The man stepped back and made a little bow. "I beg your pardon," he said, and smiled.

The girl was friendly, too, and skipped ahead to show she didn't want to keep him waiting. She came to the desk near Miller and sat down.

"You waiting to see somebody?" she asked. She didn't look directly at him.

"Yes, I want to see Mr. Foster."

"I don't think he's in." She looked down at her legs and began to straighten the seams on her stockings.

"Yes, he is," said Miller. "He knows I'm here."

The girl looked at Miller's dirty overalls and then at the magazine he was still holding. She pushed a button on her desk.

"Do you work for us?"

"Of course I do," said Miller. He replaced the magazine.

"Well, I'm *sorry*, he doesn't answer."

"He's in there," said Miller, "and he told me to wait for him."

"It's up to you, then," said the girl. She tossed the magazine into a wastebasket.

It was after one o'clock before Foster appeared and said, "All right, Miller."

"Mr. Foster," said Miller when he reached the door the other held open for him, "I was due back to work at one. I didn't think I'd have to wait so long."

"How long will this take?"

They stood together in the doorway. Miller felt bent and small before the other man. He tried to lower his voice. "I've got a cylinder here. I thought you would want to hear it." He nodded down at the lunch pail he carried.

"You have? Well, can't you leave it?"

"I'd like to explain it to you."

Foster puffed up his cheeks and exhaled loudly. "All right. Miss Swanson."

"Yes?" said the girl, looking up.

"Call" He looked down at Miller. "Where are you working now?"

"Assembly 32."

"Call Assembly 32 and tell Rasmussen we're holding this man."

"Whom shall I say we're holding, Mr. Foster?"

Miller spoke up quickly. "James Miller."

Foster closed the door behind them. Then he sat at his desk and lit a cigarette. "Sit down, Miller. What's this all about, now?"

Miller dug in his shirt pocket for a cigarette.

"They told me at C.A.P. to come directly to you if there was ever anything that looked important"

"Yes. What is it?"

"Well, last night after work, some of the men stopped by the Shannon for a drink, and Ferris Do you know Ferris, Mr. Foster?"

"You mean the Hugh Ferris we fired last month?"

"Yes. Well, he was talking about the plant, so I took it down."

"What about the plant, Miller?"

"He was trying to start trouble by saying you had spies working here."

Foster sat up. "What the devil does he know about it?"

"I don't know, Mr. Foster. He didn't say that. But I think he's a Communist" Miller felt that explained everything.

"You have his conversation recorded?"

Miller nodded.

Foster laid his cigarette on an ashtray and drummed his fingers on the desk top. Brisk, black hairs stuck up over the white cuff on his wrist.

"Let's go hear it," he said.

He got up and opened another door. Miller followed him into an oblong room with a white screen at one end. A movie projector

stood on a table in the back. The walls and ceiling were lined with Celotex.

Foster opened a cabinet in the side wall and swung out a chrome-plated machine. "Do you have the cylinder?"

Miller opened his lunch pail, reached inside for the cylinder, and unsnapped the catch.

"Is your recorder working all right?" asked Foster.

"It works fine." Miller held up the lunch pail for Foster to see.

"Where's the microphone?"

"It's in the top. Here." He pointed.

"Oh, yes, I see." Foster leaned over him, interested. "I haven't seen one just like this."

"They're all made different, depending on how they're to be used," said Miller. "They don't want them all to look alike, either."

"Yes, I know."

"I turn it on by sliding down the name plate."

"I'll be damned!" Foster raised himself up and smiled and held out his hand for the cylinder.

Miller grinned with delight. He felt as though he'd made the machine.

Foster took the cylinder to the built-in reproducer, secured it in the spindle, fixed the head in place, then turned a switch. The cylinder began to revolve very slowly. He swung the apparatus back into the wall and closed the cabinet.

"We'll see what it sounds like," said Foster. "Sit down, sit down."

They sat facing the speaker which was behind the projection screen. Soon the room was filled with men's voices. The Shannon came to life for Miller. He raised his voice so that Foster could hear him above the noise. "I was sitting at the bar with Hal Pierce and Bonzini when Ferris came in."

The loudspeaker seemed to have picked up a conversation about the relative merits of beer. "*Hell, if it's beer, it's beer.*"

That's all I care about," said one voice. *"As long as you get the effect"*

"That talk doesn't mean anything," said Miller. "I was moving to a table near Ferris."

Foster looked up at the ceiling.

Cries of greeting came from the loudspeaker: *"Hey, look who came in,"* said one voice. *"Well, Hughie, me boy,"* said another. There were sounds of chairs scraping and muffled laughter.

"The men from the plant were crowding around to talk to Ferris, and I had to move the machine to a better place, so's it would pick up what Ferris was saying. You see, Mr. Foster, that's why I had to explain all this to you."

Foster nodded and fidgeted on his chair.

A new voice came from the speaker: *"How've you been, Hugh?"*

"Oh, all right, Hal, considering everything."

"That's Hal Pierce, talking to Ferris," said Miller, quickly.

"Hey, Bonzini, how's the family?"

"Ho! Same thing. The wife she cook all the time. The kids they need the shoes. . . . Why you no come to see us?"

"Who's this Bonzini?" asked Foster.

"He's on my assembly, both him and Hal Pierce."

"Oh, sure," said Foster. "I'd forgotten him."

"Well, you know how it is no job."

Hal Pierce's voice broke in: *"Say, Hugh, I heard you weren't working. Is it true they got you black-listed?"*

"It seems like it. I haven't been able to get work, yet."

"Holy Christ! Have you been out of work all this time? There are lots of jobs."

Other voices rose in exclamation.

"Not for me," said Ferris. *"The school board's getting after my old lady now. If she gets the can, I don't know what we'll do."*

"Old Happy Harms, he gone to California, no?" asked Bonzini.

"That's right," said Ferris. "He sold his place and took his kids out of school."

"What did they have against him?" asked Hal.

"I'm damned if I know."

"Well, Christ! If they can fire a man like that, none of us are safe."

"That's what I been telling you," said Hugh, his voice rising. "They'll pick us off, one by one, until the local's busted wide open. Just like me and Happy. We're only the first. You'll see!"

Then Hal's voice came through very strong: *"All right, boys! You all heard that. Does this go on the agenda, now, or not?"*

"Wait a minute!" said a new voice, and a flurry of voices blended together in argument.

"Let's throw the Commies out!" someone yelled.

"Shut up! Let's hear what Hal has to say."

"Let him talk."

Foster was listening intently. *"You say Hal Pierce works with you?"* he asked.

"Yes. He's on my assembly."

Foster wrote the name on a pad of paper.

Hugh Ferris spoke again: *"There's only one way that I can see how they would know as much as they do, Hal."*

"Yeah?"

"They must have a stool pigeon in the plant."

There was a momentary hush.

"Stools!" someone said. *"God damned stools!"*

"Jesus!"

"I been working for old man Hindemuth for twenty years. I never would have believed it."

"It sure looks like it."

A chair was scraped across the barroom floor.

"Now listen, men." Hal's voice spoke with authority. "Our local's got a good reputation. They haven't got a thing on us. Let's keep our noses clean and our eyes and ears open. If there's a stool"

"We'll castrate the son of a bitch."

"I kill him," said Bonzini, simply. His voice was rasping with emotion.

"Now listen to me" Hal's voice pleaded with them, but the protests and the noise rose in volume. Then the machine was suddenly quiet except for the low scratching sound.

"That's all," said Miller.

Foster turned to him, surprised.

"Sounds like it was just getting good. Did something happen?"

"Oh, no! But I didn't want to take any chances, so I turned it off and left.

"Do you think they suspect you, Miller?"

"I don't think so." Miller couldn't hide the apprehension he felt, though.

"I'm sure it's supposition. They can't know anything. But be careful, anyway. We don't want to lose a good man."

Miller flushed.

Foster got up and turned off the reproducer. "That's good work, Miller. You've had a good record here. I was sure we could count on you when we picked you out. I want you to know we appreciate your efforts. You're not only doing us a service, but you're doing a service to every real American in this community. You want to be proud of yourself, Miller." He slammed a fist into his open hand. "We're going to clean out this mess of Reds if it's the last thing we do."

Miller felt stirred by the praise. He watched Foster's tight mouth as he spoke, hanging onto every word.

"Follow up on those men, Miller. Get them talking. Get into their homes if you can. See what they're reading. We must have proof before we can fire a union man, you know."

Miller sat deeper in his chair, planning. "Was that the sort of conversations you wanted, Mr. Foster?"

"Well, they're all right. They can be used as substantiating evidence. But we need more factual data—plots to slow produc-

tion and that sort of thing. How about this Hal Pierce? Can't you get to be friends with him?"

"Yes, sir, I know him pretty well."

"What sort of a man is he?"

"I don't know, he seems to be all right."

"He sounds like an agitator to me."

"Maybe he is, Mr. Foster. He sounds like it, don't he?"

"See what you can get on him." Foster stopped talking and looked down at Miller for a moment. Then his voice changed. "Say, incidentally, don't come up here any more during working hours unless you've got something really hot. . . . Say, like something on Pierce. You shouldn't be seen around the office too much, you know." He jerked out his arm then and looked at his wristwatch. "I've got to chase along, Miller. I'm afraid we'll have to talk some other time."

"Oh. Sure," said Miller. He stood up slowly. "I'll see what I can get on Hal Pierce."

"That's the idea. Here. Go out this way." Foster walked with him to a door that opened onto the metal landing in the plant. "Keep up the good work!"

"Yes, sir," said Miller. The last things he saw in the room were Foster's creased gray trousers and his shined, expensive shoes.

From the top of the landing Miller looked around the plant. As far as he could see, men were working at the huge machines. No one seemed to notice him. Under every glaring light a man was bent over his machine. He started down the stairs and in doing so looked far out across the room and then stopped short. At Assembly 32 a man stood near the water bottle facing toward the stairs. The man moved and Miller recognized the swarthy face of Bonzini. With a sudden movement, Bonzini crumpled up the drinking cup and threw it on the floor and walked away.

The lunch box suddenly weighed heavy in Miller's hand. He found himself going on, down the stairs. He planned excuses, but

they came out as a jumble of words in his mind. Then he was standing at his lathe and Rasmussen, his foreman, said that yes, he knew, and to see if he couldn't get caught up on a few of the brass fittings since Pierce was taking over the line work. For an eternity Miller watched his own hands busy with the lathe chuck and the mike as though they were animated old twigs. Then all at once the whistle blew and he was washing at the trough and a man shoved him violently.

He turned, shielding his face.

It was Bonzini's chest right in front of him, and it was Bonzini's voice that said, "You son a bitch!"

That brought him out of it a little—the voice and the recognition. The plant came back into focus. He saw the lights being shut down and heard the motors whining lower in pitch as they slowed. The belts flapped slower and slower like great birds dropping down. There was horseplay around and the kind of end-of-day laughter men have. One man threw a wet towel at another. Miller wanted to run laughing to them but they were all oblivious of him. He turned aside and took a step away.

Bonzini grabbed him and twisted his denim shirt tight over his thin chest. "I talk to *you*."

Garlic fumes washed over Miller. He shut his eyes and winced.

"Bonz, for Christ's sake!"

The cry came from behind Miller. He opened his eyes and saw Hal come up, carefully drying his hands on paper towels, carefully wiping each finger. "I said there wouldn't be any of that."

Bonzini took his hand away from Miller's shirt, flexing his fingers. "I don't say so."

"Leave him alone, Bonz."

Bonzini seemed to Miller to be growing less angry. He began to be calm and sad, like someone at a funeral.

"I kill him, Hal. He's a bad man."

"You can't kill a man here in the washroom. What's the matter with you?"

"Look," said Bonzini.

He lashed out at Miller, but Miller jerked away and the blow missed. Then Bonz and Hal were tussling on the floor and a crowd gathered around.

Miller edged back as the struggling men were separated, and Hal shook himself loose from the men and said, "Take that silly wop out and get him drunk."

Most of the men moved off with Bonzini as Hal turned back to the trough to wash again. He looked up at Miller once.

"I'm sixty years old, Hal." Miller was beginning to shiver. But he could feel streams of sweat running down under his shirt from his armpits.

"I know, I know. Shut up."

Miller wanted desperately to get away. A few of the last men stepped back for him and he'd got outside in the yard before he remembered the lunch box. He felt sick.

Gradually, his mind cleared in the fresh air, and he began to fortify himself. He had done the wrong thing to take all that guff from a couple of dirty Reds. He could have gone up to the office, only there probably wasn't anybody working that late. The men were clearing out of the gate. The last cars were gunning away. The building cast a great triangular shadow across the grounds in the low sun. "They can all go to hell," he said. He spat.

His lunch box was where it should have been—in his locker. Finding it in place gave him courage. He would do all right. He would win out. Foster would see.

At the gate Hal was waiting for him. The others were gone.

"I'll walk with you," said Hal.

"What for, Hal?"

"I've been thinking it over. I guess I ought to walk with you. I'd better go as far as the bridge with you, anyway. Just in case."

"You don't need to do that, you don't need to do anything for me," said Miller, sullenly. He thought he had heard a tone of conciliation in Hal's voice. It puzzled him, but it added to his strength.

They walked in front of the plant, along the trimmed, green lawn. Mr. Foster could see them together if he was looking out the window.

"Bonzini shot off his mouth about seeing you upstairs." Hal looked down at him as they walked along, and there was a curious kind of twitching to his mouth. "The boys are all touchy because of the way things are now. You know how it is. They're too easily led that way. And Bonzini" Hal's voice trailed off as though his mind were on something else. He shrugged.

Miller couldn't believe what he was hearing. He caught his breath, sharply.

"Oh, well, Hal, it's over with. Let's forget it."

They were walking past the cafés and the bars. The Shannon was ahead of them, on the corner by the river front.

"That's just it, Miller. That's just what we can't do. Ever. That's why I had to talk to you. I wanted you to know about Bonzini, for one thing. He *did* want to kill you. For him, it's that simple. You see, he's a pretty rough boy. His old man was killed by the finks in Harlan County and he's never forgotten it. He holds a grudge against company men. He's never been educated, Miller. He don't figure out things so good. He knows you were up at the office, and so he added up the score, on impulse" Hal looked away. "And what answer do you think he got, Miller? The right one or the wrong one?" They were almost in front of the Shannon.

"How about a drink?" Hal shot the question at him.

Miller stopped and his pulse began to pound. "Where you taking me?" he said. His voice caught in his throat. He imagined the inside of the Shannon, with Bonzini, Ferris, and all the others, facing the door, waiting for Hal to bring him in. He'd been trapped!

His fear captured him again, suddenly and completely. He felt lightheaded, adrift. His knees weren't dependable, but he broke away and started to run. A gutter separated the old granite curbing from the worn bricks of the pavement. Miller jumped it, his heavy shoes floating out before him. The opposite walk would be a haven. If he could just make it! His ankle turned on a rounded brick, and the pavement slanted up to catch him. The lunch box skidded noisily down the street.

Hal walked to him and shook him to an upright position again. Then, while Miller stood in horror, Hal walked with deliberate hesitation to the lunch box and picked it up. But he merely slipped it under his arm.

"All right, come on. We can skip the drink. I thought you liked that place, Miller."

They reached the bridge and climbed the circular iron stairway together, stepping together, up and up, a step at a time.

At the top Hal faced Miller. Now there was no mistaking his intention. "That way," said Hal, deliberately spacing his words, "the road is open to you, but don't ever try to come back. This is the only chance you'll get."

Miller looked down the long tunnel of cables and bridge members which led to the residential city beyond. He held out his hand for the lunch box, unable to speak.

"What's holding you back?" asked Hal.

Miller leaned back against the balustrade. He waited for the final blow, hardly caring. His shoulder throbbed from his fall.

Hal walked up to him and held out the lunch box with both hands.

"Yes, I know what this is. I broke into your locker this afternoon and looked at it. I didn't tell the others" He drew in his breath. "I don't believe in killing, Miller, even a bastard like you. I just don't ever want to see you again."

The auto traffic on the bridge was heavy. A few loiterers watched the river, leaning over the balustrade. Some kids were

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throwing stones down at a tug beating its way stubbornly against the current.

Hal tossed the lunch box over the rail like a basketball. "Now, beat it," he said.

Miller turned and watched the lunch box sail down. It slapped on to the mottled surface of the water, bobbed up on a swell, and sank. He heard Hal's steps dim out down the stairway.

The neon signs of the cafés and bars framed the street that led beyond the Shannon. At the end of the street, Miller watched the last patch of the green lawn at the Hindemuth Iron Works disappear into shadow.

ELIZABETH THOMPSON spent fourteen years of her childhood in the Snake River region of northern Idaho, and the four brothers mentioned in her story are real. She has lived in California since 1913. After graduating from Mills College in 1919, she taught school and worked as a reporter. From 1924 to 1948, when she enrolled in the Stanford Writing Center, she was executive secretary of the Alumnae Association of Mills College. "No Meadow Lark Song" is a chapter from a novel on which Miss Thompson has been working for the past year.

✓ NO MEADOW LARK SONG

ELIZABETH THOMPSON

I knew when I got home from school in the afternoon I'd find Mother there in a pretty white linen blouse above her soft grey skirt, with a pink cameo pin at her throat. Once in a while, though, she'd still be in her starched gingham dress, her heavy pug of light hair slipped to one side, and I'd know she'd had a hard day and wouldn't have time for the things I'd been planning to tell her. She'd be cross and have two or three jobs for me to do the moment I stepped through the door. I'd wonder then if I'd remembered to make my bed before I left in the morning, or if I'd dusted, or practiced on our new piano as long as I should have, or if Nigger Dog had dug a hole in Mother's bed of nasturtiums. All the pleasant lovely things I'd been thinking about as I walked across the fields would leave me.

But if Mother were reading, or mending by the window where she could watch me coming home, then I'd remember to tell her about the meadow lark nest I'd just found or the trail bird with the necklace on its throat, dragging its wing ahead of me on the path.

I found nine meadow larks' nests that first spring, the year I was in the third grade and we moved into the new house on the hill, and even a greater number of the shallow careless nests of the trail birds close to the path. The meadow lark nests were softly

lined tunnels of shining brown and yellow like the tall grasses around them, hiding beneath sagebrush, or rocks, or clumps of grass, their little round openings concealed by velvet sea-green curtains of tender, softly blowing lupine leaves. I found them by leaving the path and wandering in the fields and feeling the whirl of frightened wings around my adventuring feet.

When I found a nest, I didn't trample the grass around it but marked in my mind how I'd find it again, on the warm sunny side of a flat boulder, to the left or right of a giant sagebrush, in a little valley near a shining patch of yellow bells, or where the blue *Brodiaea* was in blossom. Then carefully I'd kneel in the deep dry grass just long enough to look in the nest, as one would look inside a white candy egg for the picture there, to count the freckled white eggs or, if the eggs were gone, the straining wide-open mouths like triangles hinged together above the handful of down that filled the nest, or the pin-feathery little bodies and white-tipped wings. In every nest the birds were of a different age. Their nests left empty one after another were lonesome places.

I'd much rather be the child of a meadow lark, I told Mother, than the trail bird which planted her nest where it could be easily stepped on, and never looked for a pretty place to build it, but threw together quickly on the surface of the ground a few twigs easily gathered on which her little clay-colored eggs rested dangerously. One trail bird had even made its nest on a tiny island of grass in the middle of the road. I wanted to move the nest to make it safe from horses' hoofs, but Mother said the Lord who'd let the trail bird lay her eggs there would take care of it until the little birds were safely grown. Several times when long wagons with horses pulling them passed over the nest I closed my eyes and thought hard of what Mother had said. Always the nest was there when the wagon was gone, sometimes with a horse's hoof mark close to it, or a wagon mark cutting a few more spears of grass away from its shrinking island.

The meadow larks never endangered their homes that way.

They knew they'd concealed their nests well and built them strong and warm. They stayed confidently in their little tunnels until my feet came suddenly too close. Even if I stepped on their hidden houses, I wouldn't have crushed them, for they were protected by bushes above and soft pillows of grass below.

I had my first big geography book that year with pictures of rivers and canyons. I was studying what the water was doing to the land when I wasn't looking for birds' nests or following the ribbon-wide trails the black-and-red ants made from the sagebrush to their hills which sometimes were as high as my shoulder with the toothpick-sized logs they'd scissored off and dragged home over their dusty little roads. The water that ran in a stream beside the road after a rain cut straight down into the sandy soil. I'd lie on the grass and gaze into a deep rut which was like a canyon with landslides and deltas, and horizontal lines along its banks.

It took me a long time to get home, but Mother didn't worry, for she could see my head above the sagebrush and lupine as I came across the fields and said she knew I was in good company. Once, though, after school I had to go down town, a whole mile in the opposite direction from home, and I couldn't tell Mother when to expect me. I was to buy two brass rings for the doll hammock my new teacher was showing me how to weave, and she told me not to ask anyone but the storekeepers themselves where I could find what I wanted. I might have to wander all over town, for I didn't know then if brass rings were sold at grocery stores, or the drugstore, or some other place on Main Street. I whispered my question at a half-dozen places, including the butcher shop and a cigar stand, before I found them in the Bee Hive, that blessed store where we got our Christmas presents.

By the time I was ready to start home, the lights were on in the Bee Hive basement, though there was still sunshine on the hill and my long shadow ran ahead of me when I came up out of the valley. There was still time, I decided, to go around by my meadow lark nests, and see what the rain had done to my little

canyon, and to make sure the trail bird in the middle of the road was all right. I couldn't have eaten my dinner not knowing. It was so dark I had to look closely at the ground to locate the nest, and when I looked up I was startled to see a heavy man bent almost double, his head forward, running toward me down the road. Quickly I stepped behind a sagebrush and the man passed, not seeing me, though he was so close I could hear his breath drawn quickly in and out. When he was gone I started running toward the light I could see shining from the living room of our house.

"Hello," I said, putting my head through the door, "I got my brass rings."

Mother, who had her face to the window, her hands cupped like blinders beside her eyes, hadn't seen me come in. She snapped the light on in the hall and in the yellow circle beneath the tulip shade I could see she was frightened, and then suddenly angry. She took me by the shoulders and shook me quickly and then dropped her hands as though she'd told herself she mustn't shake me any more.

"Where have you been?" she asked in a tight voice, hardly louder than a whisper.

"I got my brass rings," I said again. "I told you I'd be late."

"Then you went to see your meadow lark nests and the trail bird in the road, and let us worry about you. The boys were just starting out to find you."

She raised her hand and I stepped back, afraid, but she turned quickly and walked into the living room and sat suddenly down on the couch as though the strength had gone out of her knees. I could see Father under the light in his den put down the book he was reading. The boys who were at the door when I came in whispered to me.

"You should get a licking," said Rob.

"You scared us half to death," Howard added.

"You ought to see what's in the paper," Dick said.

I began to cry, and Old Katherine, who'd stepped into the hall

when she heard me open the front door, picked me up and carried me into the kitchen and sat down on the fireless cooker with me in her lap. She held her scrubbed rough face against mine, but I didn't like it there and tried to push it away. I was sobbing because I didn't understand why everyone who should have been glad I was home was acting as though I'd done something wrong.

"We're not mad at you," Old Katherine said. "You just had us awful worried."

Over Old Katherine's shoulder I could see Howard motioning to me, crooking his finger invitingly. As soon as I could pull away, I followed him and Rob upstairs to their room. Dick and George were close behind. They closed the door and Rob dived under his bed for a newspaper he had hidden there.

"Don't tell Mother we showed you this," said Rob. "She's afraid you'll be scared."

He spread the paper out on the floor. There were black headlines halfway down the page, and two pictures. One was of a little girl with curly hair. She looked like Minnie Clark, only she wasn't Minnie, because Minnie didn't have that kind of coat and hat. Hanging from her hand was a little bag with a chain, the kind I carried my handkerchief and money in for Sunday School. The other picture was of a man with a beard. I thought of the man I'd just seen. He had a beard.

"What did the little girl do?" I asked.

"She got killed on her way to Sunday School yesterday," said Rob.

Howard's finger was following the type under the picture.

"'Marian Jensen, six-year-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan Jensen, victim of friend,'" he read.

"Fiend!" Rob corrected him. "That man killed her, bashed her head in with a rock."

He put his finger on the other picture, on the man's squinting eye.

"She wouldn't walk with her mother and brothers," said Howard, looking up from the smaller type he'd been studying.

"She ran around the little hill by the cemetery and promised to meet them at the other end of the path, but she didn't get there," said Rob. "It took just ten minutes."

"He told her he wouldn't kill her, if she didn't tell on him," Howard added. "Then he changed his mind. Said he'd learned not to trust any little girls."

"I think I saw him, coming home," I said. "He was running and all out of breath. I had to hide from him!"

"You couldn't have. He's in jail," said Rob, "but they're going to take him out. They're going to lynch him. They're going to hang him to the tree at the haunted house. They told Father."

There wasn't a sound now in the boys' room while we thought of the haunted house and its one tree that moaned when it rubbed against the roof, and the man who'd murdered the little girl; and the other men running, like the man I'd seen on the road, who'd be hanging the murderer soon. We jumped when we heard Mother's voice.

"Come to dinner," she was calling.

We burst out of the room and ran for the stairs. I could see, more clearly than the stairs in front of me, the little girl with her head smashed and her little bag which was probably red, and her coat which I knew must be blue like my own, muddied with dirt and blood, and the stone which had killed her tossed into the bushes.

"Don't tell Mother we told you," Rob said again, under his breath.

Father was hanging up the telephone receiver as we came down the stairs and walked ahead of us into the dining room. Quickly we took our places around the table, sitting down like one person. Nigger Dog came in, wagging his tail and grinning, settling down beside Rob, his head on Rob's knee, his brown eyes begging. I forced myself to eat my meat and potatoes, filling my mouth and gulping.

"Why are all the shades down?" I asked, noticing that even the curtains behind the ferns in the bay window were drawn close.

NO MEADOW LARK SONG

Through the heavy sliding door I could see that the shades on one side of the living room were also pulled down.

Nobody answered me, but suddenly I knew. They would have a bonfire on the hill that we could see from our windows. They were going to burn the man at the stake, like a witch! The telephone rang in the living room and I ran to answer it. A man's voice asked for Father. Everyone at the table stopped eating to listen. Ordinarily Mother would have said, "Go on with your dinner, children," but this time she didn't. She was listening too.

We heard Father say, "No, I'm not going. Yes, I have a little girl, but she won't be made safer by this expedition. We have laws for such things."

He hung up the telephone and it was so quiet I thought I could hear sounds outside the house, the sound of wheels and horses' hoofs. Then I was sure I heard a sound, like a man yelling. If there had been wind, I'd have called it that, but there was no wind. The air was so soft and quiet we could have had the windows open wide.

My eyes followed Father as he came back to his place. He never dragged his feet, I thought. He walked with his head up and his shoulders back, just as Mother tried to make me and the boys do. He was strong, stronger than anyone else. Then I looked at Mother and felt warm and safe. Mother's eyebrows went up and down again as though they had asked a question and answered it. Dick was eating calmly, but Howard and Rob whispered together. Rob nudged Howard until he blurted out a question.

"Why don't you go, Father?" he asked.

Father put his fork down and looked hard at Howard. We had all stopped eating. Even George sat still on top of his pile of books. My fork, I noticed, had stopped in mid-air, and I put it quietly down on my plate. At that instant there was a noise from a long way off, like corn popping inside a hot covered pan, several quick sounds at once and then a few delayed ones. Very much like popcorn, I thought, except for the feeling it gave to the pit of

my stomach. Then there was a flicker of light through the window shades, shining bright on the white paint at each edge.

Father's shoulders jerked and then straightened. Slowly and carefully he picked up his napkin, folded it, rolled it, and put it in its heavy silver ring. I felt Nigger Dog's body press against me and then I saw the old dog run across the living room to the corner behind Father's big leather reading chair. His head and tail were down and he had to squeeze into the narrow space. He lifted his head and opened his jaws in a long, low howl.

The room with its walls and windows and heavy outside door held on to the miserable sound. The shining linen tablecloth which had held us together a moment before, seemed to me now like a white lake separating us. I shivered suddenly in the warm air and then twisted my hands into one another and buried them between my knees.

MILTON WHITE *was born in Springfield, Massachusetts, and spent his life there up to his entrance into the Army. After his release from service he attended writing classes at Columbia, and in 1948-49 was at Stanford as a Stanford Writing Fellow. Several of Mr. White's feature articles have appeared in Vogue, and two of his stories in Seventeen. He is currently working on a novel.*

• THE YELLOW TURTLE-NECK SWEATER*

MILTON WHITE

The year I started at Yale as a freshman, the popular tune was "Goodnight, Sweetheart," and the latest in masculine attire, at least in my home town of Fairville, was the turtle-neck sweater introduced by Clark Gable. That year, too, Pa bought a Hudson, and one evening in September he used the new car as a final argument in the decision that the family would drive me to New Haven.

"After all," Pa said, as we finished supper, "with the new car, Yale is only about a two-hour drive from here."

Horrified, I protested. It would not be necessary at all for the family to drive me to New Haven. The train would serve the purpose, and I could go alone.

Ma and my kid sister Muriel, who was fourteen, were putting the dishes in the sink. Ma said, "But you're going to have a lot of luggage, Harry, and it seems a shame not to make use of the big trunk compartment in the car."

Some kids outside shouted for Bobby, my ten-year-old brother, but he stood in the kitchen, holding his football, waiting for a decision about the trip, his eyes wide. Everyone was watching me, and it occurred to me that the trip to New Haven had probably been planned and talked over by the family without my knowing it.

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"I don't have to be delivered at school like a kid going to camp," I insisted. Always, in those days, I had the feeling that because I was small and thin, no one believed I was grown up. "If I'm old enough to go to Yale, I'm old enough to get there alone."

Pa picked up the evening paper. "I see," he said, and he started to walk into the living room.

My sister Muriel rattled dishes in the sink and gave me a dirty look. Bobby dropped his football. Ma turned on the water, then she shut it off and looked at me calmly.

"No one says you can't get to New Haven alone, or even that you shouldn't," Ma said. "It's just that driving you down there would give us all the chance to see the school. You'll have plenty of time there on your own."

She turned on the water again and started to wash dishes. "If Pa wants to drive you to New Haven on Sunday, we're driving," she said.

I worked evenings as an usher at the Colonial Theatre, and I had to get to my job, so I could not argue any longer. Besides, when Ma set her face the way it was set, further argument was useless.

I said to Bobby, "Can't you hear those kids outside yelling for you? Why the heck don't you answer them?"

The movie at the Colonial drew a good crowd that night, and I was busy for a couple of hours. But after the final feature started, all I had to do was stand around and wait for it to end. I did not see much of it. I was too busy thinking about Yale.

All the movies I had ever seen about college life ran through my mind; in fact, they afforded the only impression I had of what college would be like. New Haven was only a two-hour drive from Fairville, but I had never seen Yale. I knew, however, that complete independence was a requisite for the young man entering college. In the movies, the fellow whose family brought him to school always turned out to be a drip and he never wound up marrying the girl.

THE YELLOW TURTLE-NECK SWEATER

That was Wednesday night. On Friday afternoon, I came home from downtown and found Ma alone in the kitchen. I showed her the railroad ticket I had bought.

"Honestly," I said, trying to sound cheerful, "it won't be necessary for Pa and all of you to go down to Yale with me on Sunday."

"Sit down a minute," Ma said quietly. She busied herself watching supper cook on the stove. I sat on the kitchen stool.

After a minute of peering into pots, Ma said, "I know how you feel about wanting to go to Yale alone, Harry. It's a big thing in your life. But it's a big thing in Pa's life and mine to have a son going to college. You're going to be there for four years, and you'll find lots of memories for yourself in that time. That's why I don't think you should object to Pa having the one happy memory of taking you to college for the first time. He's never been to college himself, you know."

Pa's car came into the driveway. He parked in the garage.

"Don't say anything about this," Ma said. "But you can decide for yourself what you want to do, and then we won't talk about it any more."

Pa came into the kitchen. He kissed Ma. I noticed the strength and roughness of Pa's hands. He was a plumber and heating installation man, and that kind of work shows.

"Meat loaf for supper," Ma said to him.

That night I returned the railroad ticket.

On Sunday the family piled into the new Hudson and Pa drove to New Haven. As we passed through each town Bobby asked, "Is this Yale?" and Muriel, sitting by the opposite window, said, "No. Not yet." Ma sat between them, her hands folded.

It was a fine September day and the first I saw of Yale was Harkness Tower outlined against the blue autumn sky as we entered New Haven. I recognized it from the catalogue.

"There it is," Pa said, pointing. "There's the college."

Everyone in the car leaned forward and stared. I held on tightly to the white box in my lap. This was Yale, and the white

box in my lap held a turtle-neck sweater I had bought for the occasion. It was going to be just like the college life I had seen in the movies. The sweater was a bright yellow.

My room was in Welch Hall, facing the campus. I had checked its location many times on the map in the catalogue, and I was sure I would have no trouble finding it. But I was surprised when Pa stopped the car without asking me, just outside the right gate and he said, "This must be the place."

We got permission slips for the family to enter the dormitory and see my room. Everyone helped with the luggage. The room was on the fourth floor. We stood by the windows, looking down at the pattern of sidewalks and shade trees on the campus, and the movement of fellows struggling toward the dormitories with their suitcases. I kept telling myself, "Here I am at Yale."

Bobby asked where the Yale Bowl was. Muriel said, "The campus is very pretty, I think." Ma said, "I can make up some bright draperies that will make your room real cheerful." And Pa said softly, "So this is Yale."

I felt old and independent. "Well," I said, looking around my room, "I have all the stuff from the car. I suppose you'll want to be starting back home soon."

I knew Pa did not like to drive after dark.

Ma said, "I thought we'd try to see Mike, while we're here."

Mike was my cousin. He lived in New York and was a junior at Yale. Ever since my acceptance at college, I had been corresponding with Mike. He was going to have a room in Harkness Quadrangle.

"He may not have arrived yet," I said desperately. The truth was I did not want to cross the campus with my family in tow. I was a college man now.

But Ma said, "In his last letter, he wrote that he would be here on Sunday. Don't you remember?"

"Oh yes," I said. But I was determined to go down fighting. "If you want to go over to Mike's right away, you can find his room and I'll be over a little later. I want to change clothes."

"We'll wait for you downstairs, on the campus," Pa said.

I accepted my fate. While the family waited for me outside the entrance to the dormitory, I unwrapped my new yellow turtle-neck sweater and put it on. It had to be worn without a shirt and the wool made me itch, but no one could deny that the sweater was smart-looking and collegiate. I went downstairs and joined the family and tried to lead them as rapidly as possible across the campus to Harkness. I even tried walking a little ahead of everyone.

Muriel said, "Hey, you're walking so fast people are looking. Slow down."

Muriel was right: the fellows who passed by were looking at us. Not so much because of my family, I decided, because for the first time I noticed other fellows walking around with their families. It was the yellow turtle-neck sweater. Two fellows coming toward me put down their suitcases and stared after me in envy. And well they might, I thought, for they themselves looked formal and stiff, wearing ties and tweed jackets.

As we passed the campus gates I thought I heard some other fellows who passed say "Rah, rah," and when I looked back they were staring at my sweater. I felt proud.

We found my cousin Mike's room without any trouble. I hung back while he greeted Ma and Pa and the rest of the family. I was surprised at the genuineness with which he said it was good to see everyone, and weren't Muriel and Bobby growing up fast? But then I remembered Mike was a junior at Yale, so naturally he would have that kind of poise.

But he lost his poise when he saw me. His eyebrows went up and he held out his hand hesitantly. I felt uncomfortable right away.

"Is something wrong?" I asked.

Mike stood back and stared at me. Then he exploded: "Are you joking? What kind of outfit is that you're wearing, anyway?"

"My sweater?" I said. "But I just bought it. In the movies——"

Mike slapped his forehead. "Oh migosh," he said. "A turtle-neck sweater."

My face burned. I remembered the fellows staring at me as I crossed the campus. I remembered distinctly the sound of the "Rah, rah," I had heard.

Just then someone knocked at Mike's door and he opened it to let in his friends. Somehow I survived the introductions and the surprised stares; then with Ma and Pa and the rest of the family, I escaped. We stood outside Mike's door for a minute, not speaking. I could not look at the family. I pulled at the neck of my sweater.

"We'd better go back to your room, Harry," Ma said to me.

Without another word, the family surrounded me. I let myself get lost in the middle of them. Muriel took my arm. And that was the way we walked across the campus. Ma and Pa walked in front, keeping their heads high, staring down anyone who looked. Muriel walked firmly by my side, and Bobby trotted along behind me, turning to stick out his tongue at anyone he found looking back at us.

They got me to my room.

No one mentioned the sweater. I pulled it off and threw it on the bureau and changed into a shirt and tie and jacket. Ma pretended to survey the room.

"Bright green would be a good color for the draperies," she said.

"Well," Pa said, "I guess we ought to be starting for home and let Harry get settled here." Everyone took a last long look around my room.

I followed the family to the car. Ma kissed me.

"Do you have to leave so soon?" I said, hanging onto Ma; and I meant it, about the whole family.

Pa smiled. "You're on your own, now," he said. And suddenly I felt lonely. Pa shook hands with me. "You'll be all right, won't you, Harry?"

I looked into Pa's eyes. "Yes, Pa," I said. "I'll be all right."

THE YELLOW TURTLE-NECK SWEATER

I watched the family car until it was out of sight and I could no longer see the kids waving at the back window. Then I walked slowly back to my room. For a few minutes I stood at a window, looking out at the campus. Then I went to the cot and picked up my new yellow turtle-neck sweater. I folded the sweater into as small a bundle as possible and I stuffed it in the bottom drawer of my bureau, way back in one corner.

ELIZABETH WOLFE is completing work on her A.M. in creative writing at Stanford. Her stories have appeared in *Common Ground* and *Stanford Short Stories*, 1949. "*The Thing in Their Hearts*" won second prize in a quarterly contest sponsored by the Bureau for Intercultural Education, for those stories which do most to further good intergroup relations.

THE THING IN THEIR HEARTS*

ELIZABETH WOLFE

Outside on the window ledge, a gray and brown bird hopped back and forth, looking for crumbs. Minnie unwrapped her lunch. The office atmosphere at noon was one of hushed expectancy. Everything looked ready to burst into activity at the stroke of the clock. The bookkeeping machines sat poised, with Gaylord's pale blue billheads sticking up from the rollers. Mr. Beamish's pen lay waiting in the deep seam of the ledger. Minnie looked at the columnar sheets on her own desk. This was the day for the Advertising Department trial balance. She was doing it alone for the first time, and the feeling of suspense in her chest gave her the queer sensation that she would float up from her chair if her feet were not firmly planted on the floor.

She bit into her sandwich and chewed slowly, trying to subdue this lighter-than-air feeling. The bird still hopped back and forth on the ledge, and crumbling a piece of bread, Minnie reached carefully over the slanting glass of the ventilator and scattered the crumbs in one corner. The bird, perched on the far edge, cocked its head and with cautious hops came closer.

"Eat up all the crumbs," she said. "Don't leave a scrap."

Mr. Levine did not like her to feed the birds. One time, shortly after she had started on this job, he saw her scatter crumbs on the ledge and later, when she went to his office with checks to be signed, he said, "Better to not feed the sparrows."

* Reprinted by permission from *Common Ground*.

"I don't think they're sparrows, Mr. Levine."

He turned his head sharply toward her. His thick lenses, catching light in a sunburst of rays, sparkled like cut glass.

"To me all birds are sparrows, Miss Feigenbaum."

She laid the checks on his desk.

"Yes, Mr. Levine."

"Don't mistake me, Miss Feigenbaum. I'm not stopping you from kindness to animals." He tapped his fingers against the desk blotter. She noticed that his nails were trimmed square. They looked scrubbed and had a natural gloss.

"In my father's province, Miss Feigenbaum, the villagers had a saying, '*Gde Zhidi, tam vorobyi.*'" He paused, and the tapping stopped. "That means, 'Where the Jews, there the sparrows.'"

She could not see his eyes through the light-struck lenses, but she could tell he was looking at her.

"Do we understand ourselves, Miss Feigenbaum?"

She nodded, and he waved in dismissal.

They did understand each other. Funny how you could tell about people, right from the beginning. She had known about Mr. Levine right away. And she felt he knew too.

"Do you want a place to stay?" he had asked her, when he read her application blank. "A long time maybe?"

"Yes," she replied. "I'm looking for a house where I can work for years maybe. I'm getting too old to shift around. I need security now, not change. I'll do a good job for you, Mr. Levine. I'll be loyal——"

"Never mind. Never mind." He waved his hands as if to hold back a crowd. "The young ones fly here and there. I need some steady ones who'll last. But you got to be good. You must know two and two. That's all—just two and two."

"Yes, Mr. Levine."

"This is a ritzy house. Not for people like us. But I have a knack they can use. Maybe you have a knack too. Maybe we can work together."

He looked out of the window to the parking lot below. The main wing of the store jutted out with its fluted stonework to cut off view of the tree-lined boulevard. He gave a funny little laugh. "They hide us in this cubbyhole. But the blood of the business is here in my department."

Minnie fumbled with the ring of her handbag zipper.

"Don't get me wrong," Mr. Levine said. "I'm not complaining. Gaylord, the big boss, is a fine man. He treats everybody like human beings."

He took off his glasses and began to polish them. His eyes, she noticed, were a faded milky blue. He did not speak again until he had hooked the gold bows over his ears. "But Gaylord can't boss the hearts of all his help. Some of them——" He shrugged his shoulders. "You'll find out soon enough. Now never mind. Let me show you the desk where you will work."

She found out a few days later, in the washroom. The outside door opened and she recognized Evelyn Prescott's voice.

"I told Mr. Olson that would happen if Gaylord made one of *them* head of a department. They bring in all their friends and relatives, and overrun a place."

She suddenly broke off, and through the silence, Minnie could imagine them mouthing soundless words at each other. She rustled toilet paper so that they wouldn't bend down and recognize the corrective shoes she wore.

Their voices started again, a little strained, as they tried to talk lightly of the new ostrich-plumed hats.

"Did you see that fabulous pink one?" Evelyn Prescott said. "It's a dream."

Minnie sat still, afraid to go out and face them. She waited until they finished renewing their makeup. When she heard the door slam shut, she went out and washed her hands under the cold water for a long time, turning the soap over and over in her fingers.

Now, as she chewed a dried black fig, she wondered what she could do to make Evelyn Prescott like her. No person was all

bad or all good. Even Mr. Levine must have some little faults, although she couldn't pick them out yet. Give Evelyn Prescott a chance and she would probably be friendly, like Mr. Beamish the time he explained the whole bookkeeping system. Maybe the way to reach her heart was just to do a good job. Evelyn was the advertising manager's assistant. If she could find no fault with Minnie's work, then it might be her feelings would soften. Like the trial balance, say. If Minnie got it right the very first day and had it ready for Mr. Olson by late afternoon, who could help but soften a little and be pleased?

It was still fifteen minutes before the others would return. Minnie wrapped the fig stems in the sandwich paper and brushed up every stray crumb. A head start would lose her nothing.

She rolled off a blank space on the adding machine tape to make room for ink notations. As she picked out the digits of the first amount, the electric drone inside the machine tingled through the plastic to her fingertips. The tape unrolled like a yard of ribbon from her desk. She tore it off, penned the column heading at the top, and started a new strip. When one o'clock came, she paid no attention to the resumed activity all around her. Her fingers flew over the keys, and the automatic release pounded its dull thunder in triphammer rhythm.

She heard the tap of high heels across the floor and glanced up to see Evelyn Prescott leaning over Mr. Beamish's desk. The seams of her nylons made ink-sharp lines from the hem of her beige skirt to the exact center of her black suede heels. She was talking in low tones to Mr. Beamish, then suddenly spoke louder. "Give these invoices to Miss Feigenbaum when you're through. We want them checked and returned by four o'clock." She turned halfway round and Minnie caught the look that always sent a feeling of guilt through her like a wave. She knew that until she could overcome this sense of shame she would never get Miss Prescott to unbend, and yet she had no way to prevent the flush that burned her cheeks.

Evelyn Prescott turned back to Mr. Beamish and nodded

toward Mr. Levine's door. "Hasn't *he* come back from lunch yet?"

"Not yet," Mr. Beamish said.

Minnie cleared her throat with a noise that sounded like a bark, and touched the keys of her adding machine. They felt slick. Automatically, she let her hand drop to the chair cushion and rubbed her moist palm and fingertips against the rough velvet covering.

The lighter-than-air feeling was completely dissolved. Her fingers worked as swiftly as ever, but a sense of dull routine smothered the spark she always felt in tackling a new job. Even when Mr. Levine came through on his way from lunch and said, "The trial balance goes good, Miss Feigenbaum? Let me know how you make out," the balm of his words was not enough to soothe the rawness.

When Mr. Beamish passed the invoices over to her, she raced through the simple arithmetic of monthly charges for radio time and billboard advertising, clipped the sheets together, and tossed them into the outgoing box, ready for the two o'clock pickup. At least she could make sure that Evelyn Prescott would never be able to complain about her speed.

It was almost four o'clock before Minnie completed totaling all the accounts. The six tapes lay on her desk, neatly folded so that the totals faced upward. Now that it was time for the final recapitulation, the comparing of the ledger totals with her own, the floating sensation crept back into her chest. She delayed the moment of discovery and sat there, staring at the folded tapes. What if only one digit were wrong? She might have to spend hours tracking down the error. She wanted it right immediately, not so much as a flag of defiance to Evelyn Prescott. She wanted it for Mr. Levine. It would be a way of saying thank you. It might in some little measure show him how much she appreciated his warmth and kindness, that she wanted to sustain him in his loneliness.

She realized she was being silly. Mr. Levine was too big a man to need the fragile prop she could lend him. And yet she knew she needed to lend him this feeble support. Only by doing this infinitesimal favor for him could she gather little crumbs of security for herself.

Her fingers hovered over the adding machine keys, then with smart taps pecked off the figures from the six tapes. She pressed the "Total" button and watched the keys leap up inch-long to record the numbers. Then she shut her eyes. She fumbled for the strip recording the ledger total and held it up near the adding machine. Then she opened her eyes. Digit for digit, the figures matched. She wanted to wave the tapes wildly, like streamers of confetti, and shout to all the office that she had succeeded at first try. Instead she sank back in her chair and gave herself time to calm down. Mr. Levine would be pleased.

As if he had sensed her thought, he opened the inner door and headed directly for her desk. He was holding a sheet of paper in his hand, but Minnie was struck mainly by the set lines of his mouth. His face looked as blank as the light-refracting glasses.

He tossed the paper on her desk and his words fell like a stone against her chest. "Mistakes we can't afford in this department, Miss Feigenbaum."

She saw a red circle around an item on a week-old invoice. Then everything blurred before her eyes. Mr. Levine's door snapped shut. With trembling fingers she tore the successful trial balance tape from the adding machine, collected all the other tapes, and looped them together with a rubber band. She stared at the neat little pile, not daring to look anywhere else for fear that all the workers in the office were watching her. Her cheeks burned and her throat felt choked up with shame.

Picking up the red-circled invoice, she pretended to study it, but it quivered in her hand and made a rustling sound. She laid it back on the desk and stared at it with eyes that would not focus. Gradually the pattern of the invoice sharpened and she saw two handwritten notes stapled at the top. One was a square of yellow

paper, scrawled over in green ink: "Damn it, Levine. I won't put up with such mistakes. Better hire someone who knows simple arithmetic. Simple arithmetic, Levine. T. Olson." The other was pale blue with precise red-pencil lettering: "Mr. Olson—I thought you'd want to see the attached. Mr. Levine should know that we could use less speed and more accuracy. Evelyn B. Prescott."

The colors blurred and shifted like bits of glass in a kaleidoscope before Minnie's eyes. Evelyn Prescott could have come and talked the mistake over. Like one human being with another. She could have been as mad as she wanted, only not to tattle right off to Mr. Olson. To blame Mr. Levine. To humiliate a fellow creature for one little mistake.

She studied the invoice to see what the mistake was. She erased the total she had previously penciled in and brushed away the eraser crumbs. Then she checked the extensions. A vague memory nibbled at her mind. Somehow the error looked too obvious. In her brain the mathematical calculation traced a familiar path. A week ago she would have noticed the difference in monthly billings. She studied the second item more carefully, remembering that she had done so once before. There was no error. Evelyn Prescott had fallen into a trap.

The feeling of relief made Minnie's lips relax, but she felt no satisfaction in being right. She wrote in the original figures. They looked so black and emphatic, almost defiant, that she erased the space again and with a harder pencil wrote the numbers in slender gray outlines. She wondered how she could explain this to Mr. Levine. The understanding between them had been shattered so swiftly she was afraid she could not find the words to mend it. Even though she could now prove that she was right, that momentary distrust would have left its mark.

As she started for his office, Mr. Beamish glanced up. "Get it straightened out?" he asked.

She nodded dumbly.

Mr. Levine took the invoice from her without looking at it and

tossed it in his outgoing box. His mouth was still set in tight hard lines.

She waved her hand toward the invoice and her words came out in a sudden squeak. "There was no mistake. The second item is for February. Evelyn Prescott did not see that."

Mr. Levine turned his face up toward her but remained silent. Then he cleared his throat noisily, reached to pick up the invoice again, and studied it carefully. "So," he said. "It was Prescott's mistake after all."

Minnie nodded. "But anyone could have made it," she said. "I almost did myself. If she had only asked me."

She could not see his eyes, but his glasses shone up at her as if reflecting pleasure. He threw the invoice back into the box with a gesture of triumph. "Excuse me, Miss Feigenbaum. In my excitement and stupidity I forgot to ask you. How was the trial balance?"

Minnie almost gurgled. "The trial balance balanced, Mr. Levine. Digit for digit."

"Good," he said.

He took off his glasses. His milky-blue eyes studied her face until she had to look away in embarrassment. When she glanced back, his mouth was twisted by a smile of sadness. Still smiling, he slowly polished his glasses with a clean white handkerchief. Then looking up at her again, he said, "You know, Miss Feigenbaum, it's the thing in their hearts that blinds their eyes."

She stood there, watching him, feeling that her bones would turn to liquid in the pathos of that smile. Then, hardly knowing what she said, she murmured, "Thank you, Mr. Levine. Thank you very much," and backed out through the door.

PATRICIA FARRELL ZELVER *was born in Long Beach, California, in 1923, but she grew up in Medford, Oregon. She attended the University of Oregon, graduated from Stanford, worked in San Francisco, and then returned to Stanford for an A.M. in English in 1948. She was married in 1949, and continues to write.*

THE LONG HOT DAY*

PATRICIA FARRELL ZELVER

Her father sat hunched under the lamp light, his lap filled with twisted copper spinners and swollen silver bobs and many-colored flies. The old tin tackle box lay open on the table beside him and its discolored felt lining smelled of the fish that had been dead since last summer. Her father was bent over, beneath the lamp, studying the glitter of his favorite spinner.

For just one moment it was all too much. I won't ask, Ann decided. She had no need, really, to sit one long hot day in a hard boat with a pole in her hand.

Her father had found a piece of decayed velvet in the box and was scrubbing his spinner with vigor and care.

"May I go with you tomorrow?" Ann said. It was done now. "Please, Daddy, let me go."

"Now what would I want to take you for?" He looked up at her and grinned so that the wrinkles went slipping about on his great, old handsome face.

"You promised! The next time you went with Gasper."

All this, then, because she was going away. The waste of a summer's day—they were expendable in Eagle Point—as a farewell gesture before she left, in a week, thank heavens, for Los Angeles where she had a job.

"You'd embarrass me," he said. "You can't fish!"

No, it was an art she had not yet mastered. One needed, she

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felt, to be a monomaniac first. "I could if you wouldn't always experiment with my bait," she told him fretfully.

Her mother came into the room then, dressed for dinner in a black crepe gown. "Did you ever hear anything so funny?" said her father. "Ann wants me to take her fishing!"

Ann was certain by her mother's quick glance that it was true: she had never heard anything so funny. "I thought you were having lunch with me at the club," her mother said. "I thought you were making up my foursome."

"I—I'm going fishing," Ann told her.

Her mother laughed. "Why, you don't expect him to introduce a member of his family to his precious Gasper, do you?" she said.

Her father sank back in his chair, crossed his legs, and lit a cigarette. "Gasper and I get along," he said. He liked the thought that they were jealous of the disreputable Gasper. "Now, what would we want with a woman on our trip?" he asked them.

"You promised!"

"Well, well," said her father, reaching out to tousle her hair. "I'll tell you what! Seeing as you're going away——" He was, she felt, resigned at last. "Seeing as you're going to leave us for the big city, I'll take you. But no foolishness on this trip. No, sir!"

"Why, you'd think Gasper was a rich client of yours, Paul," said her mother. "The way you kowtow to that man!"

"He's a prima donna," her father said proudly. "Yes, sir, a regular prima donna! You have to know how to treat Gasper! He won't take just anyone out in his boat! He don't take Al Bates any more, not after——"

"Al used flies when Gasper told him to use eggs," said her mother in a singsong voice.

"No, sir, he won't take Al any more." Her father's face became very serious. "Now, we're getting up at six o'clock in the morning," he said. "No foolishness on this trip!"

"It's all foolishness," said her mother, and Ann agreed with

her silently. "But if you're going," her mother said, "I'll make you a lunch. You ought really to have a good lunch and I'll make one for you. And, Paul," she said, with the tiniest trace of concern, "take your pills with you, dear. You can never tell. Someday you might need them in the most unexpected place!"

At eight in the morning Gasper waited for them at the bridge. He was a squat, fat-muscled man and he was wearing khaki pants and a white T-shirt.

"Gasper, this is my daughter, Ann, who thinks she can fish," her father said. Gasper called her Miss, however, throughout the rest of the day.

The river under the bridge was deep and still like a pool. While the two men worked to get the flat, heavy boat off Gasper's trailer, Ann wandered to the water's edge and looked down into the amber-clear, rock-edged bottom. She put one hand down, deep, into the water and brought it up, ice-cold and red. She sat down, cross-legged, in the damp sand and looked at the green leaves that trailed from tall trees into the water and she could smell the spiced dew that still clung to the shade. The men shoved the boat into the water and they all climbed in and Gasper motioned with his hand for Ann to sit in the bow.

"Ought to be a good day, eh, Gasper?" her father said.

"Ought to be."

Now, what would make it a good day, she wondered, for even if it rained they wouldn't care!

The river under the bridge was still and deep but as Gasper rowed them toward the bend the thunder of the first rapids came to them from far away. Soon they were in another part of the river, a narrow rush of water, arched by dripping willows and shaggy oaks and grey flowering snakebrush and there were little streams that wandered off into the tangle of the strange, lonely meadows that lay within the tangle.

"Did you save a riffle for me, Gasper?"

"Don't worry!"

But one riffle, Ann thought sadly, was so much like another.

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And the most ridiculous thing was that when she went to Los Angeles she would carry her false faith even there. "You should see our Rogue River!" she would exclaim, as she had heard him exclaim so often. "Zane Grey said his favorite riffle was on the Rogue!"

"You mean 'ripple,' don't you?" the city girls would say.

"You don't know what a 'riffle' is! Well!" And she would go on from there, as he did, to enumerate the virtues of her little Oregon town. It was strange the way he loved the place she longed to leave.

The boat was bouncing on the river now. The sun hit hard upon the water and the moist heat sank into their limbs.

Gaspar squatted on the floor of the boat to drop anchor. "We'll try this spot," he said. "Mike Denim had a fellow up from Frisco last week who caught the limit here. Fellow said he was going to send for his family and set up housekeeping in Coney Point!"

"Smart fellow!" said her father.

Oh, Coney Point! Oh, Coney Point! Ann remembered a friend of hers who had gone to college in the East and when she returned to Coney Point she could not stand it. There's nothing here, she had said to Ann's father. It had been a supreme *faux pas*.

Nothing in Coney Point? Nothing, except God's Country! And he had pointed out all the Easterners who had their pictures taken, holding their catch, in the *Coney Point Gazette*. They found something here, all right, didn't they? And, besides, my girl, just wait until you buck the streetcars for a while. You'll be back!

But of course the poor girl never returned. She didn't have the courage after that. It took courage to live in Coney Point, anyway, Ann thought.

Still, it was strange, these days, to find a man so satisfied.

"Eggs, Miss," said Gaspar. He turned to her father. "You might try a fly in here."

Ann put an oily, pink egg upon her hook, entangled the leader

in the line, disentangled it, and let it drop over the boat. "More line, Miss," Gasper said from the stern.

Her father cast his lines out over the water and the green and red fly touched and flickered and dissolved in the glare.

"Understand you have a rival on the river now," said her father.

"Takes out movie stars and millionaires. He can have 'em."

"Now, you're just jealous," he said and grinned at Ann. "Gasper, here, just loves movie stars!"

"They can go back where they come from," said Gasper.

Her father winked at her and then, leaning over, adjusted her line. "Keep the tip up higher," he warned.

"Took a movie star out once. Never again."

"Why, that's too bad," her father said. "Ann was hoping she'd see Clark Gable on the river."

"You can have Clark Gable," said Gasper. "I'll take Mickey Mouse."

"Say," he said in a whisper to Ann, "that was a strike! You got to pull up quick on those babies!"

"I didn't see anything," Ann said.

"You have to feel it," said Gasper with a sigh.

The lines were brought up and examined. Ann's egg was gone.

"No use even talking about movie stars," Gasper said. "Bad luck."

Once more they floated, tense, in the swirling pool, and a slow excitement caught Ann and she felt in the silence that all her nerves were on guard for a bite.

"Ah!" Her father's line jerked, then he released it. He let the line spin out over the water and every movement of his body was with the job. The line played in and out around the boat until the action on the other end of it was stilled. Then, at that moment, out over the water, a shower of speckled silver shot through the air. "What's the matter with you?" her father said, chuckling, taking a fat trout off his hook. "You going to let me catch all the fish?"

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"Give me time. Give me time," Ann told him.

"We got all the time in the world," said Gasper.

Then right away her father had another strike and this time the fish got away. "Darn it," said her father, and Ann remembered he did not swear before the prima donna.

"You'll get him, Paul," said Gasper.

"I'll get him," her father said. "Wait and see."

But after a while there were no more nibbles and Gasper took up the oars and they started down again through the green and solitary archway and once, when there were not too many trees, a monstrous shadow filled the river with darkness and Ann looked up and saw Table Rock, rooted in the valley on her right. Once, long ago, Chief Joe of the Rogue Indians had smoked a peace pipe with the white men on that gaunt and jagged stone. She thought how odd it was that he had done so, long ago, and how the shadow still covered the water and the water still tumbled over granite ledges and divided into swift, dark channels and the steel-head and the salmon still came up the river to spawn and die.

"Oh," said Gasper, grunting. "Over there!" For there was something dead upon the rock. A vulture moved in a slow circle above it, descending in degrees upon his prey.

They had stopped, now, at Zane Grey's riffle and this time Ann caught two trout, one right after the other, and her father, after ten minutes, in which he jumped into the shallows to fight, landed a ten-pound steelhead that lay, gasping, at the bottom of the boat.

Now the sun shone straight above them and Gasper took off his T-shirt and wiped the sweat off his red, hairy chest, and they all took out their lunch and ate with the boat anchored deep in the noisy stream.

Her father remembered that this was where he'd caught the big one this time last year. Gasper said it was the biggest one he'd ever seen.

"My wife's father wouldn't believe me," her father said.

"Jealous," said Gasper.

After lunch they went on down the river. Their silence seemed

a part of the sound of the water. As they plunged through the rapids of the lower fork Ann looked up and saw the United Airlines' passenger ship sailing low, too, over Table Rock.

Then, at that moment, her father's line was almost wrenched from his hand. His body stiffened and the pole bent low over the water and for a moment the tip was submerged. Her father hurriedly released his line and the great fish on the other end of it shot off under the boat and her father changed his position and released more line, his chest heaving with the exertion and his face red with sweat.

Ann saw that Gasper watched her father, not the line, and she saw him slide away from his place in the stern, holding the net in his hand, waiting for the moment when the fish would stop fighting. But instead, quite suddenly, her father's arm slackened, the pole wavered and would have dropped if Gasper had not reached for it in time. Quite suddenly her father's body seemed to waver like the rod and his face changed and became white under the redness. There was a moment when she would have screamed in terror, but then her father smiled and his face was all right again and he said, "I must be crazy, letting that baby go!" And Gasper said quietly, "Anybody has trouble after lunch."

Her father took his pole from Gasper then, who slid back to the stern, and Ann, watching him, thanked heaven she had not screamed. Her father had said no foolishness on this trip, and he had meant that kind of woman-foolishness that spoils good things. Ann thought of asking him about his pills, but instead she said, "It must have been a monster, that one!" and she knew it was the better thing to say.

It was growing dark now and the fish had come out to play upon the water. Her father said, "Best time of the day," and Gasper said, "Ten minutes until sundown."

The sun, just sliding out of sight behind the great rock, had turned into a fiery orange, and for a moment, as it disappeared, the orange streaks split the sky.

"Five more minutes," said Gasper, looking at the sun.

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But Ann, looking at her father, saw that the shadow of the rock had swallowed up his face. She thought, then, how in a few years he would die. Oh, he would fish no more! The thunder and the sweetness of the river held her, like a haunted thing, and she thought how, in a few years, her memory of its beauty would be filled with pain.

In a few years there would be movie stars and millionaires, for the cities were suddenly dangerous, and these people, who did not know her father, would walk the streets of Coney Point, and Gasper, who was younger, would take them out in his boat to Zane Grey's riffle in spite of himself, but her father would go no more.

She thought how in a week she would go away and how it seemed different, going, now. She thought, there will be more grace in leaving, when, for the first time, it would be easier to stay.

"I'll catch another," she said. "There's just time to catch another."

"Why, we'll make a fisherman out of her yet, won't we, Gasper?" said her father with his grin, and it seemed to her the most gallant compliment she had ever received. "But you'll have to learn to hold your tip up, first," he added, carefully.

"Oh, I will, I will," she said to him. "Just wait and see!"

