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FOUR SHORT STORIES

by

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B.A., Tufts College, 1950

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

Montana State University

1951

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INTRODUCTION

The four stories: Night, Fiesta, The Gilded Hearse and Deep Valley, are arranged in the order in which they were completed. If there are noticeable changes in technique or in ideas, they are probably more apparent to the reader than to me. But there are explanations and viewpoints which I should like to state. First, I wish to discuss matters which the reader could not discover for himself, and which will be of interest to anyone who likes the stories: how the stories came to be. Then I shall comment upon a few concepts which I have in mind when writing and which influence the way in which my stories are told.

The original version of Night was written in May, 1947, as the final assignment in the freshman composition course at Tufts College. I remember that the opening sentences came to me as I walked home from school one day. I was delighted with them. I had no plot, but I worked one out by adding one satisfying sentence to another. The joy of putting words together is still a motivation and reward for writing, but I no longer have the nerve to begin to write without a framework in mind.

I think a good deal of homesickness went into the writing of Night. It was nearly vacation time. My home was within sight of the Adirondack Mountains, and for all

that I loved Boston, the open country was calling.

Neither the plot of Night nor the characters have reference to any specific event or person. However, my father told me tales his father told of preachers who were tarred and feathered in order to excoriate from them the lusts of the flesh. In my own childhood I spent many hours at the log cabin of Henry and Mary Ann Thompson; I remember them as simple, human, but withal good, and they could not read or write.

I had then, a thorough acquaintance with the background and the kind of people used in the story. The theme of Night came naturally from an intense interest in the problems of prejudice and social coercion. The same theme handled differently is used in Deep Valley.

My freshman composition teacher told me that I might someday do successful creative writing. It was not a new idea to me. Before I could read I had created a well-remembered set of fictional characters---the effect of a rather lonely childhood and of having elderly parents, I think. And in grade and high school my "compositions" were thought successful. But my college teacher's encouragement gave me pause. I had to ask myself whether I had a real creative instinct or merely talent. The question plagued me all of the summer of 1947. I decided, or perhaps, more accurately, came to believe that I did

have, and had always had, since I could remember, an urge to create. I marshalled evidence in my favor--my imaginary companions; the adventure story I began in first grade, as soon as I could print; the "composing" on the piano which drove my parents first to distraction, then to lessons--and I enrolled in a creative writing class in the autumn.

But I wasn't completely satisfied with my decision. In the three years between high school and college I had become intensely interested in music. I had withdrawn at the last moment the application for admittance to a conservatory. The decision to go to Tufts (I knew the name from a time when I wanted to be a doctor) was made for me by the fact that the Boston Symphony Orchestra was near at hand. In short, I wasn't deeply interested in creative writing; I was more interested in searching through books of poetry for material to set to music. On the other hand, two courses of music in my freshman year had not been highly successful, and finally resulted in open warfare between _le maitre_ and me. He said I had a faulty ear; he once had a work performed, and it was said to be in the style of Purcell.

So, in my sophomore year, my interests were divided, and I set out the following summer for Colorado, half-determined not to return to college in the fall. The West was inspirational; it broke up my doldrums; it made me

return to Boston, but with perspective now, with confidence that I could write.

Two years of courses in creative writing produced nothing of any value. The class experimented with form, studied theories, read. I suppose the time wasn't completely lost. I received my B.A. in January, 1950, and stayed in Boston for over a month with nothing to do. It was then that *Fiesta* was begun.

The setting for *Fiesta* is a fairly accurate description of what I saw myself in Santa Fe. Only the girl, Alita, is consciously based on a real person, although sometimes the other characters remind me of people I know.

The death-theme in *Fiesta* is one which held a long-standing, deep-seated fascination for me. An older brother had committed suicide when I was four. (He had been crippled by cerebral palsy from birth, but he had had a fine mind, and we still have the letter Edwin Markham wrote him commending his poetry.) I do not remember his death, although I certainly was old enough to be aware. Sinda's suicide at the fiesta is an attempt to deal with the idea that wilful death is not necessarily the result of a feeling that life is stale, but rather may result from an awareness of the fulness of life coupled with an inability to experience it fully. I certainly did not write *Fiesta* with my brother consciously in mind, but I

think it safe to say that unconscious childhood recollections influenced the story.

Fiesta was put in final form after I arrived in Missoula in the fall of 1950. (During the summer I had occupied myself with some pretty bad poetry.) My first quarter at Montana State University was a busy time, and I did not begin a new story. Strangely enough, another death in the family probably served as instigation for writing The Gilded Hearse. My father died on December 13.

The idea for The Gilded Hearse was an old one; originally, about 1948, it was an idea for a novel, and a few pages got written. So let me disavow immediately any idea that the story is autobiographical. It is related to my family and myself in about the same proportions that Fiesta is related to my having been once in Santa Fe.

It is true, though, that the background scenes in The Gilded Hearse bear a strong resemblance to real places. The town fronting on the lake is an accurate description of Rouses Point on Lake Champlain, but the stairs Tony climbs to get off the beach are on the ocean front at Swampscott, north of Boston. The fountain and the park are in Canton, New York.

The last story, Deep Valley, was written in April-May, 1951. The idea was based on an actual incident; an intoxicated Indian, in Missoula to take part in a pageant in

the summer of 1950, borrowed money from Jean Pocta, working at the switchboard in Main Hall. He told her he would make her a pair of slippers; he actually said, "An Indian never goes back on his word."

Since I have seen Indians only at a distance, and since I have spent very little time on a ranch, the characters and background of Deep Valley are almost purely fictional. Some reader may wonder why I chose to fictionalize to such an extent the original incident, since it might have made a good story as it happened. To answer the question involves my conception of what the short story should accomplish.

In considering the incident at the telephone board as a possible idea for a story, I was concerned with how I should make the Indian understandable, how I should make the reader feel for him as a man. There are writers who can work in very small areas, who are capable of conveying both idea and feeling in not much more than a sketch. However, space is usually necessary to the creation of a mood, and I, personally, do not care for the kind of short story which presents a neat idea or sketch and lets the reader's emotional reaction go hang. Poe was a master of the short short story packed with emotion, but he had not much idea to convey. Besides, I wonder if we are as chilled by his horror stories as we pretend to be. James'

long "The Turn of the Screw" is a better horror story than Poe could manage. I certainly do not mean to imply that short stories need to be as lengthy as mine, but I think that a desire to create mood and fill out the character enough so that the reader may react to him as a human being instead of a mannikin--this is explanation of the length of my stories.

Readers have commented on the amount of detail they find in my stories. They wonder if the amassing of detail does not make the stories unnecessarily long. Here again, I think that if the stories come alive, the characters must have a well-defined environment through which they move. The environment is important to an understanding of the character, especially if the environment is seen through the character's eyes. For example, in Fiesta, Philip sees only noise and dust in the celebration, and he cannot understand Sinda's melancholy. In The Gilded Hearse, Tony Allen notices the fountain and it is significant to him; Mrs. Allen pays no attention to the fountain, but she does notice how the store smells, and the smell of food starts a train of associations concerning her family.

By seeing environment through a character's own eyes, then, the reader is enabled to discover for himself the sort of person the character is, and the writer avoids

the awkward necessity of <u>telling</u> his reader. I think that a story is often the richer for letting the reader do his own interpretation of personality; he may read in deeper meaning than the author himself could have given.

In the same way, I deliberately understate in order that the reader may not have my understanding of the characters thrust upon him. For example, I usually write "he said," in preference to "he gritted," or "he snarled," or "he spat back." In short, characterization should not be so completely defined that no room is left for the reader to interpret in his own way. On this score the short story adapts a theater technique; the words said are considered an adequate indication of how they are said.

There is another reason for understating. If a story is told quietly, it is more likely to be believed. When I was writing <u>Fiesta</u>, I had the feeling that I had better mention Sinda's suicide casually and early in the story, rather than dwell upon its gory details at the end. On the other hand, there is no harm done by reminding the reader--by using a colorful turn of phrase which he wouldn't have thought of himself--that you are a serious and competent literary craftsman. In <u>The Gilded Hearse</u> for example, I wanted the reader to be aware of my description of the fountain. The fountain is seen through Tony's eyes; the reader discovers Tony's character by the way in which

Tony sees the fountain; if the reader is impressed by the way in which I describe the fountain, I have managed to assert myself as a writer, and I have slanted the reader toward thinking what I want him to think about Tony without insisting that Tony's personality is thus and so.

The use of rhythm is another effective means of urging the reader toward the proper interpretation. From Fiesta:

> She said, "Why don't you suggest places to go? You let me make all the suggestions."
>
> He said, "I don't have to suggest places to go. I like to go where you go. I love you."

"She said" might have been written, "she whined," and "he" might have "answered blandly." Neither substitution would have changed the rhythm of the sentences. But if I had written "she whined," some reader might have said, "Oh, no. She certainly would have 'inquired icily.'" The rhythm of the sentences is intended to convey the impression of tension between them, and understatement saves me the unpleasantness of using descriptive adverbs with which the reader might quarrel.

I think rhythm was overdone in the early story, Night. When I wrote it, I was too much impressed by Thomas Wolfe's style. There was, I think, no conscious attempt to imitate Wolfe, but one tries to write according to one's concept of good writing. I do not think that conscious imitation

is a good thing; I have already said that the experiments with technique in undergraduate writing courses did not produce satisfactory stories. I am still dissatisfied with my own stories, but I am not quite aware where the trouble lies, and I hope that it will work itself out with practice and experience.

It is easier to evaluate the work of others than it is to judge one's own. Thomas Wolfe taught me the value of rhythm and of detail, and showed me the dangers of formlessness, overstatement, and poetic prose. Virginia Woolf is a favorite author of mine because of her ability to make a story move vertically by going deeper and deeper into a situation, instead of horizontally by adding incident to incident. I consider Theodore Dreiser's An American Tragedy proof that a story may be powerful even though awkwardly written. I think that it is often difficult to pay attention to the meaning of flawless prose--I find myself thrilled by Pater, but often unaware of what he's talking about. Of course, awkwardness presents difficulties too. So does an idiosyncratic style, such as Joyce's or Henry Green's. But it is an author's insights and his ideas, not his style, which give him stature. I do not imply that style is unimportant, but I think the reader should not summarily dismiss an author because of the idiosyncrasy or the awkwardness of his style.

Style is a personal matter, and there is integrity in writing to please oneself. There is a certain lack of integrity in a too-conscious imitation of style, and the implication that I have imitated always annoys me. It does not seem to me that a first requisite for writing is to have read. I have read a great deal, but unsystematically; I doubt that I know any one author well enough to imitate him. Besides, I think that one likes in an author what one already has in one's own mind and personality--unsaid, unformed perhaps, but already part of oneself--and, in such a circumstance, imitation is impossible.

N I G H T

NIGHT

John Nathan lived for thirty years with Helen, who was barren, and when she died neighbors came from across the valley to follow with him to her grave. It was spring. Along the lowlands the willows were green with bursting buds; white fragile flowers were thrusting up through last year's rotting leaves and the limbs of trees flung down by the autumn winds.

The buggy jounced and swayed as the wheels grated in the muddy ruts, but John sat unnoticing, old, while all these sights passed before his eyes, so familiar yet so oddly strange when seen with sorrow. Beside the grave, while they lowered the plain, light casket into the earth, he did not weep. A soft breeze came from the mountains laden with the scent of pines, and wet earth, and the wild shag plum blossoms which whitened the valley like late snow. His thin greying hair tossed about in his eyes, but he stood with his hands at his side, and finally they turned him about and took him home, so that they could throw the damp, black earth in upon the coffin, and finish Helen's grave before the sun went down.

Night overtook the friends who had come to mourn before they reached their cabins. There was no moon and they let the reins hang loose and trusted their horses to take them home. The darkness pulsed with sound: the sucking,

dragging grate of the wheels; the distant night bird's cries; the shrill chorus of spring peepers from the creek, and then their sudden silence as the buggy passed. The air was sharp and cool and they sat close together and listened to the earth's song and were filled with nostalgia and sorrow. Most of them were John's and Helen's age, and now the years came crowding back, throbbing and real, painting forgotten faces on the darkness, blotting out the night sounds with the voices of other days, filling their stomachs with sick emptiness and their throats with a tight stifled anguish. The dim lights from their cabins glimmering through the trees recalled them to the present with relief. While the horse was put away, the women hurried into the cabin, turned up the light, placed wood on the low fire and set the kettle on. And across the valley, through the wet woods, there in his small dark cabin near the stream, for the first time in his life, John Nathan felt completely alone.

Spring that year was filled with bright, clear sun and nights of heavy, quiet rain. Beneath his snug roof, John lay in darkness and heard its steady thunder. The eaves dripped. The earth drank. Before the door and down the path to the spring, the flowers Helen had planted bloomed again, already half choked by weeds and grass. In the day John drove his team into the fields, but somehow he could

not concentrate his efforts, and he tired easily. Once he had enjoyed the hot breeze, the smell of the steaming earth. The furrows had grown behind his plow, and every day, their increasing breadth had been the visible evidence of his efforts. But now the team stood often at the lower margin of the field, stamping flies and dozing while John sat motionless where he had flung himself down beneath a tree.

At these times his mind wandered, and he lived his life again as he would have had it. He would think that he saw Helen coming toward him over the sunlit meadows carrying water or a basket of lunch. Then, when he woke to reality, the day seemed dark and chilly, and he would rise and work again. Often, it seemed to him that he had a son. He saw him working in the field, he heard his voice, saw his bare head and long stride behind the plow. Through the quiet evenings he did not light the lamp. Sometimes he would wonder suddenly if he had been talking to himself and would be ashamed. Then he would strike a match and thrust it beneath the chimney of the lamp, and when the wick caught the flame he would carry the light to the mirror and stare in the cracked, discolored surface at the strangeness of his own face.

In mid-August, the shock and sorrow partially forgotten, craving again the voices and faces of other men, John set out one evening for the meeting house down the valley near the bridge. Once they had gone, Helen and he, every Sunday

morning in good weather to the church services there, and they had read the heavy, clasp-bound Bible which was the only book they owned. But they had stopped going, and when Helen died the new parson hardly knew what to say about a woman he had never seen alive. Now a traveling evangelist had come to the valley to hold nightly meetings.

The service had already begun when John arrived. He heard the hymn-singing and then the rising, falling incantation of the evangelist's prayer. Within, the people were kneeling on the floor, facing their seats, with one hand covering their eyes. At the end of the prayer, they rose, their great shadows stumbled over the walls as they settled in their seats again. John stepped in and sat quietly near the back. A few people looked around, recognized him, and nodded.

The evangelist was young, emaciated; his voice was deep and powerful, and near the end of his impassioned sermon he wept brokenly. Twice, a young woman rose and sang hymns. John could not take his eyes from her face. She was young and heavy and kind looking. When the crowd rose and gathered in little groups to visit, John avoided his neighbours and pushed through to where the preacher and the young woman were standing. They shook his hand, asked his name, and God-blessed him. He went home feeling alive again and looking forward to tomorrow.

John went back every night, and watched the woman's face, and heard the others call her Liza.

One night when he came to the meeting-house, only a handful of men were standing about. A bucket was tipped over on the ground, tar was spilled over the grass and on the men's clothing, and feathers were stuck to their hands.

"If it wasn't getting so dark we'd catch the slut, too."

"That's the last we'll see of that pair. I dare say he'll lay low in the woods somewhere 'til his coat of varnish comes off."

"Don't worry, she'll find him or somebody else. She probably was borrowed from some other traveling preacher."

The hard, excited voices floated clearly on the light summer wind. The meeting house was all dark and the door was standing open. John knew what the men had done and he was sick and did not want them to see him there. He turned around, and went home, stopping far up the valley to sit on a boulder for a long time.

As he approached his cabin, he saw a light flickering through the trees. He was not surprised. He walked slowly up the path. Somehow, he had expected the light there; it seemed as if it was more natural to see it there than it had been on all the other nights to find the windows still and dark. He knew who was there before he opened the door. When it had swung slowly back, he saw her beside the table

facing him.

* * * *

The last of summer. Haze lay along the horizon, cloud shadows swept over the meadow where the wind bent the grass like waves on the sea. Then the first frosts came in the night and withered the pumpkin vines, and turned the green, rough leaves of the corn into brown rustling blades. The hills were filled with scarlet and yellow and the whirring of falling leaves. Then, in November the earth was gray and bare again. And in the autumn of his years, remembering June, John took Liza one day across the mountain to the town and brought her back to the valley as his wife.

From spring to spring again, a year, and in that brief term of days, from night to morning, from despair to hope, from grief to joy, from mourning to the enchantment of a dream. For John seemed to have again his life before him. He dreamed a young man's dreams. He saw years of struggle, of building for those he loved, then the long, slow years beyond, full of quiet days when he would sit in the sun for many hours drowsing, dreaming back over the years, the good years. And he thought of death, even as a young man does, not as darkness and oblivion, the quiet mound of grass beneath the wind, and a strange voice saying, "Who lies here?", but as honor and remembrance and eternity in stone. He

would not wholly die. His sons would break the buds of spring and place them where he lay, and remember.

The news had spread throughout the valley that John had taken in the preacher's woman, but the neighbors respected him, and knew that he was lonely. They would not interfere. As long as the woman stayed at John's cabin and did not come into the settlement, they would suffer her to remain, unseen, among them. But then one day when old Sid Ryder went to town over the mountain he heard the amazing news of the wedding. He tarried so long in the store talking about the event that dusk had already come before he started home. But a tale bearer's prestige is great, and old Sid noticed neither the distance nor the darkness in his haste to be home. He turned the thing over in his mind, talked to himself, anticipated the reactions of his neighbors, and before he realized that he was halfway to his destination, he came to his own door.

A wind rose that night driving a heavy rain against the mountain, and in the morning, scattered, ragged clouds hung sullenly over the drenched earth. Old Sid slept fitfully, and he was early up and headed for the settlement, for this news burned in his mind, and he must tell it. By noon the tale had spread up and down the valley, and those who had not heard it first hand set out in the lowering weather and came down to know if it were true.

At first, they were surprised and made jokes. But as

the afternoon wore on, the group grew larger and a sullen mood fell over the crowd. They had allowed the woman to stay among them to look after an old and righteous man. But to marry, and with secrecy...

"It's about as Amy says. It's a damned shame he had to make such a fool of himself in his old age."

"There's no fool like an old fool, I guess."

"Poor Helen. It's a mercy the poor thing died before this happened."

"Yes, it would have been the same thing if Helen was alive. That miserable, dirty thing. She should be run out of here."

"He's the one who needs a lesson."

Outside, sudden gusts of rain dimpled the puddles in the rutted road. When John saw the torches coming up toward his cabin, he knew that, at last, his neighbors had found out about his wedding. They were coming to make him treat them to his cider. His house would be opened to them, and his bride welcomed into the community. So he threw his door wide and stepped out.

"Come in, come in. I can't keep good news hid, can I?" he called.

The crowd halted, shifted uneasily, muttering.

"You come out," someone yelled. John stood still, facing the fitful, sputtering lights.

"Yeh, come out, and bring your slut with you. We're going to give you a shivaree you won't forget 'til the tar wears off."

Inside the cabin the light went out. John began backing through the door.

"There, she's put the light out. I guess she's had this happen before."

The crowd moved forward slowly at first, then, as the door began to close, with a wild rush and hoarse cries, slipping in the mud. Their heavy boots cracked on the cabin floor, the torches filled the room with wavering shadows, and they saw the open window and the calico curtain billowing lightly in the night wind.

The mob surged out of the cabin and spread into the bushes. The torches bobbed in the darkness. And John went too and called her name. But the woman was already in the main road, running up the slope over the mountain.

As they spread out in their search, each man was cut off from the courage of the crowd, and soon they began returning to the cabin. They stood about uncertainly. The rain increased and the torches sputtered out. John was sitting on the ground, cross-legged, and the rain ran down his face in sudden little streams. He would not answer when they spoke to him. They lifted him under the arms and took him inside. They did not light the lamp. They did not

want to face his gaze. They went back outside, and finally pulled the door shut and started home.

The rain drenched the earth, their boots sucked in the deep mud, and near the settlement the creek was swollen nearly to the bridge. It surged and babbled in the darkness; twigs, reeds, and last year's leaves were swirling on its crest.

F I E S T A

FIESTA

It had been a lonely year for Philip Meister. In his whole married life he had never considered the possibility that he might be left alone. He plagued himself ceaselessly, therefore, to know why the unexpected had happened.

It was the suddenness of her action that he couldn't comprehend, Philip said. Sinda had gone down to Santa Fe with him, but he came back to Chicago alone. Even a year later he was saying to friends, "Can you imagine what came over her?" He kept insisting that nothing upsetting had happened in New Mexico. Sinda was really far too sophisticated to be upset because he took the Spanish girl dancing. Besides, she got interested in the pansy Brady right away herself. Sinda was usually as predictable as the phases of the moon, but sometimes she would do queer things. She would cry for no reason, for instance, and this Brady was another of her whims.

"Of course," Philip said, "I'm not stupid enough to think Sinda really wanted Brady. I wouldn't think any woman would want to trade in a man for a Brady. No, I'm positive that it wasn't so much that she wanted someone else as that she wanted to be free from me. But I can't understand it. We hadn't been unhappy together, although we did go to the Fiesta as sort of an attempt at a second honeymoon. But after Sinda met Brady she was moody and distant.

You know she left me a note which said just this:

Dear Phil:

Simon Brady said once, 'Think how it would be if you were to toil and endure all of a long year, and the festival never came.' I can't go on with you now that I know the festival will never come.

And she signed her name. I know that note by heart. I've tried to see in it some real motive, some clue. Can you imagine it? Just that. But you can see the strange power Brady had over her. I met him once afterward you know and told him to his face that his evil influence was to blame. He just looked at me calmly and said, 'I had nothing but the power of unintentionally making your wife see her plight, Mr. Meister.' As if I were too gross to understand Sinda."

Philip Meister's friends, people who had known Sinda too, were no help to him. A couple of them suggested that Sinda must have acted on the strength of long standing grievances, but the others agreed with him that it must have begun in Santa Fe.

"Sometimes," Philip said, "I think it was the very character of the Festival itself that worked on her. To me it was a lot of noise, dust, and crowded bars. Oh it was colorful, picturesque you know, but Sinda seemed to see something sad about it. In fact several people--Brady and Alita--seemed to find something sad about the fiesta, too.

"I don't know, though. Logically it must have started when I met the Spanish girl. I keep wondering if I am to blame. But my whole affair with Alita was innocent. Even if I am to blame, I am innocent."

So in his loneliness, Philip Meister searched his conscience and declared himself blameless, even a year after he came back one night just before dawn to his rooming-house on the outskirts of Santa Fe, to find his wife lying on top of the bed, her wrists slashed, dead by suicide.

II

For an hour that September night the guitars were still. Every light in Santa Fe had been put out and crowds waited along the streets to see the procession of candlebearers come down from the Cathedral. At last, when the doors of the Cathedral were opened, a great slab of light fell gleaming upon the street, a carpet for the feet of the worshippers. The only sound was the shuffle of bare feet over the smooth cobblestones, and smoke from the guttering candles floated in the cool air, with an odor like that of decaying flowers. The procession passed slowly, dark faces bent, hands cupped to guard the fragile flames. Then from the Hill of the Martyrs outside the town came the chanting of the mass for the dead. It was then that he kissed Alita for the first time.

She had said, "If we don't go we will have to listen

to them singing the requiem." So they had pushed out of the crowd and gone along a deserted street. They strode out swinging their arms, holding hands. Her high heels clicked on the pavement, and even lifted up like that, he noticed, her head was just below his shoulder. They were silent at first. But Alita's mood changed swiftly, and suddenly she had thrown her body backward to show him she could touch her hands to the ground. Her hair fell behind her spread knees and her breasts strained against the shirt she wore; when she sprang up, he caught her in his arms and kissed her. As he held her, the breeze lifted and they could distinctly hear the chanting of the worshippers who were gathered around the ancient graves in the desert. She pushed him away gently, her head turned to catch the sound of the singing. Then they walked on in silence. Suddenly the lights came on again. He looked at her. Her face was quiet, serious. But then she smiled quickly and put her hands over his ears, saying, "Don't listen." She shook his head lightly with her finger-tips. Laughter was behind the Spanish words she said. He asked her what they meant. She looped her arm through his, and propelled him back toward the plaza, the bright lights and the music. She said in flawless English, "After all, they have been dead two hundred years."

Afterward, it seemed to him that that was the beginning.

III

Sinda heard about the Santa Fe Festival before they left Chicago. She kept talking about it. She asked Philip if he wanted to go.

He said, "The whole idea of this trip is to go wherever we want to, and to stop as long as we please."

They were packing their bags. Sinda carefully folded up a blouse, and said, "Yes, but do you really want to go?"

"Of course," he said. "I would tell you if I didn't want to go to Santa Fe."

"Really wanting to go and just going because the car takes you there are different matters," Sinda answered. Her voice sounded strained. He didn't answer her.

She said, "Why don't you suggest places to go? You let me make all the suggestions."

He said, "I don't have to suggest places to go. I like to go where you go. I love you."

He came toward her. She snapped her suitcase shut and slipped it to the floor, and walked out of the room before he could reach her.

No more was said about the matter until they were in Colorado Springs one morning waiting for breakfast. The Fiesta would begin in Santa Fe that night. Philip suddenly wondered how far it was to Santa Fe, and they began talking about the festival. Sinda said again she would like to go.

That morning driving toward Santa Fe both Sinda and Philip felt the alertness and light-heartedness of going where they had never been before. In the small towns across southern Colorado they began to hear Spanish spoken, and, early in the afternoon, at a service station in New Mexico, Sinda bought two sombreros because the car's top was down and the sun hot. They had to be tied on to keep them from blowing away.

The landscape too gave them a feeling of newness, strangeness. From Colorado Springs toward Pueblo they came out of the mountains into sandy hills covered with tufts of coarse grass almost the color of the earth itself. And below Taos in New Mexico, there were long stretches of level road, and mountains low against the horizon in the distance. They sped through Mexican villages; a few low houses, dogs, chickens, and occasionally a man with wide-brimmed hat low over his dark face, to shield his eyes from the sun. The whole country was bathed in sun. The very hills were yellow with exposure.

Sinda and Philip were carefree, not feeling the usual restraint between them. Unconsciously they were preparing for the gaiety of the festival. Sinda stayed at the wheel nearly all the way; she drove fast, watching far ahead along the road, glancing occasionally at the peaks ringing the horizon. They didn't speak much.

Late in the afternoon, Philip was reading names from the road map--La Veta, Taos, Durango--and he read to Sinda the name of a mountain range, Sangre de Cristo. She repeated it.

"Sangre de Cristo. The Blood of Christ," she said.

The name seemed to capture her imagination.

"Isn't it wonderful, Philip," she said. "What wonderful country. Imagine us naming a mountain range The Blood of Christ. The Blood of Christ."

Philip tried to joke with her. He said, "You're the only person I've ever known who gets emotional over names on a map." So he tried to sustain the mood of intimate carelessness he had felt when Sinda tied his sombrero under his chin, sitting up on her knees on the car seat. But suddenly she was silent, and her face, as she looked far down the road, was tense and tired. And then he too fell silent. At first he was angry with Sinda's swift change of mood. 'But gradually, as they continued without speaking, he began to blame himself for having joked with her. Even though he had enjoyed their carefree mood, he should have known that Sinda would suddenly turn serious. He should have refused to play with her, and then he would not have been expected to give an answer to her seriousness. He could have stayed quiet while she talked. Besides, she hadn't been talking seriously. No, she had been talking about the mountains called The

Blood of Christ, and when he had tried to joke with her she had gone out of reach.

He tried to reconstruct the events which had led up to his rankling resentment against himself. But he had hopelessly lost some of the strands. It added up to complete nonsense; they had been happy and at ease, then Sinda said something about a mountain range called Sangre de Cristo and he had replied in the bantering tone appropriate to their mood. It was senseless and Sinda was to blame.

Now that Philip had established in his own mind the cause of their silence, his temper cooled and he began thinking in a detached way about his relations with his wife. They were like magnets, he thought. But their like poles were facing, and they had never been meant to attract each other. Somehow they were fixed in that strange position. As long as they stayed a certain distance apart, each could lie quietly; as soon as they moved close, repelling forces were at work. His mind was still idly mulling over the laws of magnetism, trying to apply them to human relations, when Sinda pulled the car to the side of the road, and went around to the trunk after the thermos bottle.

It was Sinda who spoke first. He heard her without paying attention to what she said. She took off the sombrero and said something about the workmanship, running her long fingers over the crown, and not looking at him. Philip was

looking over the prairie, his mind still half occupied with the laws of magnetism, turning the little tin cup about in his fingers. The beads of moisture on the metal wetted his hands.

Philip said quietly, "This lofty aridity answers something in me."

Sinda didn't answer. He added, "Perhaps in both of us."

She turned suddenly to him and put her hands on his arm, She was pale with seriousness, and spoke rapidly not letting him cut in. She said, "Philip, Philip," and her face crinkled for a moment as if tears were close. "It's new country and you like it. Let's try to be happy. While we're here. . . ."

He put his hand over her mouth and said, "Shh..." She tried to twist her head away but he put his arm around her shoulders and held her tightly. He said, "We aren't unhappy, Sinda." After a few moments her body went limp against his, and he felt a surge of tenderness for his wife. He felt that he must answer her somehow.

He said, "Darling, we have to live out difficulties, not talk them out. Even if we could talk about things naturally it would be all right, but this dragging things in by the tail is terrible." He tried to sound wryly humorous.

Sinda said flatly, but with a sort of desperate urgency, "But you can't see anything to talk about unless I drag it in by the tail." She stopped and turned her head away.

Philip drove the rest of the way into Santa Fe. It was dusk. Sinda leaned back with her face toward the mountains, which were blue as ice in the half light. Neither spoke. After a while they saw the distant lights of the town from the crest of a desert hill.

IV

Whey they drove into Santa Fe the Fiesta had begun. The effigy of the Spirit of Gloom was already burning. It had been set ablaze as soon as dark came, and now gaiety swirled through the streets like some wild thing blown into town by the night wind from the prairie.

Philip honked and inched his way through the crowds. They skirted trios with violin, guitar, and accordion; lone singers with guitars, dancers, horsemen. At one corner of the plaza a stage had been set up, and they saw a girl whirling there with her arms above her head, while the watchers applauded. The din was terrific. Over all the milling crowd flickered the flames and shadows from the crumbling effigy.

Philip felt light-hearted and excited. He glanced at Sinda. She was still wearing dark glasses. The flames

threw a red shadow across her face, so that he couldn't tell what she was thinking.

It was Saturday night; the Festival ended in the early dawn of the next Tuesday morning. They met Simon Brady that first night. At first they both disliked him. He kept talking when they wanted to see the Fiesta. Afterward, Philip sometimes thought, "If we had never met Brady; if I had not been bored; if Sinda and I had begun to see the Fiesta together . . . what then?

V

The room they found was on the edge of town, but even from there they could hear the twanging guitars and the songs--ardent, melancholy, festive. In their room, even before she unpacked her bag, Sinda opened the window, and leaned out listening. The dry, thin air was cold, and overhead the stars seemed big and close.

It was almost ten o'clock before they finished showering and changing clothes and started back toward the center of town to get supper. They stopped to listen to three Mexican boys singing, accompanying themselves with guitars; then squatting in a doorway, obviously quite drunk, a young fellow in cowboy clothes was fiddling quietly.

The restaurant was as crowded as the street outside. They were standing, trying to spot an empty place, when

near them a tall, thin man got up and asked them to share his table. He introduced them to his mother and told them his name was Simon Brady.

The mother said, "We feel guilty, you see." Her son glanced quickly at her, and put his long fingers over the beringed fist in which she was clutching a crumpled handkerchief. They looked at each other, faint smiles lifting their lips, and the mother said, "We feel guilty because we never eat out except in Festival time; then we come here where we won't miss anything."

The restaurant was dimly lighted, and outside dancing had begun in the streets. The sound of laughter, music and shouting made it difficult for them to hear one another even across the table, and Philip sat back watching Sinda as she leaned forward to hear what Brady was saying. When Brady's head turned she studied his face. He talked on and on. He was telling them about the Festival, at first, and Philip listened.

"You see, the Spaniards had imposed Christianity on the Indians, but when the Indians drove the oppressors out, they naturally took up their native rituals. Well, when the Spanish army reconquered the territory a few years later the Indians naturally became Christians again."

Philip watched him closely. Brady was holding one cigarette after another between the thumb and forefinger

of one large hand, while he gestured with the other. He took a long draw on his cigarette, then leaned back in his chair, while he carefully squashed the butt in the ashtray, and blew smoke from his pursed lips.

He said, "The Festival celebrates the bloodless reconversion" (he made quotation marks in the air with two fingers of each hand) "of the Indians, and the Spaniards who were killed in the original revolt are martyrs now."

Sinda laughed merrily, and lifted her glass high before her face before drinking, as if to toast Brady's clever conversation. The mother had been looking down at her hands folded one over the other in her lap, but now she rolled herself about on her fat hips and slipped her arm through his and drew him toward her. As Brady leaned sidewise and forward toward his mother he turned his sleek head, too, smiling at her, and his blue knit tie swung away from the white shirt front and dangled between the soft, round cotton and the angular grey flannel of their knees. He straightened and silence fell among them. Philip was leaning back in his chair, watching the dancers outside.

Then Sinda said, "Have you always lived here? Is this your home?" She was asking Mrs. Brady.

Mrs. Brady looked at Sinda vacantly for a moment as if gathering her thoughts, and then she said, "Oh no, we didn't always live here. Simon came out nine years ago, and he

wrote me such wonderful letters about Santa Fe that one day I just took the train and came along." She smiled and settled contentedly in her chair without having said where they had lived before. Her hands were folded in her lap, and she smiled not looking at any of them. And then suddenly Mrs. Brady looked Sinda in the eyes, and Sinda, after a moment, glanced away, avoiding the fat old woman's stare.

Then the mother said, "I've never said it before but I think Simon wanted to send me back on the next train." For an instant her face clouded, and both Sinda and Philip watched with dreadful fascination for her tears. But she did not weep. She looked back at her pudgy hands.

Brady's face was strained. He took two quick gulps of his drink, and in an instant had become the jovial, loving son.

"Ho-ho," he bantered, "You've said it at least twenty-six times. And I think you're beginning to believe it."

Mrs. Brady smiled a vacant smile at her son, and said in a low voice, "I think I had better go home now." She rose a little heavily from the table and repeated, "You have your friends to talk to now; I guess I had better go." No one tried to detain her. Both Sinda and Philip got up, but the mother ignored them.

Brady went with his mother to the door, and they talked there for a few minutes before he came back to the

table. Looking through the window, Philip could see the mother moving slowly away through the gay crowd. When Brady sat down, he glanced from Philip to Sinda. They did not speak. After a moment Brady said, "One can't be always completely kind even to one's mother." Still neither Philip nor Sinda spoke. Brady spread his large hands, palms up, and shrugged his shoulders.

"No really," he said, "one must fight evil with evil. Only one answers with a lesser evil if possible."

Philip was leaning across the table to hear what Brady said. There was a strained atmosphere among them. Philip tried to pass over the situation lightly by asking in a jovial tone, "Is that why you like Santa Fe, Mr. Brady? The evil, I mean."

But Brady took the question seriously. They had already ordered two rounds of drinks, and Philip had notised with annoyance that Brady seemed highly sensitive to alcohol.

"Now understand me," Brady said, and there was something almost alarming in the intense gestures of his hands. "Now understand me, I don't mean that evil must always be answered by evil. But no one believes in the turn-the-other-cheek business any more. So if you can't answer evil with good, it is better to answer it with evil." He relaxed suddenly and smiled. "So I let my mother walk

home," he said and turned up his eyes in an abashed and ludicrous manner, and lifted his hands in a helpless gesture.

Evidently Brady now was willing to change the subject. Philip was about to suggest that they should go their separate ways, and he was annoyed when Sinda continued the strange conversation.

"But I don't see what you mean," she said. "I mean, if you're serious, what is the advantage of fighting evil with evil?"

Brady seemed a little embarrassed at the question. He answered smiling, "Well, at least you express yourself. If you're a masochist you turn the other cheek; if you're afraid of a fight you walk away, but if you're sensible and truthful you slap back."

"But lightly," Philip said, still trying to divert the conversation.

"But lightly, yes," Brady answered.

"But why?" Sinda asked and Philip was greatly annoyed to see that she was seriously interested in Brady's harebrained chatter. Now Brady became serious too. "Because," he said, "the important thing is to give expression to life."

"And you think evil is part of it?" Sinda asked.

"But of course, my dear." Brady smiled and spread his

hands again. He was willing to drop the conversation, but he felt that he had to explain what he had been saying. And so he talked on, punctuating his words with flourishes of the cigarette which he held between the thumb and forefinger of his left hand like an exquisite, miniature baton. He leaned intently across the table and at such close range the dim light accentuated his features rather than hid them. He had a long face with either the refining quality of sensitivity or of elegance, perhaps both, to save it from horsiness. Certainly there was an elegance about Brady bordering on effeminacy. His eyes were slanted and heavy lashed, and the mouth was thin, but well-shaped, so that the two together gave the face an expression of habitual melancholy. It was a monkish face, but lean, healthy, tanned by the sun.

Sinda was saying, "But you are almost saying that the evil in life is good."

"Well," Brady answered, "life as we know it wouldn't be life, and I don't think we would like it, if it weren't for the bad things. That's why I stay in Santa Fe--because there is room for all here. Life may be expressed in many ways. The individual may become a desperado or a religious fanatic. But here both are accepted. There is room for both expressions of life. But where you and I come from the business of living was uniform, patterned, life-denying."

Philip found himself interested and offended by what

Brady was saying. He leaned across the table, too, and looked intently at Brady. Philip said, "Yes, but all this is highly theoretic. People are the same everywhere. Nothing could happen here which couldn't happen anywhere. They have desperadoes because the police force isn't big enough. Show me where these people are any different from the people back home in Chicago."

Brady didn't answer for a moment. "Well," he finally said, "listen to their music. Music says what words can't say. One measure is gay, the next sad. In their music, forces are balanced just as in living. It is the same in their lives. You see, most of these people have nothing gay or pretty in their lives. Their daily lives express the miserable. But then the fiesta comes. . ." He looked out at the crowded plaza, and sat quietly for several minutes, his face sober and intent.

Brady drained his glass and ordered another round before he spoke again. Sinda was twirling her glass against the palms of her hands. Her face was drawn. Brady spoke first.

"I'm sorry. You don't know what I'm talking about. And I can't say it. It's a feeling. Music can say it. So can actions. I mean that these people say the inexpressible things about life in their daily lives. They express life through action." He stopped and bounced his fist on

the table with exasperation.

"Now here's the idea," he continued, leaning closer toward Sinda. "Tomorrow you must go to mass at the Cathedral. I remember the first time I went. It was when I first got here. It's the crucifix in back of the altar you must notice. Some would call it vulgar, but not you," and he reached out and covered Sinda's hand with his. "They would call it vulgar because there is red paint on the hands, feet, on the brow, and on the side. Red paint to represent blood. The blood has already flowed out. The Christ is dead, and they have shown him that way in the crucifix. And when the priest lifted the wine toward the ravaged figure, I suddenly saw why he was represented as being so gruesomely dead. Do you see? They know he is to be honored because he expressed himself, because he expressed his conception of life by way of death."

A long silence ensued. Geysers of light flickered over the windows from the fireworks outside. It was nearly midnight. Philip put both hands flat on the table and pushed himself up. "I think," he said, "I will express myself," and he grinned sardonically and a little drunkenly at Sinda and Brady. They looked at him without speaking. Then he excused himself simply, abruptly, as if he were going to the Men's Room, and he walked out the door into the crowded plaza.

VI

The crowd was thinning out. The sound of music and laughter seemed to be moving into the side streets. Philip felt excited at being alone in a strange town in Fiesta time. He took deep breaths of the cold, clear air. Overhead the stars were close and big.

He found a tavern but the bar was lined four deep. As he leaned against the wall waiting for a chance to order, he began talking to a little Mexican policeman, and that is how he met Alita. The cop was telling him how many hours he had been on his feet that day, and she overheard him while pushing by. She made believe stomping on his tired feet, and she laughed and chattered in Spanish. She had been drinking; her eyes sparkled as she grasped the policeman's shoulders and laughed into his face. She was wearing a white mantilla over her black hair. When she glanced at Philip and said something in Spanish, he knew she didn't expect an answer, but he wanted to talk to her.

He said, "You look like a real Spanish senorita in that mantilla." And immediately he recognized the insipidity of what he had said, and felt embarrassed.

The girl didn't look at him. She shook the little policeman's shoulders--she was nearly as tall as he--and said in English, "Mexican. Not Spanish. You and I are Mexicans, eh, Pedro?"

The policeman took the laughing girl's wrists and held her at arm's length from him, looking into her face with his melancholy eyes.

"This one...," he said to Philip, shaking his head as if he could think of no words to describe her. And then, "Get a drink for this friend," he said to her. Suddenly she turned full toward Philip, serious.

"What, no drink yet?" She was already pushing a way through the crowd, before Philip could speak to her.

VII

So they drank together and talked. When that bar closed they went to an after hours place on the outskirts of Santa Fe. They danced. Her body was lithe and young. It was nearly two in the morning when Philip came home.

He went to his room and put on the light only after he had lunged across the bed and been surprised to find no one in it. In the bright light the room was neat, deserted, still. Sinda had not been home. He put out the light and lay on top of the bed in his clothes so that Sinda could see that he had come home drunk.

When Philip woke up in the morning his wife was sleeping under the covers and he was on top on his own side, still in his clothes and shivering with cold.

VIII

It was Sunday morning.

Philip lay still, shivering, trying to decide what he should do. He rehearsed waking Sinda gently; he would not mention last night. He would laugh about his throbbing head as they sipped coffee, and Sinda would give him an aspirin from her handbag. But then he thought of how she had left him shivering on top of the covers. Cramps began to ripple across his stomach. He got heavily to his feet. His head was pulsing and he gripped the edge of the bureau, and knocked Sinda's compact clattering to the floor. He expected the noise to wake her, but she didn't stir.

When he came back from the bathroom he studied his face in the mirror. He had shaved and his face was flushed from drinking. Alcohol always took away his paleness, and made him look younger. He put on a bow tie and a coat which emphasized his big frame. He actually liked the feeling of a hangover, after he had showered and shaved and put on fresh clothes, and he stood in front of the mirror combing his thick hair and enjoying the frail, giddy sickness in his stomach. Sinda was still sleeping when he went out.

IX

The sun was already hot. After a cup of coffee, Philip sat on a bench in the plaza. He could feel the sun

drawing the alcohol out of his body. He felt weak and giddy, but he stayed there like a sun worshipper until he felt as if he would faint with dizziness. His head was still throbbing and he felt uneasy. The idea kept occurring to him that he should go back and wake Sinda. He knew, although she had not said so, that she would want to go to mass in the Cathedral. He should go wake her. But he couldn't get rid of the feeling that his wife had been awake when he left the room. He was annoyed that she had left him uncovered last night; Sinda rarely retaliated but obviously this time she was protesting because he walked out on Brady's monologue. Well, they understood each other perfectly, and they had always made it a practice to ignore the little tensions, like this, that came up between them. After all, marriage, too, as Brady said, was a balancing of many elements, Philip thought, and even if the scale tipped far one way, as it seemed to be now, it would right itself. It was better to sit still, better not to jar the delicate balance, better to let equilibrium be restored. Even if he had gone too far, Sinda was already reestablishing the delicate balance--by leaving him dressed and uncovered, by ignoring him this morning. He was sure she had been awake.

So Philip mused as he sat in the hot sun that Sunday morning in Santa Fe. So he mused, and his uneasiness gradually subsided, and he dozed in the brilliant light, the

heat, and quiet. There was nothing necessary for him to do, and finally he slept, and the symmetrical, quivering figure of the delicate scale filled his dreams.

When the gathering crowd awoke him, he did go home, But Sinda had gone out, and he went back to the plaza, vaguely disturbed, but relieved too in that Sinda's actions were justifying his own.

The unexpected was to come to Philip Meister when he was confident that he was master of the situation, when he had been obsessed for some hours with the idea of the self-adjusting scale, when, although the girl Alita had just proven to him otherwise, he was sure he could count on his knowledge of human nature. Later he was to say, "It was the suddenness of it I can't understand." Really, though, it was the unpredictableness of Sinda's action which stunned him. And perhaps it was because the idea of the delicate balance had grown strong in his mind just as he was thrown into complete confusion that made everything so unclear to him later. Even a year afterward he said it must have begun with Alita, and still that could not be, because his whole affair with the girl was innocent, completely innocent.

That afternoon as Philip stood watching dancers perform on the open stage in the plaza, Alita came up beside him and took his hand. They spent the rest of the day together. That night they watched the candlelight procession going

barefooted to pray where the bones of the martyrs lay in the desert. That night he made love to Alita, and came home again toward morning. When he stepped into their room, he again did not put on the light, but shut the door softly and stood against it listening. There were only the scattered voices of late revellers. After a while his eyes became accustomed to the dark, and he could see the curtain stirring in the cold air, and the neat emptiness of the bed. Then he slept, and woke when Sinda came in and pulled the shade before lying down because it was already daylight. She bent over him and shook his shoulder. She said his name and gently shook him. She turned his face up with her fingertips and it seemed a long time that she looked at him, not making a sound. He kept his eyes closed. Sinda sobbed after she got into bed, but Philip soon fell asleep, feeling justified because she had come in later than he. The scale was adjusting itself.

That day, because he slept late, Philip was in when Brady called, and Sinda accepted for both of them an invitation to lunch.

Brady was gracious but quiet. He looked tired, and the expression of melancholy was accented by the smudges of fatigue around his eyes. When Sinda left them for a few minutes Brady said, "You have a charming wife, Mr. Meister."

Philip held out his lighter to Brady's cigarette.

"I'm pleased you find her so," he said.

Brady blew smoke slowly from his pursed lips and said quietly, "And are you enjoying our little Fiesta?"

Meister didn't answer the question. He looked steadily at Brady, and the other returned his gaze, holding his cigarette before him between the thumb and forefinger of his left hand, and on his face there was an inquisitive look. "You are accusing me," Philip thought. "You are reprimanding me in order to justify your own interest in my wife. But I'm not afraid of your accusing or of you, because you wouldn't dare, neither of you would dare."

X

That night, Monday, was the last of the Festival. Even if Philip and Alita had driven outside town into the desert, they would still have heard the singing and felt the swirl of the dancing. There was no escaping it. They sat in a dusky bar. Through the windows beside them they watched couples dancing outside in an open court. Shadows flitted over Alita's face, and the sad-gay music throbbed like some element of the air itself. Once Philip and Alita went outside to dance but the night air was cold, and they did not stay.

They drank not heavily, but steadily. For a long while

neither spoke, because earlier they had made themselves melancholy with the thought that this was the last night of the Fiesta. Philip had talked about starting back to Chicago, and it had come to both of them, and Alita said it, how strange it was that they should have come, from so many miles apart, together.

And Alita said, "How much stranger too that I should love you."

They had never mentioned love before. Alita's admission filled Philip with desire and an anxious awareness that when morning came he would be leaving Santa Fe with Sinda. He foresaw how it would be; probably he would never come back, and there would be no excuse to justify correspondence with Alita. He would not know where she was or what she was doing. Finally, she would become almost a wraith of his imagination, and gradually his desire would be quieted. Unless he could leave her behind him without desire...

Philip had not answered her in any way when she told him of her love. He was looking beyond Alita at the dancers in the courtyard, his cheek on her hair. He noticed an old man in the orchestra, who sat with his head down, musing over his guitar, the dark shadow of his hat brim hiding his face. Philip told Alita to look, and when her face was turned from him, he put his lips against her

hair and said softly, "Look, Alita, he is thinking of when he was as young as we and in love. One day his lover went away and that is why he is sad. He remembers the hours they wasted."

Alita was silent a few moments. Then she took the hand he had slipped under her arm against her breast, and held it in hers. She said quietly, "No, Philip, not because his lover went away, but because they have been so happy together. That is why he is sad. Last night he walked in the procession and heard the requiem. He thinks as he sits there that this is the last Festival he will see. He is sad because he is old, and he has loved so long. And he knows he will not live much longer. No, Philip, if his lover had left him so many years ago he wouldn't be sad to die. It is because he is leaving the one he has loved so long that he is sad."

She turned her face against his suddenly, stridently, and they kissed. She was asking him never to leave, and suddenly Philip was talking about his wife whom he had never mentioned to Alita before. He drank rapidly and talked about Sinda, holding Alita in his arms. He was telling Alita that they had only the rest of tonight, and tomorrow he would go away.

He heard her speak Spanish to someone, and another girl stopped at the table. She was a young Mexican girl with

heavy breasts and a sulky mouth. Alita spoke to her in rapid Spanish, and the girl glanced at Philip and sat down. Philip ordered a drink for her, and Alita straightened out of his embrace. While they were waiting for the drinks to come, Alita suddenly turned toward him and put her hands to Philip's face. Her eyes were close to his, and he saw how she studied his face as if that she might never forget it. Her eyes were moist and dark. Then they closed as she kissed him.

The new girl started to go. Alita took her hands from Philip's face and put them on the girl's arm, and kept her from going. And Philip too asked the girl to stay, although he did not know who she was. He was quite drunk, and he kept asking the girl why she was so quiet, and why she wanted to leave them.

At last the strange girl put her hands over his, and squeezed gently. "Let's go somewhere else," she said. He turned toward Alita. She was gone.

XI

Philip Meister wept as he staggered through the streets of Santa Fe that night. He lost his way for a while, and wandered through deserted streets on the outskirts of town. He cursed his wife, everything about her, even her goddam silly name. At first he swore that he would kill her as

she slept alone in her bed. Then, strangely, for the first time he thought of divorcing Sinda. It was a sobering thought.

He found a diner and drank three cups of coffee, then went out in back to relieve himself. Overhead the stars were close and bright. From the plaza he could hear the sound of singing drifting faintly out to the edge of town and beyond into the prairie. As he stood looking up at the sky, listening to the distant voices, all his emotion gradually subsided into the urgent need for sleep, and he turned toward the singing, anxious to be home.

It was very late now. The stars were already dimming in the light of early morning, and the air was stirred with those soft, sudden breezes typical of dawn. The leaves lifted, rustled and fell, and once he passed a lawn sprayer which had been left running all night. Its soft persistent tinkle made with the leaves' stir and his footsteps, a streetful of sound, so quiet it was. Then as he came toward the plaza he heard more clearly the sound of singing and of guitars.

Six young Mexicans were singing their hearts out, one song after another, and strumming guitars. Around them booths were being torn down; even the big stage, where the dancers had whirled and stomped only a few hours ago, had been stripped of its bright bunting. The new planks shone white in the hard lamplight.

He was almost sober now. He knew that he would never divorce Sinda, and he was no longer in a hurry to get home to talk to her. Perhaps tomorrow. Perhaps, he thought, tomorrow, as they drove along over the sandy hills, he would talk with her. But he knew everything she would say. Perhaps she would stop the car again and weep a little. Well, he would see ... tomorrow.

It was very quiet as he came up the street; only the leaves stirred in the cold air, and away behind him he still heard the plinking guitars and the faint sound of voices. Suddenly his foot struck an empty beer can. It bounded away with intermittent clatter, and at the end of its trajectory, rolled away into the road and spun slowly silent. He was almost home; he had been so startled, he did not think to listen again for the guitars and singing.

THE GILDED HEARSE

"Redeem
The time. Redeem
The unread vision in the higher dream
While jewelled unicorns draw by the gilded hearse."

T. S. Eliot.

THE GILDED HEARSE

America. Early summer. Dawn.

The milkman's truck rattles and halts and rattles on again along the quiet street before the sun is up. The man whistles softly as he walks to the dark doors. Everything is lonely and silent in the half light. The east is turning pale. There are long, gray clouds near the horizon, and the air is already hot and still. It will be another humid day.

The ice in the milk truck melts rapidly and a damp, cool trail runs the length of the street. The rattling of the bottles and the low gear grinding of the little truck echoes under the tall elms, and in the empty yards, and through the dark doorways which are open to admit air to the sleepers within. And then all is silent again except for the creak of the milkman's shoes, his soft whistle, and the dull clink of a bottle being set down on a sill.

From far down the street the milkman sees a light at number 261 and the car parked in the street. His scalp prickles momentarily. He is afraid of death. The idea flicks through his mind that old Mr. Allen is finally dead and that the undertaker is there laying him out. He has a sickening mental picture of them arranging the stiff limbs, and closing the lifeless eyes.

He drives nearer. He recognizes Dr. Lewis's car.

Perhaps the old man is just dying. His scalp crawls again and he stops whistling. But when he draws up opposite the house the doctor is leaving and Mrs. Allen is standing on the porch, her arms folded across her chest. She nods to him as he starts to go to the back door carrying a bottle in each hand, and he stops to ask her how her father-in-law is.

She walks over to the side railing and leans there. She looks tired. She says, "Not more than another day. The doctor says this heat is bad for him." The milkman stands below on the sidewalk. "Just before dawn is a bad time," she says. And he can't think of more to say about the old man, and he asks, "Did your son come yet?"

"Anthony came yesterday morning," she answers. "He was going to stay at school a few more days, but his examinations were over. He came right away when I telephoned."

The milkman escapes then, delivers the bottles and returns directly to his truck although he sees her still standing on the porch when he goes back by the front of the house. The east is quite light now. Dawn is only a quarter of an hour away.

Mrs. Allen sits down on the top step of the porch to watch the sun come up. High among the branches of the tall trees the light is pearl grey, but their trunks are indistinct and deep shadows are between the houses on the oppo-

site side of the street. Occasionally she hears the distant rattle of the milk truck. Otherwise the only sound is the gentle, pre-dawn rustling of the leaves. The electric light inside the house throws a wan glow through the open doorway. She hears the nurse come downstairs quietly and run the water in the kitchen for a few minutes. There is the sound of water being sloshed from a glass. Then the quiet footsteps disappear again. Dawn is a little nearer. Mrs. Allen gets up and gropes inside the door for the light switch. She puts out the light and sits back down on the steps. She is wide awake with the alertness of great fatigue, and her mind is extra-ordinarily active. Suddenly she feels very sad. She leans her head back and tries to make her mind blank, but thoughts force themselves into consciousness, and she thinks of her own dead husband.

"Oh, Peter, oh dear husband, handsome one, father of Anthony (handsome one), father of Mary, and of Sarah."

She lifts her hair from her neck with both hands, bends back her head. The shadows are grey now; morning is nearer.

"Oh, Peter, in my fertile brain, as you called it, I sometimes recreate you living, your face, your voice, the whispers mostly, and in the dark, deep night recreate alive and powerful from burning memory your hands upon me. Oh god, the memory of your hands upon me. Then in the night the cold thought of death is darker, deeper. In an instant

I am chill, alone; your hands, your whisper are swept from me as if by the swift passing of the black wing of death, and I am naked, uncovered, horrified and alone. And even in the deep night the horrifying shadow of death sweeps over me. Then, icy, my body stiffened by the mere thought of death, I simulate the reality. I compose my limbs, my lids, in the manner of death, and lie very still, stopping my breath, until my hair roots crawl with terror, and I turn on my left side to hear the reassuring beating of my heart. Oh husband, father, brown flesh--in your dissolution I have learned the terror of nothingness. When I was a child I crawled once under a low cabinet and lay on the floor. And suddenly the bottom of the lowest drawer was like the lid of my casket, and I was terrified, and ran out into the sun, and that same hour poured dirt through my hair and pumped cold water over my head in order to feel life--the weight, the glistening cold of it. And oh beloved, you were all of life. If you are gone I am already half with death, and I must hold to life like a man on a ladder with someone dragging at his feet."

II

When Mary came downstairs she saw her mother sitting on the porch, but she went directly to the kitchen without speaking to her. Later, when breakfast was all ready, Mrs.

Allen came in, but they ate without saying much to each other. And then they began to work in silence.

Mary had rolled up the sleeves of her long, blue housecoat, and she was clearing the table. She worked swiftly. Her arms were brown and lean, and her hands large. She picked up the dishes one by one and scraped them with one movement of a rubber scraper, then stacked them up. It took only a minute to clear away. She turned then and walked quickly to the sink, her housedress making her look very thin and tall. She turned the water on, and stood dashing her finger through the stream to test the temperature. Through the window over the sink she saw the sun on the quiet trees, the infinite peace of a summer weekday morning. Far up the street two children were running through the dappled shade of the tall elms. The light breeze carried away from her the slapping sound of their shoes on the sidewalk. Her whole attention seemed to be absorbed by the scene outside the window. Her face was drawn and there were dark circles under her eyes.

Mrs. Allen looked at her daughter's back and hoped she would not speak. She hoped Mary would not see her getting out the duster. She could not say to her, "We are going to have a funeral. We must be ready." She knew Mary had refused to go near her grandfather because she could not watch someone she loved die.

"Now what are you doing," Mary's voice said sharply. Mrs. Allen looked up. Mary was half turned from the sink, watching her, both glistening hands resting on the edge, and beyond Mary, in the doorway, Tony was stretching his arms above his head.

"What are you going to do?" Mary asked again, and Tony walked into the kitchen almost at the same time, saying, "Alors, le grandpère n'est pas allé a l'autre côté pendant la nuit?" Mrs. Allen looked at Mary instead of her son. But Mary looked at her brother fleetingly, and turned back to the sink. She thrust a pan under the stream of water. Tony watched her.

"Mrs. Allen's mare has her ears in her mane I see," Tony said. Mary turned the water off rapidly. She looked at Tony over her shoulder and snapped, "You speak English when you want to be cute, don't you?"

He made himself a place among the piled dishes on the table, and slowly spread his napkin, and poured a cup of coffee. Mary came to the table to pick up a pile of dishes. He watched her long, brown fingers reach under the edge of the plates. Little soap bubbles were clinging to her hands. He glanced at her face, but she turned swiftly, ignoring him. Her hair was uncombed; some strands were caught beneath the collar of her housecoat. He watched her intently, soberly, the fingers of his left hand gently resting on the warm

cup which he poised half way to his lips. Mrs. Allen made him a sign not to speak.

"A full grown filly and never's been ridden," he said, and took a sip of coffee, watching his mother and sister over the edge of the cup. Mrs. Allen straightened from dusting and left the room. Her duster lay crosswise and fluffy on the shiny wood of a chair.

III

Mrs. Allen only opened the door and Sarah was awake. She lay very still, her dark eyes toward her mother. No sunlight was here. The shade was down over the open window and the light breeze lifted it stiffly, causing an odd varying light to shiver through the room. There was a sound of leaves, almost, in this still greyness, the sound of silence.

"Is grandfather dead," her gentle Sarah asked, and Mrs. Allen went swiftly to her and, bending down, took her thin cheeks between her hands, and kissed her mouth. She said, "No, of course he's not dead. Hurry and get up now." She ruffled through the clothes in the closet.

"Is it raining?" Sarah asked.

"No, it's sunny. Hurry now. You can have breakfast with Tony if you hurry."

"Is Mary there?"

"Yes."

"Oh."

They did not speak again. Mrs. Allen jerked the shade. It slithered to the top and bright dappled light, filtered and tinted a faint green by the tree-tops outside, filled the room. She saw Sarah squint her eyes tight, and her thin hands came out from under the sheets to cover her face. Her child was thin and pale against the white sheets.

Mrs. Allen and Sarah went downstairs together, the mother's arm around her daughter's shoulders. Sarah had her bathrobe on over crinkled pajamas. Her eyes were lumpy with sleepiness. She had dashed water in her face, but her hair was uncombed; a damp lock curled on her bony forehead over the blue vein lines at the temples.

As soon as they walked into the kitchen Tony glanced at them, holding his cup poised halfway to his lips, looking over the rim. Mrs. Allen stopped with her arm still over the child's shoulders. She looked directly at Tony, her face artificially bright, her eyebrows raised a little. Her son did not respond. He continued to hold his silent gaze, looking at them intently, detachedly. Mrs. Allen drew Sarah against her, and said, "Isn't little sister blooming this morning?"

But Tony was carefully setting his cup into the saucer, and poising his long fingers together before his face, "How uplifting for the soul," he said, "how inspiring for the labors of the day to have the fair ones of our number appear

appear of a morning so radiant, so bedecked, so peignee."

Mary turned as if she would reply, but then went on washing the dishes.

"Am I to understand," Tony said, rising from the table and stretching again so that his shirt came out of his pants and showed a strip of brown skin, "Am I to understand that I have wounded three birds with one stone?"

Mrs. Allen saw both her daughters turn on him to speak. She walked among them and said, loudly, "Death is in this house. Your own flesh lies dying. Can't we have peace?"

Tony said, "Why?" and walked out of the room. In a moment they heard him playing a little tune on the top-most keys of the piano. The brittle sound was like ripples in the sunlight and quiet. Sarah was sitting at the table now with one hand supporting her frowzy head. Mary was clearing away the place where Tony sat.

Sarah said sleepily, "From the great deep to the great deep he goes."

Mary slapped her swiftly and hard. The prints of her fingers were pallid on Sarah's cheek, then slowly blushed. Mary stood over her. "Show off in the backyard, smarty," she said.

IV

In mid-morning Mrs. Allen asked Tony to go shopping

with her. Mary had gone to work and Sarah was playing in the street with other children. So Mrs. Allen and Tony went together along the quiet streets and took a short cut along the edge of the park.

Then they turned into the park itself and walked across the shade-spotted grass toward the fountain. There was no dew. The day was already hot, and ahead of them, through the tree tops, they saw the hall tower gleaming against the radiant sky. Deep in the park children were running from tree to tree, crouching, falling prostrate, slapping their own thin haunches as if they rode horses, and their shrill voices imitated flying bullets, neighing, and groans of anguish. A distant radio blared and traffic rumbled in the streets. Tony's soft shoes brushed a faint, brittle sound from the dry grass as they walked toward the fountain. And suddenly its sound was there too, insinuating itself like a sudden arpeggio into the orchestration of morning.

The trees threw dappled shadows on the grass and over the fountain. There was no breeze; the leaves were still and heavy on the boughs, their singleness invisible. The tall elms and beeches were grey-green masses like trees in a painting, and the water of the fountain spurted and broke into a million droplets and fell, but the pattern of its movement was unchanging, unruffled by the still air. The pool around the fountain reflected the tinkling murmer

which seemed to be produced by the collision of sunlight and droplets, so scintillating, so shot and shaken with light was the top of the jet where the droplets began spraying sidewise to form a diaphanous film which billowed outward and down toward the grey shadowed pool below.

Tony sat down on a bench and said he would watch for her to come out of the store, and Mrs. Allen went on by herself across the park. When she reached the street she looked back and saw her son sitting in the sun with his legs crossed high, his arms stretched along the back of the bench, his face turned toward the fountain, and a feeling of peace and security came over her. Night was far away. She had slept badly last night and she was tired, but she thought of the long, slow, sunny day ahead and she was happy. This afternoon, she thought, during the hot part of the day, she would sew on the back porch where she could look out on the flower bed. The zinnias would droop in the heat, and then, toward evening, Mary would spray them and they would raise their leaves in the cooler air.

She walked slowly and planned the day--lunch, sewing, a light evening meal. She would have at least three hours by herself this afternoon. Tony would take Sarah swimming, and Mary wouldn't be home from the office until five. The only possibility that she would be disturbed was that the nurse would leave the old man for a moment to come down to

the kitchen, and perhaps she would step out on the porch for a moment to talk.

The thought of the old man dying disturbed her. She thought of last summer, of days like this when the old man worked in the garden while she sewed. Well, it had to be. It had to be. When he died, after a little while, life would move along placidly again. She would remember him working among the flowers, then coming up to sit with her while she sewed. She would forget his suffering. Yes, she would remember only the pleasant things. She had learned long ago not to wait for tomorrow to be happy. It was the past which was pleasant, warm and close. Then, too, she had learned to choose out of each day those things which represented peace and contentment, like sewing quietly in the afternoon, like walking after groceries across the park. She turned once more, but her son was hidden by the trees, and she walked slowly on.

The store smelled of oranges and coffee. The clerks greeted her cheerfully and casually, and she took her time choosing what to buy. She moved slowly, pushing the cart ahead of her. She could almost taste the food she chose, and see it served on the little table in the kitchen with her children sitting one on each side, and she on the side near the stove so that she could serve quickly. With annoyance she thought of how Sarah had the habit of gulping her

food. Well, she would outgrow it. Sarah would realize that meals were a rite, a time when they could all be together, a time to be happy with each other. She was only a child; Sarah would be with her for at least eight years yet. Mrs. Allen put a melon to her nose, and her eyes half closed with enjoyment of the ripe, delicious smell.

She was already halfway to the bench where Tony sat before he got up and came to help her. She had been watching him. He was still sprawled on the bench, moving only to bring his cigarette slowly to his lips. She enjoyed seeing him there and half hoped he would not see her until she got to him. But he got up and ran toward her lightly across the grass, flinging his cigarette away as he came. They walked toward home, and Tony whistled now and then, and kicked fallen twigs from the sidewalk. They seldom spoke, and Mrs. Allen watched her son from the corner of her eye and was content.

V

Just as they finished lunch the nurse came into the kitchen to tell Tony that his grandfather wanted to be shaved. Sarah immediately loudly reminded Tony that he was going swimming with her, and the nurse switched out of the room showing her distaste for all of them. Mrs. Allen shushed Sarah and reminded Tony that he had not

seen his grandfather since he came home.

Tony said, "I thought he was supposed to be dying."

Mrs. Allen answered, obviously attempting to be calm and reasonable, "He always feels a little better during the day." Then turning to Sarah, who was slumped pouting in her chair, "Tony will be ready in half an hour. You can help me with the dishes while you wait." The child slid lower in her chair and jabbed with her fork at her empty plate. Tony rose without another word and followed the nurse upstairs.

He went to the bathroom and got his own razor, brush and soap, and took a clean towel from the rack. Then he remembered that he needed water, and he went down to the kitchen and took a basin from the cabinet without speaking to either his mother or Sarah. He went upstairs slowly, and while the water ran until it was hot, he leaned in the bathroom window. The leaves outside were motionless. A panting robin hopped disconsolately across the lawn. The steam from the scalding water floated past him before he turned from the window.

He did not want to see his grandfather. Unconsciously he had feared the time when he would have to go in to him. Now he felt guilty, too, that the dying man had had to ask him to come. As he stood by the window he had been thinking how the old man had taken him swimming on summer after-

noons, just as he was taking Sarah now. And suddenly he had realized for the first time and fully that the old man must die. Being away at school when the aging, tired heart first failed had somehow made his grandfather's illness and his imminent death remote, unreal. But now he was suddenly shaken with grief, remorse, and a nameless fear. He studied his face in the mirror while he filled the pan with steaming water. The skin of his face felt tight-drawn across the bones. He drew back his lips in a mirthless smile, then picked up his equipment and walked toward his grandfather's room.

The nurse was there. Tony was glad. The curtain was up and the room was light and cool and still. A faint odor of alcohol floated in the quiet air. As he pushed the door open with his knee, the head propped high on pillows turned toward him, and the eyes stared at him from sunken sockets. Tony backed out, went back to the bathroom, set down the basin and the brush, the soap and razor, and took the mir- or from the wall and held it at arm's length before him, looking into his own eyes. Then the nurse's quick efficient footsteps sounded in the corridor. She stopped for only a second in the bathroom door looking at him without speaking or smiling. And then she turned again toward the sick man's room. And Tony tucked the mirror under his arm, picked up the other things, and followed her.

He walked straight to the bedside. He said, and his voice seemed too loud, too falsely gay, "I had to get the mirror. We can't shave you in the dark."

The thin, blue lips smiled slightly before the eyes opened. As he put the basin down on the bedside stand, the cold, wasted hand covered his, and the soft voice, tinged with a slight accent, said, "You're going to be doing the work, Tony. But I'll watch if you'll prop the mirror up." And then weakly squeezing Tony's hand the old man said, "Suppose I'm handsome as ever," and he smiled, closing his eyes.

The nurse said, "He's not to talk," and she came near the bed and stood with her hands clasped.

Tony did not answer. He started to prop the mirror up in front of his grandfather's face. The nurse said, "He can't have any weight on his chest." Tony turned to her and held out the mirror. She took it automatically from his hands. He said, "You can hold it then." She looked surprised, but she came near the head of the bed and stood obediently holding the mirror over the old man's face even before Tony was ready to begin.

The white lather accented the greyness of the cheeks and the sunken darkness of the eyes. Tony had to lean awkwardly in order to reach his grandfather's face. He put his fingers on the bony brow to tilt the head back so that

he could reach the chin. His own brown, firm hand made the face more shrunken, more touched by death. Beneath his fingers the delicate, slow pulse beat in the temple. Tony moved his hand away, but the pulse beat on along a thin blue vein. The throbbing beneath the little vein was the only sign of life in the mask-like face.

After awhile the old man seemed to be sleeping. His mouth opened slightly and the sound of his breathing filled the quiet room. As Tony leaned over to shave low on the neck, he caught the stale, sickly odor of the old man's breath, and suddenly he was filled with revulsion. He finished quickly, carelessly, and dropping the brush and razor into the water, he hurried to the door. The nurse lowered the mirror, picked up the soap and followed him. But he pulled the door shut with his heel before she got to it. She did not open it again.

VI

On the way to the beach Sarah trailed one end of her skipping rope along the sidewalk and walked backward so she could watch the wooden handle bounce and wriggle. Tony walked fast. She kept running a few steps in order to keep up with him. She seemed absorbed in her play, but suddenly she asked, "Do people ever get buried alive?"

Her brother said, "Of course not," and did not slow

his pace or look at her.

"Why?" she asked, still taking long and awkward backward steps, her eyes on the clattering, red handle of her rope.

"Because they get embalmed first," Tony told her.

She seemed satisfied, but after a moment she asked, "What's embalmed?"

"He draws out all the blood and shoots you full of glue," he told her, and after a moment added, "Now shut up."

Sarah swung her rope across his backside, then taking the handles in her hands she ran down the sunny, quiet street, skipping as she went.

The beach was crowded. Mothers had brought their children to play along the sand, and out in the water, beyond the shouting waders, a sailboat moved almost imperceptibly in the listless breeze, its white sail gleaming against the tall trees along the opposite shore. Tony swam out once and then came back to lie in the sun. Sarah came and teased him to play in the water, but he pretended to be asleep, and she went a little way down the beach to build in the sand with some other children. The hours slipped away, and the shadows of the trees extended across the sand, and Sarah came back shivering in the cooler air to where Tony lay. He had put on all his clothes except his shoes

and socks. But he would not go home with her. He told her he was going to stay awhile, and after pouting for a few minutes, she went to the bath house, dressed, and started home, skipping now and then.

It was cooler now. Sarah dawdled along the street. She swung her rope around tree trunks, and once she squatted for several minutes beside a scrawny, yelling kitten. But when she tried to pick it up, it ran swiftly, its tail erect, across a lawn and up onto a porch. A woman was standing behind the screen door watching Sarah, and Sarah ran out her tongue at her, and ran on down the street.

When she reached home the front door was hooked, so she went around to the back. It was cool in under the trees and she began playing there. Finally she began skipping rope, shouting out words to fit the rhythm of her movements. Her damp hair bounced around her head as she skipped and shouted jerkily, "Grandfather's dying, Grandfather's dying." Then her mother came to the door and spoke to her in a sharp voice. She dropped her rope on the short-clipped grass, and ran toward her mother. As she went in she wondered at the severe, annoyed look on her mother's face.

VII

By seven o'clock the sun was low in the cloudless sky, and it was a little cooler. Mary came around to the front

yard, dragging a length of hose, gripping the nozzle firmly with both hands while she walked backward. She wore slacks with the bottoms rolled, and her tennis shoes squished with wetness from the garden, which she had been spraying. One of Anthony's shirts accented her litheness, and she had rolled the sleeves to let her firm, boyish arms brown in the fading sunlight. She squatted on her heels to adjust the sprayer, then walked lightly out of sight again behind the house. The limp hose writhed and swelled from end to end, a gurgling bubble was in the nozzle's throat, then a high-arching, lovely mist shimmered suddenly in the soft light, wavered, then grew strong and steady. Mary came back along the side of the house and stopped a few feet from where the highest arching, glittering droplets overshot the lawn, darkening the sidewalk. She stood with her hands on her hips watching the sprayer work, then stepped quickly through the outer edge of the mist, and stopped again on the opposite side. Her blouse clung a little more closely to the curve of breasts, and her slacks were dark with wetness. She swung her body lightly from the waist in order to look up and down the street. The evening light fell warmly through the quiet trees. Radios played quietly. No one was in sight. The shrubbery bunched in round dark masses along the porch; the wilted broad leaves of the hydrangea lifted a little in the cooler air. And suddenly Mary's long-

fingered brown hands moved from her hips and in one swift movement she flipped the shirt-tail outside her slacks, at the same time dragging off her tennis shoes by stepping on the heels with the toe of the opposite foot. The grass felt like fine wire beneath her bare feet, and she curled her toes stiffly as she walked into the curtain of spray which was arching white and filmy, its glitter gone now in the darkening evening light. The whispering, soft mist enveloped her, and she lifted her loose shirt so that the cool water fell on her naked skin. And the young stranger who whistled then from the window of his car, thought her extraordinarily beautiful, as she arched her back and faced the water, the saturated shirt clinging to her slim form.

Mary carried her dripping tennis shoes one in each hand and placed them neatly side by side on the steps at the back door. From outside she saw that her mother was in the kitchen. Mrs. Allen was slicing grapefruit with a long knife, and behind her the curtain rippled faintly in the evening breeze. Mary stepped inside the screen door and held one hand against the squeaking urgent thrust of the coil which would have banged the door behind her. It was already dusky on this side of the house because of the trees; leaves at the end of a long bough fingered the window pane in front of the bench where Mrs. Allen was working. The pastel grey, flickering shadows of the leaves, and their

constant rustle were filtered through the evening quiet, filling the kitchen with soft, changeful light and tranquil sound.

The mother did not turn as Mary came in. Even when Mary said, "I think I'll walk downtown," Mrs. Allen went on tranquilly slicing around each section of grapefruit with the sharp end of the knife. Then after a moment, when Mary was almost to the door, the mother spoke. "There is nothing you can do," she said quietly. They turned toward each other then, Mrs. Allen with the knife pointing downward from her hand, and Mary with her hands still at the buttons of the saturated shirt. They looked at each other in the dim light and Mrs. Allen's voice was low. She said, "It has gone on so long. So long. At first I thought we should just wait until it was over, but..." She turned back to her work without finishing what she had begun to say. Mary took a step toward her mother, but stopped again, her hands at her sides now. It was almost dark in the kitchen. The boughs swayed lightly across the window pane. When Mary spoke her voice was tight and small. She said, and her hands moved back to the buttons of the dripping shirt, "What are we waiting for. I mean..." She stopped. The mother went on working, and Mary turned suddenly and strode swiftly through the dusky hall, and ran up the stairs.

VIII

Mary did not walk the shortest way toward town. Instead she turned toward the lake, walked swiftly, her high heels clicking rhythmically in the dusk and quiet. She had put on a full-skirted yellow dress which accented simply her slender waist, and left her long, brown arms bare to the shoulders. Her legs were bare too, and shapely above the white, high-heeled shoes.

An occasional car moved slowly down the broad street which curved along the shore. Out on the lake a motor boat sputtered in starting, then with a fading roar moved toward the scattered lights along the opposite shore. There were no stars. The slow summer evening was settling into darkness.

There were a few people walking along the street but Mary did not notice them. She heard high, laughing voices but did not listen to the words they said. She smelled drifting cigar smoke but did not look at the strolling smoker. Her long legs swung gracefully and she held her head and shoulders straight and high. But then she came up behind a strolling couple and she slowed her pace to watch them. She lingered behind them, listening to their low voices. They walked with slow, deliberate steps, their arms entwined, and occasionally as they laughed, they drew closer, and finally the girl put her head on his shoulder as he put

his arm around her waist. Then Mary felt ashamed and she walked quickly by them, not even glancing at them as she passed.

The heart of the town was brightly lighted but there were few people on the streets. Mary walked past the theater where the lights of the marquee described a monotonous gay whirl and cast flickering red and green shadows on several parked cars. She passed the drug store where several boys were standing around the vari-colored juke-box within. Heavy throbs of rhythm pulsed into the street. She turned along a side street and went in a heavy door beneath a simple lighted sign which spelled out in high, slim letters, "Jake's."

The bar was cool and quiet and dimly lighted. As Mary came in, the half dozen patrons gazed at her briefly, their eyes forgetting her even as they looked. She sat alone at the bar, and the bartender came toward her wiping his hands on his white apron. He knew her and greeted her casually. When he had set her drink before her and gone away, she looked straight ahead at her own image in the mirror behind the bar. The whir of a fan seemed to make the room even quieter, blurring the low voices of the other people.

Her own eyes gazed back at her from the mirror. She examined the face disinterestedly, as if it were not her own, but rather that of a blind person who could not see that she was staring at her. The face was somewhat gaunt,

the eyes too small, too widely set, and the mouth was long and thin. The dipping neckline of the dress didn't fit the tightly drawn and keenly parted hair. Mary turned her head and the face opposite turned too. From the side the nose was fine and long, but somehow exaggerated the almost sulking droop of the lips. How could she describe the face. Not ugly; certainly rather plain. There was something severe about it which even the soft light could not disguise. The face would look harsher in sunlight.

And with that thought her disinterest was gone. It was her own face. She remembered and enumerated to herself with a sort of bitter pleasure the flaws in that face--the fine wrinkles at the corners of the eyes, the darkness of the skin, the crinkled dryness of the lips, the nearness of the cheek and jaw bones beneath the pale, tanned skin. She gazed at the mirrored face and slowly drew back her lips. The teeth were large and white and even. And then, with terrifying suddenness and semblance of reality, the face before her had become a skull, grinning back at her with a fixed and mocking stare.

The bartender saw her set down her glass, and he came toward her from where he had been leaning to read the evening paper. She asked him for a cigarette and he tossed her his pack as he went away to fill her glass. Her hands were shaking. She fumbled in her bag for a match but there were

none. And then someone was holding a lighter for her, cupped in his hand.

Mary accepted the light, and took a deep draw on the cigarette before she looked at the man and said, "Thank you." He didn't answer. He tucked the lighter into the pocket of his coat, and looked steadily at her. His eyes were deep-set and dark beneath a bony, wide forehead. He was wearing a light tan suit and his tie was carefully knotted and clipped to the white shirt front. When he did not speak she lowered her eyes. She could see one of his hands curled fingers downward on the bar. The hand was broad and heavy with prominent veins along the back. Then slowly and deliberately he spread the long, powerful fingers along the bar and she looked away again confused.

He sat down by her then and talked casually, pleasantly, and kept buying drinks. Mary enjoyed talking with him. He had a quiet, low voice. After awhile someone put money in the juke box and they went into the dim, deserted backroom to dance. He danced well and she followed lightly, a little dizzy from the drinks. She came back to the bar flushed and laughing and saw the bartender looking at her, but she couldn't stop laughing. So when he asked her if she'd like to ride somewhere else she said yes immediately and climbed down from her stool, and stood beside him while she drained her glass. Out in the street he put his arm

around her lightly as if to guide her, but in the car he did not touch her, and she put back her head and felt dizzy and gay.

They drove just to the edge of town to a small roadhouse along the lake shore. There was a small band there and they danced and talked. She didn't know his name, and he did not ask hers. They kept coming back to their table to drink quickly and then return to the dance floor. And finally she felt suddenly dizzy and weak and she put her cheek down on his shoulder. He held her up firmly until the music stopped. Then he said, "I think we better go," and she shook her head yes with her cheek still resting on him, and he walked behind her to the table, his hands beneath her elbows.

Dust was swirling around the cars in the parking lot. The wind was rising. They rolled up the windows and drove along the shore. He spoke to her, but although his voice was plain she could not catch his words. Laughing, she swayed toward him, and he caught her tightly with his arm and pulled her to him. This time, with her head leaning sidewise on his chest she understood what he was saying. He said, "Which hotel are you staying at?" and she straightened, laughing again, and kept repeating, "I live here. This is my home," and poked at his shoulder with her fist to accent her words. She stopped only when he drew the car to the curb and shut off the lights. He got out on his side; a gust of wind

caught the door and slammed it sharply behind him. Then he was helping her out her own side and saying "You'd better walk around before you go home."

They were in the park. Overhead the tall trees were straining in the wind. She stumbled in the dark and he put his arm tightly around her waist, and swayed with her as they walked. Then her foot struck a root, and she half fell again, but he held her up, and turned her against the tree trunk. She felt the tree trunk twist and strain in the wind, and his body leaned hard against her as he kissed her. She put her hands against his chest and tried to push him away. She was a little frightened. Then he stepped away from her, but his arms were on either side, his hands against the tree trunk. She could hear his sharp, quick breathing. Then his hand was on her hip and he tried to pull her toward him. She held herself rigidly pressed against the tree trunk, and with his other hand he gripped her shoulder and wrenched her away from the tree. His fingers were digging into her shoulder and she began to struggle against him. He put out his foot and tried to twist her backward and down. They staggered in the dark. She was suddenly terrified. She got her balance for a moment and swung her arm and struck him in the face with the back of her wrist. He flung her to the ground then and straddled over her. He caught her wrists and pinned her hands

between his knees and the ground, and held down her shoulders with his hands. After a moment she stopped struggling and lay still.

IX

It was late, the wind was rising. Over the lake from the eastward, great masses of cloud were piling deep into the sky, and lightning flickered among them, but silently, beyond the sound of thunder. The water of the lake moved restlessly against the shore, and near the tall elms at the edge of the beach the uneasy creaking of a boat chain mingled with the rustle of the straining leaves. The storm would break before morning. Tony sat down with his back against a tree and his face toward the lake and wind.

Swimming hadn't relaxed him. He felt tense still, and as he sat there watching the far off lightning, he wanted suddenly to cry like a lonely child, and he rolled his head against the rough bark of the tree and dug his bare heels into the warm, moist sand to fight away his anguish. He said aloud into the wind, "What does it all mean? For God's sake what does it mean?" He wanted to shout it along the shore, to run along the sand, or swim far out toward the coming storm. But after a while he relaxed, drew up his knees and put his head down on them between the sheltering arc of his arms.

He knew he must go home. He had been gone since mid-afternoon, and now, all at once, it seemed terribly urgent that he should go home. He groped for his shoes and put them on and rose, stuffing his socks one into each pocket of his dungarees. He shivered in the cool wind. He ran along the sand and up the stairs and fell into a rapid walk along the streets toward home.

The whole town was sleeping. The light from the street lamps was intercepted by the swaying leaves, and shadows flickered on the sidewalk. Windows were dark, and in yards, heavy masses of shrubbery strained and rolled beneath the rising wind. Once a little dog ran out and followed him, snuffing and growling at his heels.

Out of his unconscious mind suddenly rose the idea that perhaps his grandfather had already died. He should have been home. The old man's face as he shaved him came vividly to his mind, and the rhythm of his footsteps became the soft, slow pulsing of the old man's heart, pitifully beating in the emaciated temple. He walked faster; he wanted to be home quickly. He wanted to know how it was with the old man. And yet the thought that perhaps his grandfather had already died filled him with anxiety and hesitation.

When he came to the park the tall trees were rustling and swayed in the wind. He could not hear the fountain. He started to walk by, but then it seemed as if he could not

pass without knowing that the fountain was still spurting up even in the darkness. Once more he turned across the grass, puting out his hand to avoid walking into tree trunks. Overhead the leaves and boughs were lashed and twisted by the wind, and even when he knew that the fountain was just a-head, he could neither see nor hear the water. He stopped to listen, but there was only the confused loud rustling of the leaves. He shivered briefly in the cool air, and although he sensed the oddness of his emotion, he was unaccountably anxious to know if the fountain was running, and he ran the few remaining steps and leaned over its edge. He put his hand, palm down, gently in the water. It was cold and still, unruffled by the falling of the jet, sheltered by the rim of the basin. Then he realized what he had done. He had tried to know, and straightening with a sob, he turned and stumbled toward the far off, empty, lighted street.

But when he got home the house was still. He knew nothing had happened. A light was burning in the kitchen, so he went up on the front porch, opened the door softly and stepped into the hall. It seemed hot and close inside. Everything was very still. As he groped for the stairs his foot struck the first step with a dull thud, and his mother called, "Is it you, Tony?" He answered "Yes," and went on upstairs, making more noise than necessary so that she would know he was going to his room. He didn't want to talk to her.

There was a dim light burning in the upper hall, and as he passed his grandfather's room the nurse opened the door suddenly but cautiously and peered out at him. They looked one another in the eye for a moment; and then she shut the door. He had seen the contemptuous, critical, superior look. She had known who it was coming up the stairs and she had not been able to bypass so good an opportunity to show her dislike. He hated her. He hated her smugness, her efficiency, her contempt for them. She had seen many people die, he thought, and she had never learned to find anything in life beyond her own pettiness. Her work had taught her nothing about the casualness of death, and it could never teach her anything about the depths of life. She was a fool. He damned her briefly, hesitating by the door behind which he knew she was standing, perhaps hoping he would come in and quarrel with her there at the old man's very bedside.

The window in his room had not been closed because it was on the side of the house away from the storm. The trees outside were noisy in the wind, and the curtain was sucked in against the screen. Without putting on the light, Tomy lay down on the bed in his clothes. Now again as when he sat on the beach he had to fight down a rising anguish. Again the question "What does it mean?" seemed so urgent, so terrifying, and so unanswerable that he fought with clenched fists and rigid body his desire to take the easy way, the child's way

of tears.

What did it mean? What did this day mean? He had lived. He had wasted a day. He had seen the fountain sparkling in the sun and found it silent in the darkness. After Sarah had gone home, after dark, for the joy of the cool water on his skin, he had swum hard out into the lake, and someone, afraid of his coming, leaped from the floating dock and struck for shore. Then, at the moment when he needed another person to talk to, he had been deserted, and he had come back to the shore to fight against himself alone. Morning seemed far behind, but he had shaved his grandfather, and the faltering heart had beat along a shrunken blue vein in the temple, and that beat had been with him all day in his own footsteps. He had had to keep walking, to keep going somewhere, because of that heart; it would not let him stop lest it stop too before its time. And if he stopped, he must weep for the silenced heart. What did it mean then? Were childlike tears the answer, senseless but relieving? Were tears the final way of striking back? Were they the final redemption after the swimming far out, after the running?

He got up, groped for the light switch, and when the room was bright he went to the desk which faced the window and sat down. He took out a blank sheet of paper and a pencil and laid them before him. He was calm now, distracted

again by an odd phrase which had come to mind that morning as he watched the fountain spurting up in the sunlight. He finally wrote one line, "The castaneting of the sun-struck fountain," and then put down the pencil. There was something he wanted to say about the fountain, but it would not come clear. Only the beginning and the end were clear. The beginning was how the fountain had sparkled in the morning light, and at the end he wanted to say how he had come back in the night and found the fountain quiet. But everything between was unclear, uncertain, formless. Just for a moment it had seemed that he saw it all clearly, but now, faced by the blank page, there was nothing to say. He ran his hands through his hair with exasperation. It seemed that there had been something, but it was gone now.

The wind had dropped, quiet rain was falling. He sat staring toward the window. A white moth, which had been motionlessly flattened against the screen, took wing and flew toward him. It struck the gently swaying curtain and fell to the floor, where it lay feebly kicking its legs in the air. Then it lay still, But after a moment the moth with concentrated effort righted itself, and after another brief rest, it took wing again. Tony watched the insect stagger through the air with frantic, uneven beating of its wings. It flew toward the light, was burned, and flew away again in small, painful circles. Then it turned back;

this time it seemed determined to light upon the searing bulb. It fluttered around and around the light, and finally it did cling for an instant to the searing glass, its wings as quietly content as if spread out upon a summer flower. But then it dropped, and lay on its back, still except for minute shudderings of the crumpled legs.

Tony pushed his chair back and in one long, swift movement he put out the light, went out closing the door swiftly but softly behind him, ran down the stairs and out into the quiet rain. His mother spoke to him as he came out, and her voice seemed urgent, perhaps frightened, but he did not answer.

The rain was warm and gentle. There was no wind now. He stood in the yard gasping deep breaths of the night air. He drew in his breath and held it, listening to the hollow thudding of his heart in his drum-tight chest. He felt strong and young. "I am the fountain at morning," his mind began to say, "Let the night wait."

He sat down beside the elm tree in the side yard and leaned against the trunk. Only an occasional drop of rain struck him here. The night was calm and warm and quiet. "I am the fountain at morning," his mind said, "Let the night wait."

X

He had dozed but he woke instantly and completely when his mother called. He walked to the front of the house. Light was streaming from the open door. Even though she called only once, he had been alarmed by the urgency in her voice, and he hurried across the wet, sweet-smelling grass. She was standing on the sidewalk just in front of the porch. Mary was standing behind her. The quiet rain fell around them shining like silver threads in the soft light. Tony stopped when they could see him. His mother said quietly, "He's dead." Mary suddenly put her hands to her face and turning, ran up the steps and into the house. She met Dr. Lewis at the door. He caught the girl by the shoulders as she tried to pass, and he spoke to her. She looked up at him, shaking her head, and her face was strained, contorted, and wild. Then he let her go--he had held her only for a moment--and she ran up the stairs out of sight. The mother had not turned her head when Mary left. She stood surrounded by soft rain and light, and Tony walked in her shadow toward her so that she could not see his face.

DEEP VALLEY

DEEP VALLEY

He had walked across to the corral before breakfast, because his wife refused to talk early in the morning, and his footsteps had been visible on the drenched grass. Smoke from the chimney had curled slowly upward, hung awhile beneath the tree tops and then disappeared into the clear air. Then Rena called him to come eat, and after breakfast he had come back across the creek to the corral, puttered for an hour, then lain down in the warm sun.

As he lay on his back, the surrounding mountains looked as if they were standing on their heads, and it seemed as if he might walk down among the shining tree tops into the wide, blue sky. Now at mid-morning, and gazing upward as he was, the valley seemed less dark, less narrow. But there was something exhausting, something frightening in the idea of wandering out into that limitless space above, and he turned his head so that his cheek lay against the cool grass. His wide-brimmed hat tilted lower over his eyes, but he could still see beneath the brim his house and trunks of the tall trees around it and the path which led down the slope toward the stream. He smiled as he remembered how his mother's mother had told him he would have been named Path-On-The-Mountain if his father had not insisted that his son be called after him--in the manner of his own people--John.

He closed his eyes. There was nothing in particular

to do today, at least nothing he need hurry about doing. He liked days like this. Such days filled him with contentment and a sense of well-being and security. So he lay in the sun, listening to the breeze stirring the grass and to the trickling of the creek over its rocky course. Finally he dozed.

He heard his wife when she first called him--he always awoke instantly when someone spoke his name--but she had called twice more, each time with a sharper edge of exasperation in her tone, before he sat up and looked toward her. She was standing on the farther side of the brook, her short blond hair disheveled and her unwieldy, protruding abdomen holding the front of her unbelted dress up short above her knees. There was something humorous about her pregnant condition, and not stirring from where he sat, John called, "Let's see you jump the creek."

She ignored his words and called back, "I need the keys to the truck." He got up then and strode toward her, and as he came she turned back toward the house, saying as she went, "I hope before the summer's out you'll find time to fix me a bridge." And then as he came up beside her and put his arm around her waist, she stiffened her body away from him and continued, "It's real nice to have just this little yard to get around in."

He dropped his arm and did not answer. It came to him

to tell her that she never came near the corrals anyway, but he kept still. They had always bickered, but since she had been carrying his child, he had felt a new tenderness for her, and he often held back his angry words until she herself fell silent. He walked along a little behind her, looking down at her straight back, watching her awkward gait. She said without turning, "I'm out of medicine. I'll have to drive in."

"I'll go," he said.

She stopped then, turned toward him and put her fists on her hips. "I don't mind at all getting out of this place for a while," she said sharply. "Just give me the keys and go back to sleep."

Again he stifled his anger. She looked pitifully misshapen and her anger and her littleness made him sorry for her. He said, "You shouldn't be pounding over those rough roads. I could be back by three this afternoon."

"It would be too damned bad," she answered, "if you had to get supper for yourself. I suppose you think I might stay to see a show if I went in. You might have to do something for yourself for once. I suppose you think I can just wait dinner until you get back."

His anger flared then. He dug the keys from his pocket and held them out to her. "Kill the goddamn kid then," he said, and his voice was loud and angry. She struck at him

swiftly and hard with her open hand but he ducked the blow by bending his body backward from the knees. He tossed the keys down in the dust at her feet. But she turned away. She faced him when she reached the cabin door, and yelled, "The kid might as well be dead if all he's good for is to lay around in the sun." He didn't answer. After a moment she screamed through her tears and sobbing, "You goddamned Indian." Then she went inside and slammed the door.

II

He walked out to the highway and hitched rides into town. His pride and anger would not let him stoop to pick up the keys from where they lay. When he started he had no clear idea of what he would do. He merely started walking up the dusty, rutted road which led over the mountain from the valley. At first he did not intend to go to town at all, but then he had reached the highway and his anger still would not let him turn back, and a rancher offered him a ride without his asking.

The rancher knew him slightly and John couldn't tell the man that he had quarreled with Rena, that she had called him an Indian, and that he was merely walking to get away from her for a while. So he said that his wife couldn't ride in, and that he didn't want to leave her alone without the truck to use in case she needed it. He said that his wife needed

medicine and that he was going in for it.

So when the rancher turned off the highway and let him out, he was already halfway toward the town, and his anger was gone, and he had decided to get the medicine and return as quickly as possible. He would make up with his wife that way. He could show her his good intentions, his concern for her. His anger had turned now into a vague unhappiness, a wish that they might have avoided the quarrel.

He walked along the road. An occasional car roared by, its tires whining on the hot concrete. Overhead the sky was cloudless, and the sun beat down on the steep slopes, shimmered from the mountain tops, glittered on the water of the small creek which gushed along the road bed. Sweat gathered under the band of his hat, and after a while his shirt began to cling to his shoulders. The town was still many miles ahead, and he began to wish he had taken the truck. Rena wouldn't use it--he knew her sulky moods. But there was reason for her moodiness now; she was not well; she slept badly, waking him often with her restless turning and sighing. Then as he walked along the hot road, he began to think about the child that was to be born, his child, and Rena's. Her angry, taunting words came back to him, but he couldn't cope with them and so put them out of his mind. But anger, self-blame and vague uneasiness remained.

Then he began to pity himself. He was not a worse hus-

band than most men. Why should he be taunted because his mother was Indian? He didn't look like an Indian; he didn't associate with them; his name was not Indian. He ran his place--the ranch his father left him--as well as most ranches were run. But still, and in spite of everything, Rena had often resorted to reminding him of his mother's race. She won their arguments like that. After she had flung "Indian" at him, their quarrels were over except for the moodiness, the silence, the distance between them which lasted until they went to bed. She liked her Indian then. She had told him once, when he first met her, that she liked him then better than any other man. Damn her, in the daytime she fought with him because he was different, because he was an Indian, but at night the other difference was all that mattered. And now that she was carrying the kid, she more often than ever blamed him for being what he was. How would she like it then if he struck her as some would? Perhaps she would like to be left alone while he got drunk in town.

His mixed feelings toward his wife were congealed now into one hard lump of anger which pressed down hard in his mind, confusing his thoughts. He was hot and tired, and he stopped walking and stood in a shady spot until someone offered him a ride. Many cars came whining down the mountain, disappeared for a while beyond a curve in the road, and then zoomed past him without slackening their speed. His ex-

asperation increased, and his anger against his wife broke and spread like an oil film on water until he hated everyone except himself. Even when a car finally stopped, he climbed in ungratefully and would not talk. Finally the woman turned on the radio, and her husband lit a cigar and settled into his corner. It was hot in the car. The breeze from the open windows kept whipping the smell of the corral from his clothes and circulating it powerfully into their nostrils. He leaned, as the sport-shirted, white-armed driver had done, far into his own corner and thrust his elbow out the window. Then from the tail of his eye he caught the woman glancing at his dirty boots, and his anger spread again, and he stifled an impulse to pull his feet back under the seat.

Soon far ahead they saw the junction in the road, the white signs marking it, and the roads themselves, one curving up and between the mountains, the other ribboning away across the wide valley.

"Which way you going?" the driver asked. He had already begun to slow down to stop at the junction, and John saw that he was turning down the valley, headed for the larger town which lay fifty miles ahead. Partly because he did not want to walk over the mountain, partly because he resented the man's obvious desire to get rid of him, John decided to ride on toward the farther city. "No, I'm going your way," he said. The driver slid the car into high gear again,

glanced momentarily at his passenger, then settled back, gazing far down the shimmering smoothness of the road.

III

They came into the city in the middle of the afternoon. When they stopped for a red light, the driver said brusquely, "I'll let you out here." He didn't ask if John were going beyond the city. So John said, "O.K. Thanks," and climbed out. He started walking down the street. When the light changed, the car rolled past him, and neither of them glanced in his direction.

A thin crowd moved languidly along the main street. John walked along on the inside of the sidewalk where the store awnings threw aisles of shade on the sun-beat, shimmering concrete. He had his hands thrust into the pockets of his jeans, and he could feel the heat of his palms against his thighs. His hat was pushed far back on his head, as it had been when the car picked him up back there in the shade of the mountain, and the sun crinkled his eyes and burned along his cheeks, but he did not pull his hands from his pocket to tilt the hat. Occasionally a man passed who was dressed as he was, but most of the men wore city clothes. He walked more and more slowly, and two girls swung past him, then glanced back and walked on, giggling. He remembered how the woman had glanced at his boots, and he thrust

his hands deeper into the sweaty pockets of his jeans.

So he turned down a side street to be out of the crowd. There before him, far in the distance, pale peaks were almost invisible, a wave of blue on blue against the tremendous sky. He remembered suddenly, vividly, the time, when he was a child, that he had gone into town with the neighbors, and how on the way back he looked toward home as he did now, almost unable to hold back his tears, so lonely he was, so eager to be home. Then they had come over the mountain, and there deep in the valley he could see his mother and father walking together to the house, and a great wave of relief had broken over him like cool water. His mother had laughed and held him against her side when he ran to her, and his father had stood bareheaded with his thumbs in his belt and said, "We'll have to send the kid to town oftener. He'll think this valley is the only place there is." But his mother hadn't answered, and he had run on ahead of them to take off his hot, tight clothes and put on his stiff-dirty jeans and cool shirt.

Afterward he had been secretly ashamed of his homesickness that day. Years afterward when he began to go often into town alone--he had to go, his mother's health was bad, his father dead--he had often experienced the same yearning to be home. In the midst of a card game, or when the music stopped for a while at a dance, he would think suddenly of

his own bed, and of the cool night wind whispering eastward down the valley. But the shame would be there, too, to turn him back toward the music, to keep him from driving out of town until the surrounding peaks were already light with morning. His mother had never questioned him. The first time he came home after daybreak he had changed his clothes and come back into the kitchen, lingered combing his hair, tightening his belt, wanting to speak to his mother. But she said quietly, "You'd better do your chores and go to bed." After that he had known a double shame--shame of his yearning to be home, and the other shame which came of his disregarding that yearning. So sometimes he would leave town as soon as his business was done, and feel satisfaction in his quick return home, because he knew that his mother would not expect him. Then again, with a backlog of repentent early returns he would stay again in town until morning.

But he had never known how his mother spent the nights when he was not there until he returned once before dawn to see her sitting by the table with her head on her arms. She raised her head when John drove up. John had shut off the engine and sat there for a moment in the dark truck, unwillingly to face his mother. Then he climbed out and stood by the truck door pissing on the caked earth of the dooryard. When he finally turned, the light was gone, and when he went

in the kitchen was warm and still and empty. He leaned against the door, drew off his boots, and tiptoed to bed.

He had lain long awake that night. That was the night he had met Rena. He had come home earlier than usual because his stomach was raw with the whiskey, because he could not go back into the noise and light of the dance hall. They had wrestled in the hot, small space of the truck's cab, and finally they had opened the doors and lain along the seat, oblivious to the footsteps which passed near by, not heeding the flickering dance hall sign whose light revealed their dangling feet. Afterward the girl had been ready to go back into the hall, and when he took her arm from around his waist and started behind the hall, she called after him, "You won't be able to," but he hadn't answered because to banter with her would be to forge another bond between them. Then he had circled back among the cars and climbed in the truck, which was strange with the girl's smell, and driven off.

After that he had gone to town only when he had to, and he had left quickly because he didn't want to meet Rena again. But one day she walked up to him with a mocking smile on her face, and he had gone again to a dance with her that night.

His mother had known about Rena. She never met her, but she asked once what the girl looked like. John told her.

Then she had shaken her head and said nothing. John had told her almost accusingly that they, his father and mother, had been happy in the valley, and his mother had said, "I belonged here," then after a moment added, "Why don't you bring the girl out so I can see her?"

That night as he danced with Rena he told her his mother was an Indian. She raised her blond head abruptly from his shoulder, and stepped arm's length away. She looked at him levelly as they continued to move with the music; then with the hand which had been on his shoulder she tipped his hat over his eyes. "So what," she said and moved against him, running her fingers slowly down his spine.

She had known even then. She called him a goddamned Indian now, but she had waited until she had him before she let that make any difference to her. The anger he had felt while riding into town had subsided while he walked. But now it rose again. He had come to the outskirts of the city and beyond the last few low and squalid houses the prairie rolled away in one unbroken undulation toward the mountains. The sun was sinking toward the peaks now, the air was cooler. He stopped and looked toward the distant slopes. Path-on-the-Mountain he would have been named. But by god his name was John. He turned abruptly and walked more rapidly back toward the center of town.

IV

His stomach was empty and his head swam with heat and hunger. He went into a shabby restaurant. No one was around. Varicolored bubbles rose monotonously over the front of the silent juke box, and an electric fan buzzed loudly in the stillness, the dizzy speed of the rotating blades accenting its stately swinging to and fro. He straddled a seat at the counter, and after several minutes a thin, middle-aged woman walked from the kitchen, her hair limply framing her sallow face. She placed her hands on the counter and waited disinterestedly for his order. John ordered one of the cheaper meals. The woman nodded briefly and shuffled away. After a moment she reappeared, put coins in the juke box, and left her sole customer alone to watch the record glide out and upward toward the needle. Then the music began, and the air pulsed with heavy sound. Suddenly he felt the strangeness of the place, felt that he shouldn't be here, and a wave of nausea akin to homesickness contracted his stomach. And when his meal was finally served, his hunger was gone. But he ate, slowly, deliberately. He left in the end only the clammy potatoes which had been covered with tepid, watery gravy. The woman spoke for the first time as he went up to the cash register to pay her. She said, "In a few minutes you could have had the supper menu," and she forced a half-hearted, apologetic smile.

Evening was coming on. The crowds moved more briskly now, and here and there clerks were rolling up store awnings, preparing to close for the day. John passed several drug stores, and once he almost turned back, determined to buy Rena's medicine and get out on the road in hopes of getting a ride home before night came. But he didn't want to turn abruptly; he felt self-conscious about seeming to wander aimlessly. So he kept walking, resolved to enter the next drugstore he came to.

Then in front of him he saw a group of Indians moving slowly along, making as they went a little island in the crowd. Other walkers skirted them widely. Only one wore native costume; even in the sultriness of the late afternoon she wore her blanket wrapped over her bent shoulders, and as John came up behind, a musty, unpleasant smell came to him from the old woman. She brought up the rear of the group; two young women preceded her by several steps, and ahead of them three men walked with pigeon-toed Indian lightness. John didn't pass them. The old woman climbed into a battered car which was parked along the curb, and the others went on without her, apparently not noticing that she was no longer with them. From the opposite direction a reeling drunk came toward them. His bleared eyes fastened on the men. He leaned his back against a wall, and as they came toward him he shook his fist and muttered, slobbering, to

himself. Then as the women passed he made an obscene gesture with his fingers, pulled himself erect from the wall and seized John's arm. He staggered along a few steps clutching at John's shirt and shaking his fist at the backs of the Indians. John had tried to sidestep out of the man's reach, but now he shoved him loose, and after several backward, reeling steps the drunk propped himself once more against the window of a store. He doffed his hat in a sweeping gesture to John. "That's all right," he said, "That's all right. But those....," and his voice trailed off into a string of muttered curses. And after a moment he clamped his hat awry over one ear, and went weaving on his way.

All John's resolution to go home was gone now. He felt again that uneasy desire both to be home and to stay in town. He knew the feeling well; he would not go home yet. He bought a ticket to a movie without bothering about the name of the picture. The show was about half over when he sat down, and he could make nothing of the story. He waited through the newsreels and the cartoon, and when the main feature began, he got up, smelling again as he stirred, the reek of his clothes, pushed his way past knees to the aisle, and went out into the street. Night had come.

V

Over the windows and glassed door of the bar, reaching up far enough so that most people could not look in from the street, there was red, opaque paint, chipped here and there, and in the center of the door a sign, "No Indians or Minors Allowed." John's eyes came level with the clear glass at the top of the door, and inside the dusky, smoke-filled room he could see the crowd, some sitting at the bar, others restless in the middle of the floor, and the bartender, a squat, fat man with a heavy face, at the cash register, his back to the customers. As John came in, the bartender glanced toward him, turned from making change, leaned over the bar and said something to John which was inaudible above the other voices, making at the same time an outward, scooping gesture with his hands. John hesitated by the door. Then the bartender cupped his hands to his mouth and shouted above the din, "Leave it open," and John pushed the door far back and propped a chair against it. When he sat down, the bartender didn't thank him but exclaimed about the heat and smoke, and directed the full force of his professional pleasantries toward his new customer.

The place was hot and noisy. From where he sat John could see the open door reflected in the mirror. Occasionally faces peered in from the street, attracted by the noise; then most of them went on their ways. Behind him, against

the far wall, the pin-ball machine and the shuffleboard were neglected. The crowd milled, stood, talked, straddled for a moment the frayed stools at the bar, then rose and wandered about restlessly again. An old and gnarled man, his flannel shirt flapping loose outside his pants, did a few whirling, cavorting dance steps, without music, holding a thin, straggle-haired and red-mouthed girl's head with a big jointed paw against his shoulder. The crowd looked on, mirthless. Then the girl snatched herself free and struck at the old man, her knees coming together above her red, high-heeled shoes, and her hair clinging across her face as her whole body followed the force of the swing. But the old man, just as John had done that morning, merely bent backward to escape the blow, and when she kicked out at his shins and nearly lost her balance, he again went skipping out of reach and stood a little off, laughing loudly, his hands on his bent thighs. John turned away. In the mirror he saw a policeman stop in the open doorway. He looked in for a second, then removed the chair which held the door open and went his way, leaving the smoke and heat and din confined once more within the narrow room.

John drained his glass. He was anxious to be out in the street. With the shutting of the door he had felt suddenly apprehensive, like a cornered animal. He was confused by the noise and heat. He wanted to sleep, and the distance he

was from home suddenly dawned on him forcefully and fearfully. His coming to the strange city was foolish and he felt ashamed. He would start hitchhiking, now. With luck he would be home before dawn. He began to pick up his change. The coins adhered to the wet, smooth surface of the bar. He picked them up one at a time, running his finger nails under each to lift it, and sometimes letting it slip from him in his haste. Finally he had all the coins in one hand, and he half rose to drop them in the pocket of his jeans. The bartender hastened toward him, and at the same time the girl who had been angry with the old man climbed up on the empty stool beside him. They both spoke at once and he did not fully hear what either said, but he hesitated, sitting down again with the money still in his hand. The girl said, "Where are you going?" accenting the "you" as if he were offending her by leaving. The bartender didn't repeat what he had said, but he stood smiling by, expectant.

He stayed. He ordered for himself and the girl. And ordered again and again as the night wore on. She turned toward him, put one foot on the round of his stool, and crossed the other leg over so that her knee came high where his elbow brushed it. She called him "stranger." She laughed loudly showing the missing teeth far back in her mouth. John said little, but he didn't need to, for the girl chattered on, her mind skipping disconnectedly from

one thing to another, and after a while his head began to ache dully, and he only half-listened, smiling when she laughed, seeming attentive. Then suddenly she untangled her legs and jumped down from the stool. She braced one hand on the bar and yelled toward the door, "Go away. Get out, you son-of-a-bitch, you can't come in here." Everyone fell silent. John turned his head from looking at her, astonished, toward the door. Over the top of the glazed part of the door, their faces pensive, red-lined by the neon bar sign above, the three Indian men whom John had followed on the street that afternoon were gazing in. Their eyes swept over the suddenly transfigured crowd, rested a moment on the screaming woman, and then they turned and were gone. In a moment the crowd forgot, took up their aimless occupations of a few minutes before and the din rose again. The girl climbed back on her stool and crossed her legs as before. She laughed and talked excitedly, and she strained one foot upward, the red toe of her shoe pointing toward her knee. John looked calmly at her as she blabbered about not being safe in a Bar. She said she came here because of the sign on the door, because "they" usually didn't try to come in. Where he had been impassive, letting her ramble on, a few minutes before, he felt now a cold hatred for her and took pleasure in it. He slipped his arm around her just beneath her arms and squeezed against her ribs. She

caught her breath, surprised by the pressure, and then relaxed against him, her face a silly moon of pleasure turned up to his.

They left soon afterward together. The clerk in the cheap hotel they found did not even ask their names. He went ahead up the stairs, his round, droop-shouldered form bent with age and effort, his stockinged feet soft on the worn carpet. He unlocked a door with fumbling care and reached within to turn on the feeble naked bulb which hung from the center of the ceiling. Then he left without a word, and they heard him seized by a fit of coughing as he labored down the stairs.

The room was hot, bare, shabby. The pipes which extended along one wall from floor to ceiling roared suddenly with the flushing of a toilet. John leaned his back against the door, fumbled without looking for the catch which locked the door. The girl had walked straight into the middle of the room, but now she turned, looked at him a moment, and when he did not move, came toward him. He tossed his hat into the corner. The girl leaned against him, put one hand lightly on the back of his neck, and with the other fumbled sidewise for the light switch. In a moment they were in the dark.

VI

He woke in the early morning. It was so nearly dark that he could not at first make out the outlines of the room, but after a few minutes he could see quite clearly the outlines of the low bureau, the chair whose back obtruded into the window, his hat lying on its side in the corner, its wide brim crumpled against the crown. He lay with both hands beneath his head, feeling the strange quiet of the place. Weakening nausea swept over him. He turned his head slowly and saw the girl lying on her stomach, her face away from him, his elbow in her hair. He could not hear her breathe until he had raised himself quietly and bent over her, holding his own breath, listening. She was sleeping soundly; her hair was damp and tangled and fallen across her cheek. She did not wake when he got out of bed. Once, as he was balancing on one foot to pull on a boot, the boards in the floor creaked sharply, and she turned suddenly on her back and flung one arm across her eyes. But still she did not wake. She didn't stir even when, after he had already opened the door, he tiptoed into the corner for his hat. And finally, standing in the hall, he took a last look just before the door closed, and saw her still sleeping, her hands clasped now on her breast.

In contrast to the stifling air inside the room, a slight breeze moved through the hall, and he drew its cool

dankness deep into his lungs. He stood a moment outside the door, not knowing which way to go to reach the stairs, but then on his right, at the far end of the corridor, he saw a red exit light glowing, and he remembered that they had faced toward it as they came to the room last night. So he turned left and tiptoed past the rows of shut doors toward the stairs.

Halfway down the hall he saw a door standing ajar and he hesitated. But, tiptoeing nearer, he saw the white end of a bath tub and he turned into the room and shut the door. Again the stifling, dead air weighed oppressively against his throbbing head. He retched several times as he stood before the bowl, and dizzy blackness shot with red wavered before his eyes. He sloshed cold water across his face and up his arms, then felt along his pockets for a comb. There was none, but he felt the round outline of a few coins against one thigh. He drew them out and poured them into his wet palm. In all, he had seventeen cents; he thought there had been a silver dollar, too. He remembered that he had not spent the paper dollar in his billfold, and he stacked the money on the edge of the lavatory while he wiped his hands and face on the coarse paper towels. Then, to be reassured, he drew out his billfold and spread it wide. The paper dollar was gone, too. He cursed the girl. Perhaps she had been awake while he was dressing, laughing at him

for his stealth. Damn her, he hadn't thought of the money; he hadn't crept out quietly because of that. No, if she had said, if he had been sure how things stood, he would have made as much noise as he pleased. He would have told her that he was an Indian, that an Indian had paid her, just to see her face. He flung the door open and had taken a few strides toward the room when he remembered that the door had locked itself when he came out and that she had the key inside. He whirled instantly, strode to the stairs, and clattered down to the lobby.

The light of a single bulb above the desk was dim in the wan grey light which now came from the wide windows which faced the street. The girl who had replaced the old man of the night before looked levelly at John as he strode toward her.

"She'll turn the key in later," he said, "Room 215."

The girl flipped back a page in a dog-eared ledger on the desk, and ran her finger down.

"Oh yes. Man and woman. You're the man." She glanced up at him and a slight smile twitched the corners of her mouth. "She'll check out later," she said, not asking, merely stating, apparently amused.

John hesitated. He could leave now, but he stayed leaning on the desk. "She'll check in the key," he said, "I've got to get home."

"Oh yes, home," the girl repeated.

Still he stayed. The girl watched him. Her eyes were friendly, amused.

"Look," he said. "Look, I'm out of money, and I've got to buy some things."

"You already have," she said, and showed even small white teeth as she smiled more broadly.

He didn't smile. He went on doggedly, "I come in often. I can come back tomorrow. But I have to take some things home with me."

Her sharp laugh splintered the wan quiet. "For Pete's sake. That's a new one," she said.

He didn't answer. He looked directly at her, though, still trying silently to persuade her. Suddenly her face went cold. "What the hell are you pulling?" she said. "Are you crazy? What the hell do you want me to do, pay for it for you?"

Still he would not go. He said, looking straight at her, "All right I've been a fool. But I'm an Indian, too. I'll come back tomorrow. An Indian never goes back on his word."

The girl laughed again mirthlessly, tauntingly. "That's another new one," she said. Then when he still lingered, she continued, "O.K., so we're both Indians. Let's suppose. But you're crazy. I'm not."

He turned abruptly then and started for the door. The

girl said as he walked away, "Your ears are red. Maybe you are an Indian," and her laughter followed him into the street.

VII

The highway which led into the city dissolved into a maze of streets, so John walked to the outskirts before he tried to thumb a ride. He walked slowly. The morning sun was strong from a clear, taut sky, and the air was already dry and hot. In the near distance the mountains rose quiet and tall above the valley.

He walked at first, thumbing when cars passed. Most of the traffic went toward the city, and outbound drivers seemed hurrying to be about the day's business, and did not stop to pick him up. He tilted his hat over his eyes and kept his head averted in order to hide the dark three-days' growth of beard. Then he decided that perhaps it seemed as if he tried to conceal his identity, and he pushed his hat far back and faced casually toward the oncoming cars. But over an hour passed, the sun went higher and still he was trudging along the shimmering pavement. His head throbbed and his empty stomach contracted sharply, sending a wave of slight pain rippling along his ribs. Finally he sat down beside the road. When he saw a car coming he would rise to signal it, and after it sped on, its tires humming on the dazzling concrete, he would sit again. He fought off the impulse to

stretch out on the grass in order to relieve his headache and nausea. After a while he lit a cigarette, and it made him dizzy and set his legs trembling.

The morning was far advanced when a rattletrap truck finally picked him up. There were three men in the cab, so John rode on the back. They travelled slowly. At times it seemed as if the coughing engine would expire entirely as they toiled up the first slopes of the mountains. Fumes from the exhaust whipped up through the rough rack on which John sat, his feet dangling over the edge, and his head was reeling from the jolting and the odor when the driver let him off along a lonely stretch of the road. The truck turned off the highway, and for a long time John could hear the throbbing of the motor reverberating in the still, hot air. He sat down in a shady place. Cars passed infrequently, and none would stop in this isolated spot where the road wound through the hills, far from human habitation. And after a half hour of luckless waiting for a ride, John went a few feet from the roadside, behind a clump of bushes, stretched out with a groan half of relief, half of pain, and fell asleep, his hat over his eyes.

The sun woke him. He sat up with a feeling of alarm. He was no longer in the shade, and when he got up, the back of his shirt was damp where he had sweated against the ground. He judged that it was about three o'clock in the afternoon.

He no longer felt sick; except for the emptiness in his stomach he felt energetic and strong. When he went back to the roadside the loss of his sickness and dejection seemed to make a difference, too, in his luck, for the first car began to slow down as it approached. There were two couples, tourists, in the car. They apparently had given him a ride both from friendliness and from curiosity. They asked many questions about the countryside, the way of life, about himself. He answered them cheerfully and they were amused and friendly. They seemed almost sorry to let him out at the end of the dusty road which led over the mountain toward his own home. Even after he had got out they lingered talking, and as they drove away they turned once more to wave farewell.

The long and dusty road stretched ahead, little more than two footpaths curving together across the landscape. From here on there was little chance that he could get a ride. The sun was low now; he would get home near dusk. He struck out, not thinking where he was, not paying any attention to the way the road twisted, rose, wound among the clumps of trees; everything was so familiar to him that he was suddenly free from all the tension he had felt in the strange town, free of the self-consciousness he had felt riding with strangers. He thought again of the time, when he was a kid, that he had been so glad to be home. That return became involved somehow with this one. That return had been

easy, relieving, and now as he strode along, he had no apprehension about facing Rena.

At last he came to the place where the road dropped away into the valley. Although it was still daylight, the sun had sunk behind the mountains, and the whole floor of the valley was a vast pattern of open space and shadow, of light and darkness. He could not see the house from here, but he felt its presence among the quiet trees at the foot of the mountain. And now for the first time he hesitated. He sat down on a flat rock, drew up his knees, and gazed into the valley. A fragile thread of uneasiness spun into a hard, small knot of fear deep in his brain.

He heard a car or truck grinding up the slope behind him, but he paid little attention. Finally the level crest was reached, and he heard the changing of gears distinctly in the still air. The vehicle was going to pass near him, and it occurred to him that if it were neighbors from farther up the valley he might ride with them to his own house. But he hesitated over that idea. Perhaps it would be better to walk behind the bushes until they passed. Still he did not move from the stone, and suddenly the vehicle rounded the last turn in the road and rattled up behind him. He did not immediately turn to look. He thought perhaps they would pass by him if they recognized him, knowing how near he was to home. They were stopping anyway; the

motor sputtered as the brakes were applied. He held his head aloof for one final moment and then glanced casually just as the motor was turned off. The truck was still rolling slowly. Rena opened the door, but did not move to get out. They looked at each other for a moment before he got up, and as he came toward her she moved over so that he could slide behind the wheel. He straddled in. She did not look at him. She kept her eyes straight ahead as if studying the valley below. She held a small package wrapped in blue paper against the unwieldy belly which bulged over her lap. He turned on the motor, and they started down.

When he had pulled up before the house and shut off the motor, she said in the sudden quiet, looking down at the package in her hand, "I went looking for you. I got it while I was in town." He didn't answer. After a moment they both got out; the slamming of the doors was loud in the stillness. He walked up the path behind her and into the house. She placed the package on the table and went directly to the stove, where she kept her head turned as she kindled a fire. He went out and across to the corrals, but there was nothing to do, and as he came back toward the house he could smell supper. He spoke to her this time; he told her he hadn't eaten, and this time she kept silent. And they did not speak while they ate supper. Rena let him go to the stove to fill his own plate a second time.

Finally he got up and went outside. The dusk was cool and luminous on the sheer edge of night. He leaned against the porch and lit a cigarette. The fragrant smoke hovered about him, and he was at peace. He smoked the cigarette down close and crushed the butt with his heel. But still he leaned there, unwilling to leave. Then Rena spoke through the darkness. He could just see her standing in the doorway, and she looked very short and round in the faint light. She said, "I'm going to bed." He straightened but did not go toward her, and after a moment she continued with a note of querulousness in her voice, "I could have slept if I had known you were here."

He thought perhaps it was better to tell her now. He said, "I wasn't here." She answered immediately, "I know," and paused; then she went on, "I don't imagine I could have slept anyway with you ramming around the timber in the dark." They were both silent again. Then she asked, and her voice was doubtful, "You didn't ever leave the valley, did you?" In the dark neither could see the other's eyes. He finally said, "No, I never left the valley."