

University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, &
Professional Papers

Graduate School

1983

Who Never Had a Brother| Stories and poetry

Thomas Michael Kalaris
The University of Montana

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd>

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Kalaris, Thomas Michael, "Who Never Had a Brother| Stories and poetry" (1983). *Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers*. 4087.
<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/etd/4087>

This Professional Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Student Theses, Dissertations, & Professional Papers by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

COPYRIGHT ACT OF 1976

THIS IS AN UNPUBLISHED MANUSCRIPT IN WHICH COPYRIGHT SUBSISTS. ANY FURTHER REPRINTING OF ITS CONTENTS MUST BE APPROVED BY THE AUTHOR.

MANSFIELD LIBRARY

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

DATE: 1983

WHO NEVER HAD A BROTHER

Stories and Poetry

by

Thomas Michael Kalaris

B.A., University of Montana 1974

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

1983

Approved by:

Rick DeMarcus

Chair, Board of Examiners

[Signature]

Dean, Graduate School

6-7-83

Date

UMI Number: EP35044

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.



UMI EP35044

Published by ProQuest LLC (2012). Copyright in the Dissertation held by the Author.

Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

All rights reserved. This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code



ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

TABLE OF CONTENTS

FICTION

Fetching Jeremy Home 1
A Hole in the Sky 11

POETRY

Poem for Sterling Holloway 32
Lear at Gloucester 33
The Golddust Twins 34
Funeral 35

FICTION

Who Never Had a Brother 36

Fetching Jeremy Home

As I drove down the highway towards Sidney, the truck pulled to the right like it had a mind of its own. It was Father's truck, his blue-beater Ford, and he had driven it across the farm roads of Central Montana and ruined the alignment. Sometimes the truck would pick a direction and go, regardless of what I wanted. Inside, the cab was filthy. Years ago Father had quit turning his head to spit the small pieces of tobacco stems. Now the interior was a uniform, sticky brown, save the driver's seat and the spot next to my leg where the dog, Rule, usually lay.

My father slept as I drove. His head rested against the passenger window, rebounding slightly each time the wheels hit a bump. Outside, the weather was typically April. The land was bare and brown and there were patches of snow that marked where the largest winter's drifts had been. The grass nearest the pavement was beginning to green. It was an appropriate day to follow Mother's funeral.

After a time Father raised his head and looked around. He twisted his neck and sat with his backbone straight. I guessed he was looking for a ridge or a river that was familiar, a marker to tell him where he was.

"How late is it?" he asked.

"Almost two," I said. He looked sober and his eyes were no longer glazed. He reached into his jacket, pulled out his pint of Ten-High, and took a short drink. "Do you

want to eat first?" I asked. "Before we get to Uncle Harry's?"

"No. We can eat on the way back." He leaned his head against the window again and watched the fields as we drove. "Jeremy might be hungry," he said. His body was losing its numbness and he pulled his coat tighter around his neck. "We pass Circle yet?" he asked.

"About fifteen minutes ago," I said. He twisted his neck and tried to bury his head into the seat. He has square shoulders and a large skull which was typical of most Scottish. He had worked on ranches his whole life, and though he was in his forties, he was stronger than most men half his age. He stretched out diagonally on the seat and wiggled his hips to get comfortable. On the road, the magpies scattered from the carcass of a rabbit.

"Wake me when we get to that long hill just outside Sidney," he said. He made a few moaning sounds, then stopped. He always would whimper like this when he was tired. Then I could tell by his long steady breathes that he was asleep.

We were going to Sidney to get my little brother, Jeremy. After the funeral my aunt and uncle had snuck him out of the house to live with them. All the family agreed it was best. Jeremy was twelve and my father was not fit to parent. The aunt and uncle laughed when they tossed the bags into the back of their car, said it would be two weeks before Father even noticed that the boy was gone.

My father is an ass. I think I knew this years ago, before I left home, before I was able to step away from our

household and see it as a stranger would. He was short and ignorant and brutal. The day I turned sixteen and finally grew taller than he, I vowed that I would never be like him. He hated Mother, thought her coughing fits and prolonged illnesses were ways she tried to get back at him. They were always in a silent war. Once Mother was having trouble breathing and her medicine ran out. Father left to drive the 150 miles to Great Falls to find the right pharmacy and he didn't return until the next morning. Drunk. He came into the bedroom and when my sister, Sarah, saw he was drunk, she pulled the white sack from his hands. The purple medicine and several small, red packets fell onto the rug. Sarah stopped and Mother pulled herself onto her side and laughed. "You old fool," she said. "If you want to see me dead, a bunch of rubbers won't do it." She tried to laugh and Sarah poured some medicine into a spoon. "Go on," Mother yelled. "I bet you're as worthless to her as you are to me."

Father bent over and picked up the packets at his feet. Sarah walked past him and he grabbed her by the arm. "So you know what these are?" he said.

"Let me go," she said. She tried to twist away but he held her with one hand.

"Yeah, I bet you do know all about these, don't you?" She was afraid of him. More even than I was.

The road had no traffic. It spanned the miles of emptiness between two towns that no one visited. I hit a large

chuck hole and Father's head banged against the window. I tried to tell myself I'd done it on purpose. He stared ahead along the black ribbon of highway. His hands, from habit, began feeling around in his pockets for his snoose. Then he remembered where we were, and that he had repeated this search several times before, and that he had no snoose with him.

"I worked out here once," he said. "The Briggs' spread, about fifteen miles to the south." He motioned with his hand. "You don't remember, do you?"

"Did we live here?" I asked.

"For a little while. Just when your sister was born." He pulled out his pint, took another drink, and washed the whiskey around his mouth like it was mouthwash. "I remember your mother pregnant, patting around the kitchen of the shack we lived in her barefeet. She thought her coughing was from the dust." He took another drink. "The cheap bastard Briggs. I quit him." He put the bottle back and pulled his coat around his neck. "Someone shot him a while back," he said. "Ten, fifteen years. Served him right."

We were quiet for a while. Then he stared up again. "That gutless Harry. What a lousy SOB. Margaret too. Cheap bitch. Always dying her hair." He kept his eyes on the road. To the left we passed a small gas station and bar. A flashing sign advertised "welcome." "Now they pull this," he said. "Think I'll stand for it."

I don't know why Father wanted me to drive him to Sidney.

Perhaps he thought the five years apart had brought us closer. Perhaps he forgot that he had given up hope of me turning out decent. He told me I had too much of my mother in me to be worth a damn. Maybe he remembered me, and not my brother Dale, sitting beside him on his salvage trips to the country dump. Or perhaps he knew that Dale was in his image, and he, too, wanted Jeremy to get away.

Father never liked Jeremy. He was the youngest and Mother worked hard to make him a "dandy," someone to fetch water for tea, to wipe the dishes dry and pile them neatly beside the sink. The month before I left to enlist, I came into the kitchen and saw Father holding him upside down under one arm. He had borrowed some electric clippers and was shearing Jeremy's blond curls like he would a sheep. Jeremy was bawling and Mother was in the bedroom, trying to yell "you bastard" but she couldn't get the words out without coughing. Father grinned and large clumps of hair fell across the toe of his boot.

After an hour the truck crested the long, gentle hill which sloped into Sidney. To the east, I could see the Yellowstone winding its way north, its banks lined with the bare cottonwoods. I had been here maybe five times before this, as a child to visit my grandmother. It was a lousy town.

"You remember the way to Harry's?" he asked.

"I think so," I said.

"Let's gas up first," he said. "I want to wash my face."

I passed one gas station, then pulled into the Town Pump. While I was inside paying the clerk, I saw a pay phone on the wall. But there was no need. Sarah had called ahead to warn that we were on our way and Harry would be waiting. I went outside and stood facing into the wind. It was from the northeast and followed the river. Father appeared and crawled into the cab. I got in and drove to Harry's house which was on the east side of town.

We parked in the driveway and Father went up to the front door and knocked loudly. Harry answered. He only opened the door enough to stick his head out.

"You've come a long way for nothing, Karl," he said.

"Where's the boy?" Father asked.

"Inside. But he's not going back with you."

"Jeremy!" Father yelled towards the inside of the house.

"Why don't you come back when you're sober," Harry said. "We can talk then."

"Bullshit," he said, then he yelled again. "Jeremy, get your coat."

The neighbors on one side began peeking out their

windows. Father looked up at Harry and snorted. Then he pushed past him and went into the front room. I walked to the door and Harry let me in. My aunt Marge appeared from one of the back bedrooms. She was small and round and didn't look like Mother at all. I had seen her at the funeral but now she looked tired and her eyes were red.

"Karl," she said, "sit down and let's talk a minute." Father stood in front of her. "It wasn't right. Not talking to you. But after the funeral you couldn't be found."

"Couldn't be found? With my whole family against me."

"We all want what's best for Jeremy," she said.

"Oh, that's right. What's best for Jeremy."

"What's it going to be like for him?" she said.

"In a year Sarah will be gone, and then Dale. Who's going to care for him?"

"He don't need no goddamn nurse."

"And I don't want to leave him alone with you."

Father slapped her and she fell onto the couch and started to cry.

"You bastard," Harry said. "Get out. Get out of my house now."

Father laughed. "Your sister was one hell of a lot tougher than you," he said to Marge. He headed down the hallway towards the bedrooms. He found Jeremy and

Marge cried.

"Get your jacket," I heard him say. "And quit your bawling."

Marge reached across and grabbed my hand. "You've got to help us," she said. "He'll ruin him. Ruin him cause he's like your mother."

Father came back with Jeremy walking beside him. Jeremy's cheeks were red and he carried his blue jacket under his arm. Father walked into the room and stopped. His eyes went to the door where Harry stood. Harry was pointing a pistol at Father's belt.

"The boy is staying," Harry said.

Father didn't say anything for a second. He looked at me and then at Marge. Then he smiled. "So this is how it is?" he said. No one answered.

"Jeremy," Father said, "go stand next to Ben." My brother came and grabbed my waist. I could feel him tremble.

Father walked towards Harry. His hands were in his pockets.

"I'll shoot you, Karl," he said. "I'll gut shoot you."

"You'd be afraid of messing the rug." Father walked up in front of the gun. He stood and stared at Harry.

"Move," Father said. Harry didn't budge.

"Move," Father yelled, like he was loading a cattle car. Harry lowered his gun and then Father kicked him in the shin. Harry fell to the floor and grabbed his leg.

Father pulled the door open and said, " You two get in the truck."

I took Jeremy and we waited in the truck like he said. I felt like I was twelve years old again. Jeremy was still crying and I wanted to drive away, take off and go anywhere as long as it was away from this.

After a minute Father came out and crawled into the truck. "Let's go home," he said. He pulled out his pint and took a long drink.

We got back on the highway and started back to Lewis-town. Jeremy cried for a few minutes, hugging Father's arm and burying his head into Father's coat. "Don't worry, Jeremy," he said. "I'm not going to let anyone take you." He put his arm around the boy's shoulder. He finished his whiskey before we had gone twenty miles and threw the bottle out the window. Then he leaned his head against the window and watched the miles of vacant land.

I drove as fast as the truck would allow. The sun would be down soon and it would take five hours to get back. Sarah would be waiting, sitting in Mother's rocker, crying. She would know that she and Dale, my aunt and uncle, and I had failed, and that Jeremy was on his way back. The next morning I would return to college and try to forget this had happened, or that I even had a family. I looked over at Father. Perhaps he no longer reacted to the brown landscape and the cold wind. Perhaps his mind was washed as pale as the moon's face. I looked at him and thought

how much I hated him, and wondered if I could ever be as strong as he was.

A Hole in the Sky

When the people of Saoma first saw the square sails of British ships, they thought that the white outline was a rip or hole in the sky. Maybe that was why I stopped there when I left LA. I wanted to see any world where the people believed that Europeans fell through a hole like a Lewis Carroll tale.

When I met Lenny, he was carrying ice. It was still morning and I was walking along the main road in Pango taking pictures of the rusty Quonset huts and coconut trees. I had started out that morning with a goal of walking around the bay to the cannery on the other side. He was walking from the opposite direction and looked like he might have fallen through a hole. One plastic bag of ice dangled from each hand and two more were pinned beneath his arms. The ice was melting and the waistband of his pants was wet.

I asked him if he wanted any help. He looked up and tried to push his glasses back onto his nose with his shoulder. He was American -- average height but skinny, mid twenties.

"Yeah, thanks," he said. "I guess I should have made two trips." I took the two bags from his left arm. "I'm going over there," he said motioning with his head, "over to the boat dock."

I followed him to the water and then out onto a small, wooden dock. He dropped his two bags into a rubber dingy

which was tied to one of the wood piling, then reached over and grabbed the two sacks from me.

"Thanks," he said. "I haven't seen you before."

"Haven't been here long," I said. I told him my name was Jason and we shook hands. The insides of both arms were scarred and the ice had changed his skin into long red and white streaks.

"Those are from Vietnam," he said. "The worst part was the two years in and out of VA hospitals. They gave me a partial disability." I nodded. "Look, I live on that sailboat out there. Want to come out and have a beer?"

I told him sure. That's what happens when you have nothing to do and the whole day ahead of you. We hopped into the dingy and he put the oars into the oarlocks.

"It's not really my boat," he said as we pulled away from the dock. "It belongs to a guy named Randall who left. Had to go back to Hawaii for a while. I'm just taking care of it for him."

The boat was named "Stephanie Jane" -- a 35 ft. sloop out of LA. The hull was white with two orange stripes stenciled along the sides and the name painted on the transome in large, swirling letters. Naming a boat is not easy. Some owners name them after their wives. Some give their boats ridiculous and idealistic titles like "Courageous" or "Indomitable." Others tack on names meant to evoke visions of romance and adventure, names like "Windward Passage" or "Spray." If I had a boat I'd

name it "Unrequited" and be done with it.

When I lived in LA I knew a man who retired from his job after 35 years. Every Friday for 35 years he stopped by the office for his paycheck. He had no retirement plan so, on his last day, his employers, the same company for all 35 years, as a token of esteem, gave him an extra weekly paycheck. "Thanks for a job well done. Catch you later, fella." I used to see the man hanging around his job site like an old dog that was lost and confused by the winter's first snow. I vowed never to let that happen to me. When in doubt grab your clothes and move on. Accept no compromise. I decided if I kept compromising there'd soon be nothing left of me. I planned to keep going until I found what I wanted.

Lenny dumped the ice into two coolers below deck and returned with two Vilima beers. We sat in the cockpit under a blue and white pinstriped awning and talked. We were both from California. He had been an electronics nut in high school before he was drafted. I had quit my job in LA and was traveling.

"Most people don't like Pango," he said. "They call it the Tijuana of the South Pacific." I laughed. "They move on -- Tonga or Fiji. Hawaii. Depending on which way they're going. That's why I'm taking care of the boat. No one else stays."

"How long have you been here?" I asked.

"Six months."

"Work at all?"

"No," he said. "There's not much work. I get by fine on my checks. Get drunk once in a while."

"You like it here?"

"It's okay. Beats the States." We finished the two quarts of beer and Lenny suggested we go back.

Instead of taking the dingy, we swam to shore. The water was clear and Lenny didn't even bother to change from his long pants or take off his shoes. I at least wore shorts. We both laughed when we walked onto the beach. Part of me felt silly, standing on the grass and dripping dry, but at the same time I decided that there was nothing wrong with being all wet. This was Samoa.

"Why don't you come over to the Pango Bar," Lenny said to me when we crossed the road. "I'm supposed to meet someone there. We can have another beer. It won't take long." I said fine.

The Pango Bar would have been a dive on any waterfront. The tables and chairs were wooden and had been smashed and pieced together many times. There was a small bandstand and the furniture had been pushed against one wall to make room for dancing. Other than a few Samoans who stood next to the bar, the place was empty. Lenny led me to a table near one of the louvered windows and the barmaid came over to see what we wanted.

"This is ..." and Lenny introduced me to the barmaid who looked about forty and weighed every bit of 250 lbs.

I didn't catch her name. She tapped Lenny on the shoulder and looked over at me.

"Suzy will come later," she said. Lenny nodded and asked her to bring us two beers.

"Suzy is a girl I see once in a while," he said. "Her daughter." I nodded. "She's sort of young," he said. Suzy's mother returned with the beers and I paid.

We sat and looked out the window for a couple of minutes. The weather was hot and muggy. I hadn't rained yet but it could. It rained everyday in Samoa -- not all day, just showers that would last five minutes or so. The Samoans never bothered to come in out of the rain. After a day or so I realized that they were right. With the heat and humidity, it didn't matter. It was something basic-- something you accept as it is. Rain was nothing to hide from.

A thin man in his late forties walked in and came to our table. He looked out of place dressed in dark slacks and carrying a black umbrella beneath his left arm. Lenny introduced him to me as Donald Noon. I had seen him before in the hotel where I was staying. He didn't have a room but instead slept on a bed in the hallway. Most mornings I would nod to him as I left. Often he would be sitting near the open window in his black socks and underwear, drawing on a homemade drafting table, oblivious to the people who passed him. We shook hands and he joined us.

"I've seen you at Herb and Sia's," I said. "You're

working on blueprints or something." He lifted his head and moved it from side to side as if his neck were stiff.

"Yes," he said. "A small office building. It could be worth money if I ever finish it."

"Donald's a draftsman," Lenny said. Donald studied me for a second, then looked at Lenny.

"Did you see our friend Mac?" Donald asked. Lenny reached into his pocket and pulled out a roll of wet bills and handed them to Donald.

"He doesn't have all the money yet," Lenny said.

"Samoans," Donald said without raising his voice.

"No concept of responsibility."

"We won some money betting on the boat races and the big rugby game they had here Flag Day," Lenny said.

"These Samoans don't bet with their heads," Donald said and he smiled. "They have a very high opinion of their talents. We worked up a little parimutual daily-double." He laughed softly without opening his mouth and stopped counting long enough to wipe his index finger on his shirt. He looked up at the bar and motioned to Suzy's mother. She was sitting on a bar stool smoking and was talking to the other Samoans.

"They think they're great rugby players," Donald said. "For their Flag Day they invited the Fijian National team up here -- the same Fijian team who beat the Maorie All-Blacks two years ago. The unfortunate part is that they'd pay you with coconuts and bananas if you let them."

"Mac said he'd get the money," Lenny said. "I believe him."

"They still have money for beer," Donald said, motioning with his head to the bar. He folded the money in half and pushed it into his pants pocket. After he sat for a minute he reached back into his pocket and pulled out a five dollar bill and handed it to Lenny. Donald's movements and speech were all made with a uniformly slow and meticulous motion. It was as if all his parts were geared to one large, slow moving cog and the resulting body movements were as fast as he could go.

Suzy's mother brought Donald a mixed drink and he stirred it with his finger.

"Do you have plans to stay in Pango for a time, Mr. Jason?" Donald asked.

"I'm not sure. I might try to crew on a boat going somewhere. Tonga maybe." Donald's eyes opened.

"You know about boats then?" he asked. "You know how to sail one?"

"Yeah, I did that for a few years in LA." He raised his eyebrows and nodded. He must have learned that gesture from working as a draftsman. I remembered that the engineers I used to work with would use it when they'd discover something deep and important, like the fact that water flows downhill.

"Well, then, you should come with us tomorrow."

"Yeah," Lenny said, "we're going to take the boat out

tomorrow. Anchor it and go swimming. Suzy and her mother are bringing lunch."

Donald leaned forward a little. "You haven't met Suzy yet, have you?" I shook my head. "She's quite cute. I'm looking forward to seeing her in a bikini." Lenny laughed.

I told them I'd like to come and we finished our drinks and ordered another round. Lenny had scratched his left arm on some coral and that got him started talking about his dealings with the VA. Donald stayed until it was his turn to buy a round, then he left.

Lenny and I spent the rest of the afternoon in the bar getting drunk. I told him about my job in LA and how I hated it and saved money for a year. And then one day the engineer who was my boss came up to me and patted me on the back and told me what a fine job I was doing. I took off my white hardhat, clipped my Pentel pencil to it, set them on the ground and walked away. No explanation. I still laugh when I think about it.

I finally left the bar around seven and went back to my room. I was disgusted with myself for not doing anything all day except drinking. I had promised myself when I left LA that I wouldn't do this. It's an easy habit to fall into. You start accepting the world as you find it and you feed on self pity. Then one morning you wake up and you're fifty and any self pride you had you've traded for red wine. That's what had happened to most of the rummies I saw

around LA. When in doubt, drop back five yards, punt, and run. I buried my head in the pillow and went to sleep.

I woke the next morning about seven. My stomach growled as I dressed and my head ached slightly. Outside it was another sunny Samoan day. If this had been the States, birds would have been singing near the window, but for some reason Samoa had few birds. There weren't even seagulls.

I left my room and saw Donald in the hallway. He was sitting at his drafting board near the window wearing his white T-shirt, boxer shorts, and black socks. He looked just like he did yesterday. On the table next to him were a stack of pencils, a pink eraser, drafting triangles, and a bottle of Australian whiskey. He didn't look up.

"Good morning, Mr. Jason," he said in his low voice. "It looks like a fine day for a picnic." He picked up an engineer's triangle and placed it on his drawing. I walked over to see what he was working on.

"I used to work for an engineer's office," I said. He raised an eyebrow but didn't stop. He slid the rule across the paper until it was where he wanted it.

"Really," he said. "Are you an engineer then?"

"No. I was just a grunt. Survey work mostly." He picked up his pencil and placed it against the triangle. Then he checked the position of everything one last time and drew the line.

"I thought they were a pretty disgusting lot," I said. He gave me a weak smile.

"Yes, I suppose they are." He looked at the line he had just drawn, then set the pencil down. "Down in Australia they used to call me 'High Noon'. The engineers." He turned his head and looked at me. "Thought they could all drink me under the table. Damn Aussies. Think they're God's gift to liquor." He looked back at his drawing. "And women."

"How long were you down there?" I asked. He slid the triangle across the drawing.

"Ten, no twelve years."

"Like it?"

"Some people think it's all right," he said. "I sometimes toy with the idea of going back." He lifted the triangle off the paper and set it on his lap. "I'm on a leave of absense, you know. I told the Aussies I must go home to see my poor dying mother. Dear old Mom. They were quite understanding." He smiled. "It's been two years now. Hang in there Mom. I'll be home soon," and laughed. He had bad teeth and when he caught me looking at them he closed his mouth.

I told Donald I would see him later, then I went downstairs, ate breakfast, and walked down to the wharf. Lenny was out on deck and I shouted to him. He rowed the dingy ashore and said he was glad I came early because he was having trouble figuring out which sails to use.

"Do we want the tri-sail?" he asked.

"I don't think so," I said. "That's for storms. High winds."

"Randall has a dozen sails so you can pick out what you want." He tugged at the oars and hurriedly rowed back to the boat. He could row the boat well.

We climbed aboard and I went below to look at the sail locker. I was impressed. There were ten different bags piled in a corner. They weren't labeled but each one was coded with a different combination of colors and stripes. On the wall hung a neatly typed list of which bag contained which sail. I grabbed the mainsail and the 120 genny and tossed them through the hatch onto the deck.

"You've never put the mainsail on before?" I asked.

"No," he said. "I've only used the motor a couple of times. To move the anchor."

"Well, they're not hard." We ran the mainsail into the boom and I started listing off the different parts of the sail -- the clew and tack, the luff and leach, the foot. At first Lenny repeated everything I said, but he quickly got lost. It reminded me of the first time I was on a boat. I tried to learn everything the first time out, but by the end of the day the only words I remembered were rudder and mast.

We attached the main halyard but didn't raise the sail yet. We started to attach the genny when Suzy's mother and some other people shouted at us from the shore. Lenny

rowed ashore to pick them up and I went below to check out the boat. Yesterday at the bar he had told me the owner's story. His name was Randall -- a rich kid from California who finished college and didn't know what to do with his life so he decided to see the world in a sailboat. A nice dream. He had the boat built for him and named it after his girl friend. They sailed from LA to Hawaii and that was enough sailing for Sephanie Jane. She refused to go anywhere else. He sailed from Hawaii to Samoa hoping that she would change her mind, but so far she hadn't.

I went below and looked around. Just inside the hatch, to the left, was the naigator's table. It was a small area where Randall plotted his progress on charts and made his log entries. To the left were several small shelves which held the books he needed to navigate. In a large, square box was his sextant. I took it out and went through the motions of taking a sight. I looked into the mirrors and played with the micrometer. It was a beautiful instrument. Randall must have been serious. On one bulkhead was an engraved plaque which read, "Stephanie Jane -- custom built for Randall Eliot Simon." I imagined his first few days at sea. Sailing from LA to Hawaii. Maybe he had always been dominated by his parents. Maybe this was the first time he was on his own. It must have been idyllic -- the ocean, the girl, and the boat. And the dream soured.

I could understand. In LA I went with this girl for

five years. We lived together for three and I thought I was really in love. I kept my lousy job thinking the world was sweet and work would get better. I wanted to get married, have 2.7 children, and make house payments for thirty years. She left me for a guy who pumped iron in Gold's Gym. She said she needed space. It was a cheap bit of reality therapy. Some shrink could have milked me for years, trying to explain that someone had removed the rungs in my ladder to success. I hoped Samoa didn't have ladders.

I heard Lenny shout for me to give him a hand and I set the sextant back in its box and went on deck. Lenny had loaded four people and two large baskets into the dingy and it looked ready to sink. Suzy's mother sat in the stern of the boat, Lenny was in the middle, and Suzy and another Samoan girl balanced on the side of the bow, each holding a basket on her lap. The trick was to unload the boat without putting everyone in the water. I leaned over the side and grabbed the baskets. I told Lenny that I thought Suzy's mother should get out first.

She grabbed hold of the rope ladder which hung over the side and tried to pull herself up with her arms. I tugged at one wrist and she put her knee on the side of the dingy and fell into the water up to her waist. From there she got her foot into one of the rungs and climbed up. Lenny, however, was sitting in water up to his stomach. Suzy and her girl friend giggled.

When everyone was aboard, we hauled the dingy out and turned it upside down to drain. Suzy's mother grabbed my elbow and said "This is Suzy's cousin, Ida. Donald said to bring someone for you." I nodded to Ida and smiled. She and Suzy were in their late teens. Both were skinny and had short, curly black hair. Suzy grabbed the two baskets and hauled them below. I looked at Ida and then at Suzy's mother.

"You speak English, Ida?" I asked.

"Some," she said, which meant she could follow what was said but was too shy to speak. I smiled and went up to the bow to finish attaching the genny.

Lenny saw Donald on the dock and rowed in to get him. Once he was on deck, he walked forward to the bow in his black leather shoes -- bow-legged, strutting like Charles Laughton. He put one hand on the rigging to steady himself and scanned the shore and nodded approvingly. He watched me tie the two sheets to the genny.

"You do seem to know something about boats, Mr. Jason," he said. "Why don't you take charge? You have more experience than Lenny. Show him how its done." Lenny was standing behind Donald.

"You should take it out, Jason," Lenny said.

I told him to start the motor while I hauled up the anchor. After I tied it down, I told Lenny to head for the harbor entrance and Suzy and I raised the mainsail. It fluttered a couple of times but fed smoothly up the

track. The bay was surrounded by mountains which block the trade winds so we couldn't sail until we were out of the harbor. The girls sat on the bow and watched the shore-- the bright colors of the freight containers, the picture windows of the big hotel. There were no other boats moving in the harbor and we seemed to be part of a landscape painting coming to life.

We cleared the last bouy and Lenny looked at me. He was excited. A nice wind was coming from the east.

"You want to sail this crate, Lenny?" I asked and he laughed.

Donald and I hauled up the genny and I told Lenny to cut the motor. I showed Lenny how to sheet in the sails and went back and took the tiller from him. The boat heeled over as I pointed the bow into the wind and we picked up speed.

You can't get much higher than I was that day. We sailed for two hours and I showed Lenny all I knew about sailing. "Stephanie Jane" handled like a racing boat. We sailed to a small island and anchored. Everyone except Donald went swimming and diving for shells. Suzy's mother unwrapped the baskets of food and we ate lunch.

Afterwards, Lenny and Donald lay on the deck, moaning because they'd eaten too much. I decided to take the digny and explore the island. But as I was going over the side, Ida looked at me like I was abandoning her so I asked her if she wanted to come.

There were a few coconut trees on the island and it looked like someone came by once in a while to harvest them, but when I asked Ida if anyone lived here she shook her head, pointed to the main island and said something in Samoan. We sat down and leaned against a rock and she put her hand on my arm. We were looking south and the next land was 500 miles away. I sat there without thinking, watching the cumulus clouds swing from one horizon to the other. The only sound was that of the trade winds rustling the palm leaves. This must have been the world Captain Cook wrote of -- life reduced to its simplest elements. I wondered if this might be as far as I would ever have to travel.

We stayed on the little island until late afternoon, then sailed back to Pango. While Lenny ferried everyone to shore, I stayed aboard to fold the sails. Donald was still aboard and he walked up the bow while I was folding the genny. He had spent the afternoon drinking but I didn't notice much change in him. He watched me before he spoke.

"Well, do you like the American version of Samoa, Mr. Jason?" he asked.

"It seems to grow on a person," I said.

"You know that you could be valuable out here?"

"How's that?"

"You can sail. You can teach Lenny to sail." I

reached behind me for the red sailbag and Donald waited for me to answer. I untied the sheets and tossed them to one side. "You're not seeing the big picture."

"No, I guess not."

"We can start a chartering service. American and Aussie tourists would pay \$200 apiece for a day like today. Tropical island all to themselves. No one else on this damn island does this."

"This isn't Lenny's boat, Donald." He shrugged his shoulders.

"Randall's not going to be sailing it. Nor selling it."

"You seem pretty sure of that," I said.

"You never knew him," he said. "He was a very unhappy boy. He hated that boat. Wanted to get away from it as fast as he could. If we offered him \$1000 he'd take it. Just to get it out of his hair. He wants someone to make the choice for him."

I folded the sail in half once more and slid it into the bag. Then I coiled the two sheets and set them off to the side.

"You should think about it," he said and he watched me for a second. "Think about Lenny. He's a nice kid. He doesn't have the confidence to do it by himself." He turned and went back to the cockpit.

Lenny returned and ferried Donald ashore. I stayed

on board and looked over the rigging. Then I sat in the cockpit and looked out a Pango. The night was clear and the Southern Cross shown over the harbor entrance. I remembered trying to spot it when I was in LA and never having any luck. I made calculations from Greenwich Mean Time to find out when it would reach its highest point in the sky. I even spent one night atop a mountain on Catalina Island looking for it. According to books, I should have been able to see it, but it never appeared.

Lenny climbed back aboard and sat across from me. He stretched out his legs and leaned his neck back, rolling it from side to side.

"I don't know why I'm so tired," he said.

"Too much swimming," I said. "Or too much taro."
He laughed.

"You don't like that stuff."

"It tastes like car wax," I said and he laughed again. He grabbed a cushion and put it behind his neck.

"I guess I'm getting use to it," he said. "The Samoans eat it like bread. Huge slabs of it. They spread it with peanut butter or tuna."

"Next you're going to be telling me they toast it."

"Don't give them any ideas," he said and we both laughed. We were quiet for a minute and I could hear the clang of machinery coming from the cannery across the harbor. It was more than a mile away but the sound traveled

easily across the water.

"Donald talk to you about chartering tourists?"

"Yeah, he did, " I said.

"I thought he would. He and I talked about if when you were on the island." I nodded and ran my hand along some teak trim on the top of the hatch. "He sees it as a chance to make some money." I nodded and Lenny turned his head and looked at the lights from Pango.

"Why do you let him maneuver you like he does?" I asked. Lenny kept looking at Pango's lights. "You don't see it?"

"I know what you mean."

"He's got nothing in this," I said. "If you put that boat on a reef it's your neck." Lenny was thinking. I could hear a diesel engine rev up at the cannery.

"Donald's not as bad as you think," he said. "When I came here he introduced me around. Once he kept me from getting beaten up by some Samoans." Lenny smiled and pushed his glasses back.

"He's going to make you a rummy like himself," I said. Lenny tapped his foot against the deck.

"I guess he needs me," he said. "Maybe I'm soft in the head." We were quiet for a while. On the shore you could see the headlights of two cars moving from the far end of the bay along the road and past the governor's mansion.

I asked him to row me ashore and I told him I'd see

him tomorrow. Instead of going back to my room I went to the big hotel on the beach. It was built for tourists and the people who stayed there spent most of their time in its air conditioned rooms. I went downstairs to the bar and met two Canadian girls who were on their way home from New Zealand. They were full of stories and I spent most of the night listening. I left about midnight and went back to my room.

The next day I got up early and left the hotel without eating breakfast. Donald was snoring when I went downstairs. I caught a bus and spent the day on the far side of the island playing tourist. I took pictures of more palm trees and more rusty, corrugated steel roofs. For lunch I went to a small store and bought a can of sardines. Then in the late afternoon I caught a bus back to Pango. I went to the hotel, packed my bag, and told the hotel clerk I was leaving. Then I went by the Pango Bar, thinking Lenny might be there, but he wasn't. Suzy's mother saw me and came over.

"Have you seen Lenny?" I asked.

"Suzy and him are helping my brother dry copra," she said. She looked at my backpack and didn't say anything.

"I came to tell him I'm going to Western Samoa for a while. On the ferryboat tonight." She nodded.

"I'll tell him." She stood there looking at me and I felt awkward. She was wearing a dark blue mumu which hung to her ankles.

"I wanted to thank you for the nice lunch you made

yesterday," I said. She smiled.

"Yes. Some people like Samoa, Some people don't. You go catch the boat. I'll tell Lenny."

It was easy to go because it's always easy to go. Buy your ticket and walk up the gangway. The boat had three decks and I went up to the top and looked out across the harbor. A large freighter was anchored near the cannery, and a few small yachts dotted the west side of the harbor. I could see all of Pango. The white buildings with corrugated roofs disappeared up the hillside until they stopped where the angle of the mountain became too steep. Not far away the "Stephanie Jane" bobbed at its anchor.

I tried to go over in my head the reasons I had for leaving. Pango wasn't as uncorrupted as I thought it would be. I didn't want to get mixed up with Donald nor with a borrowed boat. I looked towards the mouth of the harbor and in the twilight I could see the two channel lights, one red and one green, and I could see the blue of the ocean beyond, now darkening. I thought about Randall. He must have hated sunsets on the ocean, out of sight of land. Tied to a hole in the sky. Maybe after Hawaii, out on the ocean alone, he stopped while he was adjusting a sail, or opening a can of stew for dinner, and realized he couldn't do it. I knew I would go on and not come back because it was the easiest thing. And someday I'd find myself in some other Pango Pango, say enough, and go home.

Poem for Sterling Hollaway

Hollywood never thought you a leading man, Sterling.
Your fingers look like knitting needles,
your basset hound eyes too sad. "Come back
when we need an Ichabod." The studios tossed
you around like a rag, good for dusting a scene
or polishing some other star's luster.

In this photograph you lean against a helmsmen's wheel,
a cabinboy dreaming he's captain. You stayed
and played, Sterling, believing the break would come.
Your daylight world was celluloid. At night
you walked through streets of wrought iron balconies --
your silken voice used only to coax a kitten,
or charm the Spring's first tulip.

In the Maltese Falcon they let you sweep floors.
You raised your head long enough
to tell Mr. Spade a man left a package --
some man, in rain clothes and hat, a knife in his back.
You swept the floor. Later, outside the door,
you heard Cairo say someone would take the fall.
The Fatman laughed. You went back sweeping.

In their world of light and black
the fall, Sterling, was yours. I look again
at these hands, this pose, the face of a clown.
Lean against your broom; dream your last scene.
Somewhere a man climbs stone steps with cat's feet,
and sings through silver lips.

Lear at Gloucester

The storm has closed around you, Lear
and there is only the steadily drumming
rain against stones. The fool says
you should return to the castle. Regan
and Goneril prepare a welcome. A feast
perhaps, with torches and trumpeters louder
than Jerico. You will parade through lines
of shouting peasants who touch your robe.
You only want to be loved. But the shouts
are your own against the storm. They will come,
your daughters, with the steady drumbeat
of horses. They will bind you to the chair,
Gloucester watching, his eyes in blood.

The Golddust Twins

One's name is Robert though I can't
tell which, the photo no longer distinct.
Two men in track clothes. 1933.
Their thick legs show they were sprinters
and both were champs. Now they hang
from a string like strips of drying meat,
surveying whiskey along the backbar.

Who named them twins? Twisted them together
so today men laugh at the way
their shorts ride up high on their bellies?
The gold of the frame is green like olives,
and when the door slams, one cobweb
above their picture waltzes with the smallest
motion, like the tape broken at the finish.

Funeral

These bells chimed exactly noon for Regan,
a classmate, age 12. Flowers lay everywhere
as if he liked flowers and I stared
at his right eye, looking for the bullet hole.
The minister declared it "bitter subtraction,"
his mother cried. God she cried.

I never liked him, the loudmouth in school.
Because of him the boy who stuttered
came late for a week. And filled
with Christian piety, we all recalled
Regan worked hard, called him a good friend
we were just getting to know.

Most there was his mother -- low
on her knees, pounding the ground with her fist.
The father and older son tried leading her away
but she kicked. I wanted to shout
"He wasn't worth all this."
They filled the hole after we left.

I didn't know, how when a child dies
dreams die, too. Not his but hers,
lichens on the marble headstone.
The clock chimes. I turn to watch the arms
that rotate, begin again the slow procession,
think of church, family, of streets to travel alone.

Who Never Had a Brother

It wasn't until I stopped at Gene's Paint Store on my way to work that I realized I'd won the Sugar Bowl. I'd forgotten all about it, being out of town as much as I had been that fall. This runt of a painter named Ernie came up with the idea. There was this flashy new black whore in town named Sugar. Leave it to Ernie to keep track of the whores. The plan was for everyone to kick in twenty dollars and we'd pull a name out of the hat. The winner would get Miss Sugar for a night and a room at the new Sheraton. The others would take the rest of the Sugar Fund, buy beer, and play cards all night. How could you lose?

I didn't know what I was going to do with Sugar. Then I went to work and the problem was taken out of my hands for a while. I was being sent to Gillette, Wyoming, for two weeks to test gravel samples, effective today. At least I'd be working inside. It was early December and the weather was getting cold.

When I went home to pack my bag, I ran into my kid brother Roland. He'd come by to drop off a book on his way to school. In the past couple of years he had become interested in the War Between the States -- a specialty of mine. But he'd become a real fanatic -- reading everything he could find. Now he knew every battle and every officer at those battles. He knew how many cannons each side had and how much ammunition. I couldn't even talk with him.

Then again I never knew what to say to Ro. He was ten years my junior and just finishing high school. I'd always told him he was the big accident in the family.

"Beeley," he said when he saw me and he gave me this little salute like I was his commanding officer. My name is Bill but I prefer "Beeley" -- the way it's done in the South.

"Nice warning they gave you," he said. He shifted his weight from one leg to the other. He'd grown in the last year and his rangy limbs did not coordinate with the rest of this body.

"That's what I like about these assholes," I said. "They never tell you anything until it's happening to you. Hell, if I could plan things out, I'd only get confused." I threw some socks and underwear into my suitcase. "You know engineers. They're God's gift to the thought process." Ro laughed. "That's what happens to you when you go to college." He knew the people I worked for because he'd been showing them how to use the new computer they'd bought.

"How long do you think you'll be gone?" he asked.

"They said two weeks. More likely three. I'll be back here by the 22nd though. The big Christmas party." I threw a couple pairs of jeans into my bag.

"They've invited me, too, you know."

"You should come. It's great. They get drunk and break their arms patting themselves on the back. Then they pranced around showing off their five year pins. If

you bring a date they'll maul her." Ro grinned. I closed the bag and grabbed two coats to take with me. Then I picked up this little Confederate flag which I had sitting on the coffee table and gave it to Ro.

"Here. You take care of this for me. When I leave there's only a bunch of damn Yankees left in this house." His eyes widened like he was eight years old. They were a strange, light blue color, like a robin's egg. "And don't say I never gave you nothing, kid." He held the door for me and I went out.

"Call before you come back," he said. I stopped and looked at him. "I mean if you need anything. Someone to to to the bank for you."

That was nice. It was the first time he'd ever offered to do that. He must have heard me complain about how, when you work on the road, it's the simple things in your life that never get done -- like going to the bank or seeing your relatives. I hadn't seen my mother in months. I told him I thought I'd be OK. Then I drove off.

My brother was known around his school as the wiz kid. In the ninth grade, his math teacher took him up to the college to a professor named Eliot. Ro started visiting Eliot twice a week and working on his own. This worried my mother because he would often stay up all night doing math problems. Once he did a problem and then saw a footnote which said that particular result had never been shown. He called Eliot and the guy hurried over to the house. He

took Ro's work, then at two in the morning he and two other math professors were back at the house. They asked Ro about one step he'd made and he explained it. The men stood in the doorway under the porch light holding their chins, staring at the paper. Roland stood there a few minutes with his hands in the pockets of his robe. Then he turned to Eliot. "The step's trivial, isn't it?" he asked. Eliot looked at his colleagues who didn't raise their heads. They hadn't heard the remark. "Yes," Eliot said. "Yes, I guess it is. Sorry to bother you." He herded the others out the door.

Ro was a natural. I asked him once to explain what he did with his math. I'd had a little calculus in college before I dropped out. Of course Ro was way past that. He tried to tell me about Hilbert Spaces, something where every point is an equation and, instead of three dimensions, you can have as many as you want, all at ninety degrees to each other. I never understood it. I asked what a Hilbert Space was good for. "It's like Disneyland," he said and smiled. "A great place to hang out."

As I thought, the work in Gillette dragged on for three weeks instead of two. The company I worked for is a consulting engineering firm. I am not an engineer, but do the field work for them. As a matter of fact, 95% of all their work is done by grunts like me. They give us different pay grades and call us technicians, but when it comes right down to it, we're just grunts. In Gillette they shoe-horned

eight of us grunts into one three-bedroom trailer to save money. Three weeks of living on top of seven other guys. And once a day the one engineer supervisor would stop by to see how his boys were doing. When I left Gillette I'd had enough. I called Gene's Paint Store and told him to set up the Sugar Bowl for Friday night. And to tell Sugar I always take my women to dinner first.

I went by the Sheraton about six and took the elevator to the top floor, where they were having the Christmas party. The room was windows on three sides and it gave a nice view of the city, except that now it was dark and you couldn't see very many Christmas lights through the tinted glass. The trim around the windows was oak and the lamps were brass. It was the perfect room for this outfit -- all show and no class.

When I got there everyone was standing around the dip bowl swirling their watered-down drinks. I felt sorry for the barmaid. She was alone and running her butt off. Her costume was "V" cut to her navel in the front and the skirt was slit up to the waist on the sides. No woman could have taste that poor.

One of the guys from work patted me on the arm.

"So you made it back," he said. He was already drunk and he weaved back and forth. "She's a pretty hot little unit, isn't she?" he said, referring to the barmaid.

"Those are chicken legs," I said. "If you want to see some heat, wait around and keep your glasses clean."

"You?" he said and laughed.

"Just wait," I said. "What I'm bringing will make your wife look like the cow she is." He looked at me not believing I had said that.

"They're all cows," I said. "Mooooow."

I headed for the door and Ro hurried over to me. He didn't mix well and I knew he'd spend the whole night tugging on my coattails.

"I'll be back," I said. "Wait here if you want to see your brother in action."

I went out to my '53 Chevy pickup that I'd named Ol' Blue. I was fonder of her than anything else I owned. I'd rebuilt her inside and out by myself, and now she was beautiful.

I picked up Sugar at a bar on the Southside and we drove to the Sheraton. As Ernie had said, she was a real looker, which surprised me. She had huge breasts and a slim body and she was dressed in a little red and white dress that was no more than a sneeze. She was friendly, laughing and asking me questions, tugging at my arm as I drove. She had the knack for making a man feel important.

When we got off the elevator on the top floor, Sugar stopped. "What's all this?" she asked. We could see into the banquet room and there were four or five guys standing near the door in suits that were too narrow through the shoulders.

Just a few people I work with," I said, taking her arm.

"Mostly men. I just have to put in an appearance. We won't stay." She looked at the men and her eyes narrowed. "Just act like my date. They've all been to college. They'll think you're great."

Ro was standing by himself and came to meet us. His jaw hung down on his shirt.

"This is my kid brother Roland. Ro, Miss Sugar." He closed his mouth and nodded hello. He looked pretty sharp wearing my old green blazer. "We might sit down for a minute. Why don't you bring us a couple of drinks." I looked at Sugar.

"Just seven-up for me," she said.

There were eight round banquet tables at the other end of the room. I led Sugar to the one where the big bosses sat sipping their drinks like a bunch of medieval lords. We were two jesters checking in. Their faces were blank when we stopped in front of them. I smiled.

"This is Sugar," I said. "These are some people I work for -- Larry Sage and his wife Dottie, Andy and Liz Fernson, Jimmy and Patty McDonald. Jimmy's our head engineer and I know how you like professional men." He hated to be called "Jimmy." "We'll join you," I said. I pulled out a chair for Sugar and we sat down. Dottie scooted her chair over to make room. Andy was so drunk he took off his glasses and tried to wipe them on his tie.

Nobody spoke. I kept smiling and my eyes moved from

person to person, looking each of them square in the eye. What hath God wrought. They all turned their eyes. Finally Jimmy took charge. He considered himself a man who could handle any woman. I remember his long lectures on the subject of poon-tang.

"How was everything in Gillette, Bill?" he asked.

"Fucking great, Jimbo. Just fucking great. We tested that gravel and it's good to be home." I smiled at him and he looked at his wife. She patted her mouth with her napkin and set it on the table. There was another lull, then Larry, the big boss, spoke.

"That's a mighty pretty dress you're wearing, Sugar," he said. The blood drained from his wife's face.

"Thank you," Sugar said softly.

"Have you been in Billings long?" he continued.

She held her hands on her lap and didn't look at the others. "Not long," she said. "Only a few months."

"Do you work in town?"

"Not at present," she said.

Jimmy's wife stood and pulled him up by the arm. "Excuse us for a minute," she said. Ro brought the drinks from the bar and set them in front of us.

"Glad we're not late for dinner, Lar," I said. "I hear they put on a pretty good feed." He nodded at me. Jimmy came back and tapped Larry on the shoulder. He whispered something in his ear.

The room had quickly turned onto a fishbowl. Some of the others stood in small groups near the table. I could feel their eyes. I could hear someone mouth the word "whore." I could sense people watching us through the picture windows even though this was the top of the tallest building in town.

I sipped my drink and put my hand on Sugar's shoulder. Then this Mexican named Manny came over and tapped me on the arm. He'd worked under me for two years and I couldn't stand him. He looked indignant. I stood up and told Sugar I'd be right back.

"Beeley, why are you doing this?"

"Doing what?"

"I brought my wife and my mother here tonight. This is a special night for us. And you bring a black whore. What's the matter with you?"

"You don't like the company? Maybe I don't like yours." Sugar came over and stood next to me.

"Let's go," she said.

"This is Manny," I said. "Maybe you know his sister." I smiled at him and he left.

"Listen," she said, "I don't know what you're doing but this wasn't the deal."

"Party's young."

"You brought me here to ruin the party. Well, I don't ruin parties. Let them have their fun."

"We're not ruining anything. You're my date."

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

"Why don't you go mingle. Maybe you can hustle up one of those drillers over there. They think they're studs."

"You are a bastard," she said and she left.

"That's not sweet, Sugar." She was headed to get her coat. Her little heels clicked across the floor.

I finished my drink and put the glass down. The whole room was staring at me and I started laughing. I started remembering things that happened six months ago, funny things when I was working, and they became funnier and funnier. Everyone probably thought I was crazy.

Ro came up and asked if anything was wrong.

"Hell no, nothing's wrong," I said. "Make sure Sugar gets home all right. She doesn't have a car." I gave him the keys to Blue. "Take her wherever she wants. And remember, you're a gentleman." I left by the side door and walked down the eighteen flights to the bottom.

I left town a couple of days after that. Didn't even go by my mother's house for Christmas. I ended up rotting in Phoenix for a couple of months. Then in March I headed north and found a job working on an oil rig in Utah.

Around the end of April I got a letter from my mother. This was the first time I heard about Ro and Sugar. The letter began with Mother's usual list of aches and illnesses.

It went on about how she didn't think she would live long -- the same whinning I'd heard for fifteen years since Father left her. In a few sentences at the end she said she knew Ro no longer loved her. He had quit school and moved in with Sugar.

After the initial shock, I decided that I wasn't worried about Ro. He had been quiet so many years. And I can't be my brother's keeper forever. I figured he was sewing his wild oats. As far as quitting school, that didn't matter. He was a wiz kid.

I stayed in Utah through the spring and into June. Then I quit and moved north again. I stopped in Billings and found out where Ro was living on the Southside, and old, white, twostory building that had been turned into apartments. Someone had taken spraypaint and written "Walter rules" on the lapped siding. At the bottom of an old flight of stairs which led up the outside of the house was Ro's bike, the same one speed bike I gave him when he was nine. It marked out his territory. I pounded on the door.

"Who's there?"

"That you Ro? It's Beeley." He opened the door halfway and smiled. Then he remembered himself and saluted. He was wearing only a pair of blue jeans and his eyes looked sunken and redish.

"I didn't know you were in town," he said. "Come in."

The apartment was small and bare. There were three rooms counting the bathroom, and this one had a green couch and the kitchen table. He had been drinking coffee and reading the newspaper.

Our talk was a little awkward at first. I wanted to try to talk to him and get him straightened out -- ask him what he was doing living with a black whore, were all his brains in his pecker? But I couldn't bring myself to do that. I wasn't in any position to cast stones -- not even to a messed up kid like him.

I never even mentioned Sugar. Our talk went in a big circle, starting with the St. Louis Cardinals, then about a book he'd read about the Second Battle of Manassas, and I talked about people losing fingers on the oil rig. Finally the conversation came around to his math.

"No, I don't really look at that stuff anymore," he said. He sipped his coffee and looked at me with his blue eyes. "You know, I've never told anyone this before, and I'm not sure I can explain what I mean. I don't trust math."

"How's that?" I asked.

"Sometimes I think my mind is like a great sandstone block where someone has cut channels for my thoughts to travel. Certain types of information travel easier than others, and with some types there is a harmonic agreement that causes everything to vibrate. When that happens

I lose control and my mind takes off by itself. That's what happens with math. I just sit and watch. It's gotten to where I'm no longer fascinated or amazed. I don't feel like a Newton or a Galois, but some anonymous typesetter at the printshop. I don't trust it. Each night before I sleep, I imagine tossing water on the sandstone walls and gnawing at them with a stick. It's all I have. I try to scratch my initials -- anything. Something to break up the harmonics."

My brother the philosopher. The whole speech was delivered with his eyes going right over my head. I had no idea where his mind was. I wanted to change the subject so I said, "This is a nice neighborhood. Why don't you move the hell out of here?" That seemed to bring him out of his trance.

"Things are getting pretty tight down here for Sugar," he said. "This pimp from Philadelphia moved into town and he's trying to force everyone to work for him. A lot of girls are." He stopped and looked out the window. "He's even got his own slogan. 'Don't be no fools -- Little Walter rules'." The street outside the window was quiet. The neighborhood had paper and beer bottles in the gutter. An old Ford was parked on blocks across the street. Someone had smashed the windshield. "It's really a strange little world down here, you know," he said. "He told Sugar he'd kill her."

"Did he mean it?"

"I don't know. She's scared."

"Why don't you just leave?" I asked. He shook his head.

"I don't think we'll do that." The "we" bothered me. He sat twisting the coffee cup around on the table. His hands seemed shaky and I suspected he drank too much coffee. I felt jumpy and wanted to leave. I got up and told him I'd only been town for a couple of days but I'd try to stop back. As he walked me to the door I thought his skin looked yellowish.

I heard how it happened later. Little Walter, the Philly pimp, came by Ro's and threw a rock through the window about ten am. The pimp shouted to Ro that he had one hour to meet him in front of the Tampico Cafe or get out of town. "And bring your gun," he shouted. Ro's health was worse. He was dizzy and he didn't have a gun.

He got on his one speed bike and rode two miles to my apartment. The door was locked so he put his fist through the window. He'd come after my .3006 deer rifle which I'd left behind. He went through the drawers until he found a box of cartridges and loaded the gun and stuffed the rest of the shells into his pockets. Then he slung the rifle over his shoulder on the sling and headed downtown.

He must have looked like something from a 1940's Life magazine -- the rifle's muzzle above his head and him on the one speed bike. He rode through the downtown and came to the tracks. A westbound freight blocked the

street and he had to stop. The train was loaded with new automobiles and a few large pieces of machinery and Ro looked between the flash of the moving cars to the Tampico. He could see Little Walter in the doorway, joking with two friends. The little man hadn't seen Ro yet. He was telling a story, gesturing with his big hands, and the two men were laughing. His jacket had two rows of brass buttons. The train passed and Ro started across the tracks.

He swerved in front of a car to turn left and the driver honked. Walter looked up and his eyes bugged out. He pulled his gun and started shooting.

Ro heard the second shot. He crashed his bike into the back of a parked car. He looked at the blood on his hand and thought he'd been hit. Walter stood in the middle of the street pointing his gun at Ro.

"Come out," he shouted. "I rule." He fired again and the bullet hit the back of the car.

Ro snapped off the safety. He stood up and put the rifle to his shoulder. Walter fired twice, each shot going wide. Ro shot him square in the chest and Walter flew over backwards. Then my little brother sat down behind the car. One of the men Walter had been joking with went over and poked at the little man with his foot. Then he bent over and looked at his eyes. He was stone dead.

The town was divided as to what should happen. The majority of people said there shouldn't be a law against

shooting a pimp, especially a black one. They also claimed it was a fair fight. The rest of the town was outraged that such a thing could happen in their city -- even if it was south of the tracks.

They brought Ro to trial on first degree murder, but at the trial Ro's attorney found some obscure 1871 law against dueling on the streets. He claimed their fight was actually a duel and Ro couldn't be charged with murder. The judge and the county attorney groaned like they were being cheated on a technical point, then they found Ro guilty and sentenced him to five years in the state prison -- the maximum sentence.

After the trial I decided to stay in the state for a while and I ended up working for a small construction company out of Lewistown. They were a real joke with their tinkertoy trucks and turn of the century blades, but they treated me okay.

I had only gone to see Ro once since he'd been sent to the prison in Deer Lodge. He said in a letter that he was a celebrity among the convicts -- the only man that had ever been convicted of dueling. The warden had asked him to teach a math class for some of the inmates but he decline. He said he liked his job in the laundry.

I used to think about what he'd said about how his mind raced ahead with mathematics, following grooves cut into his head like the groove in a record. I'd jumped out of that grove a long time ago, and had spent I don't

know how long making scratches like a bad needle. Maybe that was the best way to describe my life -- just scratching around, making a mess of everything I came close to.

It was a Thursday night in April when Sugar called. She had left town after the shooting and disappeared.

"Have you gone to see him?" she asked.

"Once. Where are you calling from?"

"St. Louis." There was a long pause.

"Well, what do you want?" I asked.

"Take me to see him," she said.

"What makes you think he wants to see you?"

"He does. I know him that much."

"Look, Sugar, you can't just show up over there. You've got to write and get permission. There's a whole bunch of crap you have to go through. They only let you see him at certain times."

"I've already done that," she said.

"He's clear on the other side of the state from me."

"He's your brother, Beeley."

I'm not sure why I ever said yes. Maybe because a Southerner can't refuse a lady, whore or no. The next Tuesday I drove to Butte and met Sugar at the airport. The prison was sixty miles away.

She looked very much the same, still turning heads wherever she walked, still the same swirling hairdo. But now there was one small difference -- she was pregnant. I just shook my head when I saw her.

"Hi Beeley," she said. "Are you surprised?" and she grinned. I grabbed her little carryon bag and headed for the door.

"I don't fucking believe you," I said. I tossed her bag in the back of Ol' Blue and helped her in. I went around and got in my side. "I am such a fool. You got me to drive halfway across the state to pick up a pregnant whore and take her to visit my brother." She didn't say anything.

"You still expect me to take you out there, don't you?" I said. She kept her hands on her lap. "Does he know about this? Maybe I should ask who's the father?"

"It's not your brother. You can count and figure that out."

"What's he going to feel like when he sees you pregnant?"

"He's going to be happy for me," she said. I just shook my head.

I hit the starter button and Blue fired to life. "Let's go," I said. "You've come a long way. Let's get this over with."

We left the airport and headed for Deer Lodge on the old highway. We had two hours to drive sixty miles and I didn't want to have to hang around the prison with Sugar any longer than necessary. I drove about forty. After a few miles she started to make small talk. She asked about my job and how I liked Lewistown. Then she ran out of easy topics and I went back to listening to the engine as we went

up and down the small, rolling hills towards the town.

Sugar squirmed a little on the seat, trying to get comfortable. I wasn't sure how far along she was -- maybe six months. She must have been uncomfortable --her skin stretched out, the extra weight making her back sore.

"You know Ro is more excited about seeing you than me, don't you Beeley?"she said. The thought never crossed my mind.

"I don't know. We never were that close." I swerved to miss a pothole in the road.

"You don't know your brother at all, do you?"

"I know he's a genius." She shook her head and laughed.

"Your brother can't match his socks in the morning. When we were together he never had any friends. Somedays he's spend hours staring at one piece of paper, 'doing mathematics ' You're the only person he ever talked about."

"Sugar, why did you come? Haven't you messed up things enough for him? Why can't you get the hell away."

"If I left he'd have no one."

"He'd have me."

"He'd be better off with a hole in his head. Hell, he acts like someone who never had a brother. He never had anyone show him anything, take him around and show him how things ought to be."

The truck topped a small rise and the motor seemed

to stall. I pumped the gas a few times and it sputtered. Then I downshifted into third and it coughed again.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"I don't know." I slowed down and pulled over to the shoulder to let it idle, but it died.

I opened the hood but didn't see anything right away. I unscrewed the wingnut which held the airfilter and looked at the carburetor. There was gas running down the outside from a gasket. Sugar got out of the truck.

"I smell gas," she said.

"No shit." She walked around and stood on my other side. I told her to get in and hit the starter button while I watched. Gas gushed down the carburetor's throat and flooded the engine.

"Something's wrong in here," I said. "Something's stuck. Either the float or the needle valve." She stuck her head out of the cab.

"How much time do we have?" she asked.

Deer Lodge was only about ten miles away. We could see the large watertower that hung above the town. "We got half an hour yet," I said. "I might be able to fix it." I reached behind the seat and pulled out a screwdriver.

Another pickup crested the hill behind us and slowed. The driver rolled down his window and asked if we needed any help.

"Carburetor problems," I said and he nodded.

"Let's ask him for a ride," Sugar said to me. "Let this go."

"You can go if you want, but I'm going to stay and fix it."

"What if you don't get it fixed in time? They won't let you in to see him."

"I don't need any help running my life," I said. I went over to the pickup.

"Do you suppose you could give the lady here a lift to the prison. She's suppose to see someone there at three. She's worried about being late."

"Sure," he said. "Glad to. How about you?"

"I'm pretty sure I can fix this in a minute or two." He nodded. He looked like a rancher and he had a cowboy hat sitting next to him on the seat.

"Whatever," he said. "I'll be there as soon as I can," I said.

"Okay," she said. She turned her head and looked down the road.

"Tell Ro hello." She nodded and the rancher pulled back onto the highway.

I started taking the carburetor apart. I removed the needle valve and the float. My hands and shirt sleeves got gas all over them. Two other cars passed me

while I worked. The frontage road didn't get a lot of traffic. I cleaned everything I could clean and blew into the valve seat. I couldn't spot the problem so I put everything back together and tried to start it. The engine sputtered once and that was all. The problem was still there.

I took it apart again and watched the clouds rolling towards me. I wondered what I was doing here and then it started to snow a little -- an April snow, not anything serious.

It's great to be out on the side of an old county road, the sky spitting little balls of snow at you like you weren't worth wasting whole flakes on. The hood of your truck is up and your hands are numb and reek of gas and you fumble with a bunch of carburetor parts looking for a piece of dirt smaller than a sand grain. I wasn't going to make it, even if I got everything fixed.

I went back into the cab and sat. I thought about Ro, when they led him to the visitor's room and Sugar would be there and I'd let him down again. He'd say it didn't matter. Carburetor trouble or no it wouldn't matter. They'd talk for a while and I wouldn't see him again for months.

I set the float and the needle valve on a rag and put my boot against the dash. The wind had kicked up a bit and it was going to blow the storm over me in a couple of minutes. I thought about some of the people I'd worked for -- engineers with their wide foreheads and one track

minds. All that stuff I told Ro he'd believed. I was the one who belonged behind bars, away from normal people. Turn Ro loose and let him wander around, away from me.

A pickup came by, this time from the other direction, and stopped. Two old men sat inside and the one driving rolled down his window and asked if I needed anything. I told him no, that I was OK. He turned to the other and said something I couldn't hear and then he gave me a slow wave with the palm of his hand and drove away slowly.

The two men looked alike, right down to the same irregular hairline. I watched their truck go over the little rise and out of sight and I listened to the whine of their transmission and tires until it faded completely. The two old fools. Out screwing around. I wondered what they said to each other.